



For daily latest books please visit <https://novelsguru.com/>

And also visit my Facebook page, and like and share it

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/3345453369055623>

Thank you guys for downloading this book from my site please keep visiting <https://novelsguru.com/> for supporting me and also don't forget to share it with your friends. Dear Friends please download these books direct from <https://novelsguru.com/> bookmark this site for latest African books, and also supporting me Thanks.

## **PROLOGUE**

"Where is your father? I've been trying to call him for the past hour and he is not picking up his calls?" Mrs Nkosi asks her daughters while standing in the middle of their large lounge. The girls are sitting on the couch watching the Queen on tv. Noluthando turns to look at her mother.

"We dont know ma, isnt he supposed to be at the shop?" Thando asks. Her mother looks at her watch and starts pacing up and down the lounge.

"Its after nine Thando, he should be here by now. Where could he be?" She asks herself and then marches to her room to take off her church uniform.

The girls look at each other and silently turn back to the TV. It's been hours since they too have seen their father. But they are not as bothered as their mother is. Their father has a tendency to go to the other side of their small little town of Elukwatini.

They know about his mistress who stays at Tjakastad. They've seen him with her a few times. None of them however has had the courage to tell their mother.

"What if she finds out?" Phepsile, the third daughter asks with her eyes still glued to the tv screen.

"She wont find out. All we have to do is keep our mouths shut and let things play out on their own." Thando whispers to them.

"I'll go dish up for mum." Nondumiso, the second born says getting off the couch. She goes to the kitchen and dishes up for her mum and puts the food in the microwave to warm it up. As soon as the microwave beeps she takes the food out and puts it on a tray. With a spoon, a small bowl filled with warm water and a dishcloth next to it she takes the food to the bedroom.

The closer she gets to her parents bedroom she hears her mom speaking to someone on the phone. She takes slow steps just to make sure she gives her mother the privacy she needs.

"I'm serious Maggie, he is not home. I dont know what to do." She hears her say. She cant hear the other side of the conversation so she just listens to what her mother is saying. "If he is not back by morning I'm calling the police. In the meantime please pray for him, you know with human trafficking on the rise you can never be too careful." Ndumi

rolls her eyes at the mention of human trafficking. All she can think to herself is what human trafficker worth his salt would kidnap a forty eight years old balding man?

When she is sure her mother has hung up the phone she gently knocks on the door with her elbow then opens the door and walks in. Guilt washes over her when she sees her mother still in her church uniform sitting on the edge of the bed with her phone in hand, head slumped like she is praying.

"Make?" MaNkosi looks up and smiles at her daughter, but the smile doesn't make it up to her eyes. "I brought you food." She holds the tray out to her mum to wash her hands. She washes her hands and wipes with the towel before taking the plate of food and putting it on her lap. Ndumi puts the tray on the side table and takes a seat next to her mum.

"Where could he be Ndumi? Can't he even call to say he is Okay?"

"I'm sure he is fine wherever he is ma, stop worrying. You know it's not good for your blood pressure. You need to rest a bit. Eat your food, I'll post on the Facebook group and ask if anyone has seen him and if they do to please let us know." A glimmer of hope rises in her mother's eyes but a feeling of guilt washes over her all over again.

"Can you do that?" Ndumi nods her head with a reassuring smile for her mother, even though the smile doesn't reach her eyes. "Thank you so much baby, please let me know what they say Okay."

"I will. Let me leave you to eat. I'll come back to get the plates." She gets up and slowly walks out of the bedroom.

Ndumi closes the door and takes a few deep breaths in and out while standing against the wall next to her mother's bedroom. She takes one more breath then walks back to the lounge.

"How is she?" Noluthando asks her sister just before she takes a seat on the couch.

"I have to write a post in Facebook asking people to help us look for him." The sister all gasp in shock and turn to look at Ndumi, even Zethu who has been glued to the TV since their mother came back from church.

"Why in heavens name would you do that Nondumiso? Do you know the mess you're about to create?" Phepsile hisses at her.

"You can't write that post Nondumiso. You just can't." Thando tells her. Ndumi sighs and takes her phone out.

"Do you know how it will look if we keep quiet while mum is going crazy. We all know papa has never just disappeared nje out of the blue, even when he was whoring he made sure to let

mum know, even if he lied but he knew she would worry so he would tell her."

"Still Nondumiso, we, all four of us here know he is not missing." Phepsile reiterates.

"I know that. But if we are going to keep up with this lie, then we better make sure we play our part and we play it well if mum finds out, or anyone for that matter, we are all screwed. So we need to play our part." Nondumiso tells her sisters.

"Maybe Ndumi is right." Zethu chirps in. As the youngest, her sisters are very overprotective of her, but sometimes they treat her more like a child than a seventeen years old girl doing matric. Even as young as she is, life hasn't really been kind to her. And for the longest time she suffered in silence. She has learned, through being surrounded by her strong-willed sisters that sometimes she needs to observe what's happening first, listen and then make a decision. And that's why she talks less and does more.

"What are you trying to say Zethu?" Thando asks her. As the oldest, Thando has been tasked with the deputy parent title, and she takes it very seriously. Her sisters mean the world to her and she would jump in front of a moving train for any of them. They know it too and the community knows it, that's why it wasn't so easy for any of her sisters to be bullied, they knew if hurricane Thando found out, all hell would break loose.

"What I am trying to say is that Ndumi is right, if we are going to keep up this charade we need to have our story straight. If mum wakes up tomorrow and decides to open a missing person's case then we need to be certain of what to do, and the community needs to see us doing something to find him. If not we will draw unnecessary attention to ourselves." The sisters listen attentively as Zethu speaks. Different emotions register in each of them.

"Fine, then let's do it." Thando says after a while. "But mum can never know the truth about this."

"Obviously." Phepsile says. "We wouldn't want the world to know we killed our father and buried him in the garden." The sisters nod their heads in agreement.

"And we never, ever again, utter those words, not here or anywhere else. Are we all clear?" Thando asks her sisters. They all look at each other as a silent pact is made.

These are the Nkosi sisters, and this is their story.

1

People always say the first born child in a family always becomes the deputy parent. Boy or girl, somehow they take on the role of being co-parents. Noluthando is no different. At 25 years old she is the sister who got the strict parents, she, in essence was the experiment her parents needed to get parenting right. They made mistakes through her and learnt their lessons through raising her.

On the outside, she is happy, she looks happy. She got her Bachelor of Education degree through distance learning, and now she is pursuing her honors. She was lucky to get a job teaching at her former High School. Most people however are still curious about her decision to stay at home and not do what her sisters did, leave their little town and explore the world.

She wakes up at five in the morning and prepares to start her day. Today is Friday, she has a few biology and chemistry classes, but she does have netball practice. She gets her toiletry bag and towel and heads to the bathroom she shares with her sisters. Even though when she was born this house was just a four roomed house, her parents have extended the house, added more rooms and built themselves a master suit. Each of the sisters also have their own bedrooms, her father insisted on it, saying everyone deserves to have their privacy.



She takes a quick shower and walks out of the bathroom with the towel wrapped around her. She goes back to her room and locks the door behind her. She looks through her closet to see what she can wear. Her body is not the easiest to dress, according to her. But YouTube videos have helped her love her chubby body a little more. She pulls out a black floral wrap around dress and puts it on the bed. A red peplum blazer follows. She gets her shapewear and puts it on. She puts the dress on and looks at herself on the mirror. The blazer goes on. She finishes her look with some six inch heels. She's not that big a fan of weaves so her twisted braids are just perfect. A little bit of make up and she is ready to face her rowdy students.

She grabs her handbag and her school bag with all her students test papers and walks out of her bedroom. Usually she doesn't have breakfast, but seeing her mother sitting at the kitchen table with a cup of tea in her hands makes her reconsider, just for today. She puts her bags on the dining table and slowly walks to the kitchen. She greets her mother then takes out a bowl from the cupboard. She pours some corn flakes in then gets the milk from the fridge. She sits down across from her mother who seems lost in her thoughts.

"Ma?" Her mother blinks and looks at her with a faint smile.

"How did you sleep?" She sips the cold tea and sighs.

"I didnt. I kept hoping your father will come home but nothing. His car is parked outside so I dont understand where he could have gone without it." Thando puts a spoonful of cereal in her mouth, void of any guilt. Of all her sisters, she's probably the only one who really has no feelings whatsoever about what they did. All she keeps telling herself is 'good riddance to bad rubbish.'

"I'm sure he will be back soon. Go get some rest." She tells her mother.

"I cant. I have to go to the police station. I have to report him missing." Her mum tells her. Only then does panic knocks. Although they did their best to cover their tracks, there is always one mistake that could get them in trouble. She goes through every step they took yesterday. The only thing that could get them caught is his phone, and that phone is at the bottom of the river, thanks to Phepsile.

"Don't you think you're jumping the gun mama, I'm sure dad is on his way home by now. Just go and rest, if he is not back by the time I get home then we will go to the police station together." Her mum smiles and holds her daughters hand.

"Thank you. I will get some sleep. You're a good daughter Thando, I'm lucky I have you." She says then gets off the table

and goes to her bedroom. Thando takes a few deep breaths and stands up. She puts the bowl in the sink and goes to Phepsile's room. She knocks and tries to open the door but it's locked. She knocks a few times before she hears the key turn. Phepsile slightly opens the door to see who it is. She relaxes when she sees her sister. The door opens wider and she goes back to bed.

"I thought you'd be gone by now." She says and gets back in bed. Thando closes the door behind her and sits down on the bed, next to her sister.

"I am on my way. I need you to do me a favour, mum is thinking of going to the police station, please make sure she doesn't go anywhere until I come back home."

"Okay, but why not let her go to the police station, if we keep stopping her from going she might end up getting suspicious."

"We will go when I come back from work. I convinced her to stay put until I come back. If dad is not back by then." Phepsile rolls her eyes and looks at her clock on the side table.

"I might as well go and open the shop." She says.

"No. Ndumi should do that. I need you here watching mum. Zethu has to go to school and we cant leave mum alone."

Phepsile nods her head.

"Okay. But I think Zethu should stay home. You can bring her

homework and notes. She needs the rest."

"Fine. But make sure she eats, you know she doesn't eat much."

"I will. Go, you'll be late. I'll wake Ndumi up."

"Thanks. I'll see you later." She gives her sister a hug and gets up. She looks at her watch and realizes she is late. She'll have to save her walk for another day. Hopefully she can find a taxi.

She grabs her bags and walks out of the house. Seeing her father's bakkie parked in the driveway gives her nausea. She rolls her eyes and walks out of the gate. She looks up and down the dusty road but there is no taxi coming. Just her neighbors making their way to work and school. She figures a taxi will find her along the way so she starts walking. Five minutes into her walk she hears a car coming from behind her. She looks back and sees a police van. She says a silent prayer hoping it's not who she thinks it is.

The car stops next to her and the driver rolls down the window. She looks at the driver and mentally shouts at her ancestors for deserting her.

"LaNkosi, sawubona (hello.))" The driver says.

"Thulani, Sawubona. (Hello.))" She answers still hoping a taxi will appear.

"There is a taxi strike, you won't find one today. Let me take you to school." He says. She scrunches her forehead wondering

how he can read her mind like that. "Come on, you're late already." He continues seeing her hesitation. She figures she has nothing to lose anyway so she gets in the car. Thulani rolls the window up preventing the dust from making it's way into the car.

"So LaNkosi, why are you late today?" If it were up to Thando she would stick her headphones in her ear and ignore the man sitting next to her, but she is in his car so it would be rude of her.

"I overslept." He chuckles and looks at her legs sticking out of her dress. His little crush on her has been a constant annoyance to her, but he refuses to give up.

"Maybe next time I should call you early in the morning and wake you up." He says looking for a response from her but gets none. She is looking out the window trying to zone him out. "So I noticed your father still hasn't opened the shop yet. Is he okay?" Any mention of her father is not good for her. Especially by a police officer.

"I don't know. He didn't sleep at home last night." That's all she can say without raising his suspicions.

"Oh. Did he visit family?" She shrugs her shoulders.

"I don't know." The car pulls up in front of the school gate just as the bell rings. She says a silent thank you to her ancestors.

"Thank you for the lift." She says opening the door.

"I can pick you up later if you want. You know taxis might not operate at all today." He says, hopeful for another opportunity to spend time with her.

"I'll call you." She says and shuts the door behind her.

She walks through the gate just as Mavuso prepares to close it. She sees some of her students running up to the gate before it closes. But Mavuso doesn't care. He will close the gate even if they are a step away from it, getting the kids in trouble.

"Babe Mavuso, unjani Ncele. (How are you?)" She asks with the biggest smile on his face. His face immediately lights up and the gate stops moving.

"LaNkosi. Waze waba muhle namuhla, (you look beautiful today.)"

"Ngyabonga Ncele, kuyaphileka kepha? (Thank you. Are you well?)" His smile gets wider and wider with each word she speaks. The kids run into the school with the distracted Mavuso looking at Thando.

"Njengoba sengbone wena nje, nematsambo sekahlangene. (Now that I've seen you, even my bones are healed.)" He says creepily looking at her from head to toe.

"Hhay asbonge Ncele. Angkushiye. (Thank you, let me leave you.)" He watches her walk away as more kids walk in. Only

after she disappears does he come back to his senses.

"I told you he has a crush on you." One of Thando's students says as they walk in the passage.

"If I were you I'd be more worried about first period. Go to class Philile." She laughs and runs off to her class. Thando gets to the staff room and sits down preparing for her first class. This will be enough to keep her mind off of her home drama, even if its for a few hours.

## **NONDUMISO**

If anyone would have told Nondumiso that coming home for the holidays would turn her into an accomplice to murder

Advertisement

she probably would have stayed at school. Maybe this was the universe punishing her for coming home. She makes sure every year when the school calendar begins she goes to Joburg and doesnt come back until December. But this time, after a whole lot of persuasion from her mother, she decided to come home. And now she regrets it.

She's been up all night, she's an insomniac yes, but this is extreme even for her. Usually she gets an hour or two of sleep, but not today. Today she got none. Her alarm goes off, not that it's necessary since she hasn't closed her eyes one bit. She grabs her phone and looks at the time. It's almost six o'clock. The shop should be open by six, but since their father is turning into garden manure, the shop will be closed. She switches her mobile data on and turns on flight mode and a barrage of messages come flooding in. Mostly from her boyfriend, Bokang. She hasn't spoken to him since yesterday. The concern in his messages is quite clear. She decides to call him back.

"Nondumiso." Concern has turned into anger. That was quick. "What happened to baby? Sthandwa sam? Lerato laka?" She asks him trying to break the ice.

"I don't know. You tell me. Your phone has been off for a while now, should I be worried?" She rolls her eyes at his dramatics. If only he knew the nightmare she's gone through the past 24 hours, maybe he'd be a little more sympathetic. But this is not something she can share with anyone except her sisters.

"My battery died."

"I know you're in the rural areas but I'm pretty sure there is electricity there." Bokang tells her.

"Like you said, we are in the rural areas. A truck hit an electric pole and damaged the powerlines, the municipality was busy all



night fixing that mess. Electricity just came back now." He sighs.

"If you say so."

"Seriously Bokang, why would I lie to you?"

"I dont know Ndumi, you tell me."

"You know what. I don't have time for this. I'll talk to you later."

She hangs up with Bokang busy shouting her name.

A soft knock sends her eyes running to the door.

"Come in." She says, a frown on her face. It must be her mother cause her sisters never knock. Ever.

Phepsile opens the door slowly and walks in. Okay miracles do happen. Ndumi thinks to herself.

"You knocked." She says with disbelief written all over her.

Phepsile rolls her eyes and sits on the bed. "What do you want?"

"You have to go open the shop."

"No. You go." She says and pulls the blanket over her head.

Phepsile pulls it back down.

"I can't go. I have to watch mum. She wants to go to the police station and Thando said I should watch her and make sure she doesnt leave the house. Zethu is too traumatized to go there."

"Isn't she supposed to be in school?" Phepsile shrugs her shoulders.

"She should be. But you know how she is. She might just end up drawing attention to us. She's not taking all of this well."

"Fine, then you go open the shop and I'll stay with mum."

"Really? You're going to stay here and put up with mum probably calling people asking for help? And then having to answer questions from everyone?" Ndumi frowns looking at her sister.

"I can do that?"

"We both know you have the attention span of an ant. The moment they start asking questions you'll be fed up in no time." Ndumi sighs knowing her sister is right, she's not a very patient person, and people asking the same question over and over again will just drive her insane.

"Fine. I'll go." Phepsile claps her hands and gets off the bed.

"Good. Hurry up, you're late already." She tells her sister. She leaves just as Ndumi gets off the bed. She goes to the bathroom and contemplates taking a shower, but she's late. She wets her wash cloth and wipes her armpits then wipes her private parts. She bends over the sink and washes her face before walking back to the bedroom. There is no need to dress up, she thinks to herself, she picks out a pair of Jean's and a tshirt. She puts on a pair of all stars and a black sweater and she's ready for the day. She grabs her phone and heads out.

She finds Phepsile in the kitchen making some food.

"I'm leaving." She tells her.

"You're not eating?" Phepsile asks her.

"I'm late. I'll get some fruits at the shop."

"Okay, I'll bring you lunch."

"Sharp." Ndumi grabs the shop keys from the drawer. She puts her headphones on and blasts some music. When she gets out of the car she sees her dad's car. Usually her dad drives the car to the shop, it's not a long distance but his old bones don't carry him that far.

She puts the volume on high and walks the distance down to her family shop. The shop has been in her family for years now, it started out as a small spaza shop and over the years it's grown to be a rather big supermarket for their little town. It's not as big as the chain supermarkets but it's big enough.

By the time she gets to the shop the bakery truck is pulling up and a few customers are already waiting outside. Her father should have hired more help but his stubborn self doesn't trust anyone. The only two guys who work here, Siyabonga and Ezrom aren't even allowed to man the till.

"Sanibonani. (Hello)." She greets before proceeding to open the huge steel bars and then opening the glass doors. Ezrom and

Siyabonga help take in the bread while she makes sure the float will be enough for the day. She makes sure everything is in order before the first customer comes to pay with her loaf of bread in hand.

"Ndumi, unjan sisi (how are you?)" The old lady asks.

"Ngyaphila Gogo Jobe, unjan wena. (I'm good, how are you?)"

She responds with a smile on her face.

"Argh, besides these old bones, we are fine. Where is your father? Is he not feeling well?"

"Eish gogo, I wish I knew. He didnt sleep at home last night. We dont know where he is." She muttered. Gogo Jobe's eyes doubled in size.

"What do you mean he didnt sleep at home?" She whispered. "I hope he didn't sleep at that womans house, I dont know why your father is doing this to your mother. Why would he want to hurt such an amazing woman."

It didn't sit well with Ndumi that everyone seems to know about their fathers extra marital affairs, but now she has to smile and pretend like she doesn't care. If it were up to her, her mother would have been told by now. Gogo Jobe says her goodbyes and walks out. A black Kia pulls up outside. Ndumi is busy looking at the creditors book to make sure it's up to date when the owner of the car walks in and stands in front of the

counter. Ndumi looks up with a faint smile on her face, which quickly disappears when she sees who it is.

"Sawubona Nondumiso." The lady says. Ndumi taps the pen on the counter waiting for her to continue but she doesn't.

"Can I help you?" She asks.

"Where is your father?" The lady asks. Ndumi looks behind her and on her sides before turning back to her.

"Lembeleko bongnike yona kutsi ngimumeme ngayo idzabkile. (I don't carry him on my back.)" She answers. The lady chuckles a bit.

"Fine, I'll just keep trying to call him. Anyways he said I must come by and get some meat. Can I have it." Ndumi laughs.

"If you have money, you can buy meat. We have a whole variety. Beef, chicken, pork, the choice is yours."

"Your father gives me meat every week." Ndumi sighs and pages through the creditors book.

"I don't see your name here." The lady tries to control her rising temper.

"You know what, I'll just take the meat. Your father will explain everything to you." She says walking away. Just then Thulani walks into the shop.

"Please do. The police are here, I'm sure they'd love to have a word with you about stealing." Ndumi shouts and people in the

shop starr whispering. The lady walks back to the counter empty handed.

"What are you trying to do Nondumiso?"

"Trying to stop a thief. My father is not here as you can see, and there is a sign at the door saying 'right of admission reserved.' And right now, you're not welcome here." The lady chuckles as anger rises to her throat. Not only is Ndumi making a mockery of her but people are looking at her funny, some whispering to their friends. There's a lot that she wants to say. But with all eyes on her, she figures this is not the time or the place for this. Her heel make a clicking sound as she walks out.

"Is everything okay?" Thulani asks Ndumi while his eyes are glued on the lady.

"Fine." Ndumi says. She sighs and goes back to attending the customers. 'This is going to be a long ass day.' She thinks to herself.

2

She's strong. She's always been strong. She was the one her sisters called when someone messed with them. She was the one always ready for a fight no matter what. She is the third born but she would fight anyone who messed with her sisters, whether they are older or younger, she was always ready to fight.

Somewhere somehow she lost the fighting spirit. Most people think she just grew up, but she remembers when she lost the need to fight, she was 11 years old. Ndumi and Thando were away on a school trip, her mother was at an all night prayer. She was left with her dad and Zethu. Zethu was just eight years old. She was happy. She could sleep late watching movies, her dad slept early so she had her night planned out. As soon as her father went to sleep she would watch as much movies and cartoons as she wants. Being the child that she was, her plans didnt work out how she planned. Sure, her father went to sleep early, but two hours after he was asleep Zethu followed. Phepsile helped her sleep in her bed and came back to indulge in her movies.

She sat on the couch with a bowl of popcorn in her lap, wearing her favourite Mickey mouse night dress. For her, it was a perfect day. She fell asleep with the movie still playing. But

when she woke up she was in her bed, her dad was sitting next to her running his hands on her skinny thighs. She didnt think much of it until his hand went up to her private parts. She quickly closed her legs tight.

"Papa, wentani? (What are you doing?)" She asked tears welling up in her eyes.

"Shhhh." Her father said and got on the bed behind her. Her life skills teacher had told them that no one should ever touch them on their private parts. But she'd only said strangers, and this was her father. Her little heart was conflicted, she wasn't sure if she should scream or keep quiet. His fingers pushed her pink panty aside and he ran his hands in between her tiny folds. Tears wet the pillow as she felt something thick grinding on her back. Her father had lifted up her nightdress and pulled down the panty. He inserted his penis inside her panty and ran it down between her small buttocks.

"Dont cry, this is normal." He whispered to her. "This is daddy's favourite game, and I only play this game with my favourite daughter." He whispered. She lay there shivering as her father, her protector moaned in her ear as his hand ran between her vagina folds and his penis rubbed her butt. After a few minutes she felt a hot liquid running down and making her underwear wet.



She was scared, what if her mum thinks she wet the bed. She wont believe her when she tells her what happened. Her father pulled his penis out of her underwear. He kissed her on the cheek.

"That's a good girl. Now remember, this is between us. No one else is allowed to know Okay." She nodded her head with tears streaming down her face. "This is our secret. You cant tell anyone. You know what will happen when you tell? The police will take you away. They will think you are lying. And you know where they will take you? To a children's jail. You will stay there forever and you'll never see your sisters or your mother again. Remember that okay?" She nodded her head. "Good girl. Now go take a bath." It was the middle of the night, but she got up anyway and went to the bathroom. She filled the tub up with water and got in. She scrubbed herself with the orange sack until she could feel the water sting her skin.

Her father opened the door and walked into the bathroom. Phepsile immediately sat up in a fetal position inside the bath tub trying to hide her naked body.

"Get out of the water, and go get some sleep." He said and walked out again. She stood up and wrapped the towel around her. She took her nightdress and underwear and went to her bedroom. Instead of putting the dirty clothes in the washing

basket she threw them under the bed. She opened her wardrobe and took out her tracksuit and her sweater. She wore them and got back in the bed.

She was still shaking at five in the morning when her mother came back from her prayer. Only then could Phepsile get some sleep. The next few weeks her father would come randomly to her room and do what he always did. She'd say a silent prayer hoping one of her sisters or her mother would walk in on them. She'd read books at the library, and she knew what her father was doing was wrong. But she was afraid to speak, his threats had escalated to telling her that if she told anyone, the police would take him away and then her and her sisters would be homeless and live on the street because their mother would hate them.

Weeks turned into months and his assault turned to him penetrating her. She cried from the pain and she cried from a broken heart. Her spark was gone, her fighting spirit was not there anymore.

"Earth to Pepsi." Zethu says taking a seat next to her sister. Phepsile shakes her head and tries not to think about her childhood. Zethu hands her a cup of hot chocolate. "What were you thinking about?"

"Nothing important. How are you feeling?" Zethu lifts her feet up onto the couch.

"I'm fine. Where is mum?"

"I gave her sleeping pills. Are you sure you're okay?"

"Honestly, I'm scared. What if someone finds out what we did. Do you know how hurt mum will be?" Phepsile rolls her eyes. To her, the pain her father had put her through was way worse than the pain her mother would feel when she found out her husband was dead. She'll live, she'll move on with her life and maybe get another husband, but for her, her childhood was gone, her innocence taken by the very man who was supposed to protect her, so no, as much as she loves her mother, her pain is nothing compared to what she is feeling. No pain will ever compare to slowly dying inside and your father being the one slowly sucking the life out of you.

"She'll get over it. We need to get you counseling." She says. Zethu shakes her head.

"I'm fine." Phepsile looks up at her sisters eyes and all she sees is darkness, sadness and pain. The look in Zethu's eyes is the same look she's had for a while now. She knows what it's like to die a slow death.

"You're not fine Zethu, you'll never be fine. You'll learn to live with this but it will never be fine." Zethu chuckles and looks at her.

"So what would you like me to tell the counselors? 'Oh miss counselor, I am fucked up because my father has been fucking me for the past six years. I found an escape in my art but I cant share that with anyone because then everyone will know my shame, oh and I've had three abortions this year alone because how will I explain birthing my own siblings? And the kicker, my sister found my dad groaning on top of me and she stuck a spear through his heart, and when my other sisters found him laying on his pool of blood on my bedroom floor we buried him instead of calling the cops.' Is that what you'd like me to tell them?" Zethu asks eyes red and tears rolling down. She gets off the couch and heads to her room. She bangs the door leaving her sister dumbstruck on the couch.

Phepsile closes her eyes and let's the tears fall. When she walked in on her father on top of her little sister, she had hoped that was the first time it was happening. The little girl inside her told her it probably wasn't, but she had hope. Hope that her father had magically become a better man. She put her hands on her stomach trying to understand how messed up her life is. From the outside, life is perfect, her mother is a nurse, a church going woman, respected and loved by most people around. Many women had come to her for advice, especially when their daughters started rebelling. She had raised "four respectful, hardworking girls" so maybe she had inside knowledge on

raising girls. Her father ran his successful supermarket, he led meetings at the traditional council

## Advertisement

he was also a well respected man. But inside these four walls, all that was just a myth. Everytime anyone praised their father the girls would always wonder if the people were referring to the same man. But looks can be deceiving right? And right now, no matter what they say and how they say it, the man will always be on a pedestal.

Phepsile stands up and goes to the kitchen. She takes out the baking trays and all that she'll need go bake a cake. This is her escape. Everytime she feels overwhelmed and scared, she bakes. The patience that comes with baking helps her breathe in and try to centre her spirit. She enjoys it. She was busy piping the icing on the cake when Thando walks in. She takes a seat across from her and watches her concentration on the cake. She's told her a few times to turn baking into a business, she's good at it, but she's been reluctant.

As soon as she's done with the intricate piping she was doing, she looks up to find her sister. An empty smile creeps up on her face.

"Hey. How long have you been sitting there?" She asks her.

"Long enough. That's a beautiful cake." Phepsile shrugs her shoulders and starts cleaning up.

"How was your day?" Thando asks. Phepsile stops and looks out the window into the garden. She can see where they buried their father, right under the mango tree. Just a few days ago her mother had turned the soil because she wanted to plant some vegetables, so that was the perfect place to bury him, no one would question the fresh soil there. She turns around and looks at her sister.

"He did it to you too didnt he?" She asks. Thando's face scrunches into a frown. She knows what her sister is talking about but she cant really open her mouth and blurt it out.

"What?" She questions not looking at her sister in the eyes. Phepsile peeps down the passage to make sure they are alone before sitting down next to her sister.

"He raped you too didnt he?" She whispers.

A range of emotions run through Thando, the strongest of them being guilt. Even though yesterday they didnt speak about what happened, except for Phepsile explaining to them what led to their father having a spear stuck through his heart, she knew something wasnt right. Most people would have been curled up in the corner crying their eyes out, even trying to get help for the man who lay bleeding on the floor, but not Phepsile, she

held on to the spear with bleeding dripping on it as their father bled to death. Zethu was curled up on the bed with the covers pulled up to her chest, tears freely flowing. When she had walked in with Ndumi, she noticed she too didn't shed a tear, she didn't scream or shout, at one point she could have sworn she saw a smile on her face. At that moment it registered to her that she had failed, failed to protect them.

"We need to start making dinner before mum wakes up." Thando says and gets up. She opens the deep freezer and looks through it for a while, allowing the cold air to hit her face, reversing the tears she was ready to spill just seconds ago. Just then someone knocks on the door. Phepsile gets up and goes to check. She asks who it is. The voice on the other end is one she's really not in the mood to entertain, but she opens the door anyway.

"Phepsile, noma ngabe bengcoshwa tigebengu ngabe tinghlahlele lamnyango solo ningavuli. (If I was being chased by robbers they would have killed me right at the door because you are not opening the door.)" She says and walks in.

"Sawubona aunty." Phepsile answers with a bored expression on her face.

"Solo ulhlata ngyabona. (Still rude I see.)" She says looking at her from head to toe.

"Ngingakwentela litya. (Can I make you tea?)" Phepsile asks knowing her aunt, Nomathemba, can never say no to tea.

"I'll be in the lounge." She turns and walks away. Phepsile drags herself back to the kitchen where her sister is already chopping vegetables.

"The devil is here." Phepsile whispers and boils the water.

Thando laughs. Her sister and her aunt have never got along, and she knows however long her aunt is staying, it will definitely be an eventful stay.

## **ZETHU**

She's been locked up in her room since she stormed out on her sister. Last night's events haven't fully registered yet. It's not the truth coming out that bothers her, it's the events leading up to yesterday that she's most afraid of. As far as she is concerned, the shame of it all is what she wants to stay buried. She's seen how rape victims get pulled apart when they speak out. She gets off the bed and wipes her tears. Her eyes are red and puffy. She's been crying since yesterday and now her eyes are showing it.



She kneels next to the bed and pulls out the canvas she keeps hidden under it. She sets up her work station and gets her paint and brushes from their big black container. Once everything is set up she gets to work. She pours all her emotions into the painting. By the time she is done she is covered in all sorts of colors. On the canvas is a bright beautiful rainbow, welling should have been a rainbow, but the black streaks running all over it speak more of a light that no longer shines and a rainbow that's lost its spark. This is her life. This is how she tries to deal with her inner turmoil.

"That's beautiful." Thando says behind her. Zethu sighs and turns to her sister.

"Rainbows aren't supposed to have black streaks." She tells her. Thando smiles and sits on the bed.

"Well, sometimes rainbows rebel too." Zethu smiles. If there is one sister she is close to, it's Thando. Even though they have a seven years gap between them, they are close. "I brought you your homework. And aunt Nomathemba is here." Her mouth opens wide.

"And you left her with Phepsile?" They burst out laughing.

"Risky, I know. But I had to check on you. How are you feeling?" She shrugs her shoulders.

"Life goes on right?" Thando figures she's not ready to talk

about things yet so she let's her be.

"Well Phepsile baked a cake. Let's go have some before Ndumi comes back." Zethu laughs and takes the picture she just painted. It joins the others behind the headboard where she hides all her dark art.

"You know you dont need to hide those anymore right?"

Thando tells her. She shrugs and takes off the oversized tshirt she was wearing. She puts on another oversized tshirt, she leaves in them and sweatpants. Her body is beautiful, but she figured maybe if she hid her body then her father would leave her alone. But that was just wishing.

They head to the lounge and find their mother sitting with her aunt. She greets and leaves them alone. They head back to the kitchen and wait for Ndumi to come back. Zethu cuts a piece of the cake and sits down. Its past seven already, the shop is closed by now and Ndumi is probably on her way back. Thando keeps looking at her watch. This might be a small town but crime happens everywhere. Ndumi walks in a few minutes later with some bread and milk. She greets her aunt and her mother then joins her sisters in the kitchen.

"How was work?" Phepsile asks her. Before she can answer her, she sees the cake. She quickly takes a knife and cuts a slice. Her

sisters laugh at her. Her sweet tooth is a running joke between them. They say if she had to choose between cake and them, she'd choose the cake. She sits down and takes a big chunk and throws it in her mouth.

"Sathane ufike nini? (When did the devil arrive?)" She asks her sisters.

"Earlier today. Let's set the table some can eat." Thando says. Phepsile and Zethu set the table then call their mother and aunt to come and eat.

"Uphi Bhuti? (Where's my brother?)" Aunt Nomathemba asks sitting down. The girls look at their mother.

"We don't know where he is." She tells her sister in law.

"What do you mean? His car is outside." She says looking around the table. Mrs Nkosi shrugs and dishes up for herself. Her worry has turned into anger. She doesn't understand why her husband would not tell her where he is or where he is going. He knows how much she worries, so as far as she is concerned he is being selfish.

"Niyathula vele? (You're quiet.)" Aunt Nomathemba says. "My brother is missing and you're all sitting here, no care in the world." She snaps.

"Aunty, babe mdzala, uyatati kutsi wentan. (Dad is an adult, he

knows what he is doing.)" Thando tells her. She snickers and takes out her phone and sends a message.

"Kusasa loku lokusako, sivukela emaphoyiseni. Angkholwa kutsi nawe Thulsile uthulsile njenge ligama lakho kepha indvodza yakho asikho ekhaya. (Tomorrow morning we are going to the police station. I cant believe that you, Thulsile are quiet just like your name but your husband is not home.) What is wrong with you?" She shouts. "What did you do to my brother?" She asks. The girls stop eating and look at her ranting and raving. "For your sake, I hope he is fine wherever he is. Because if he is not. Woe unto you." She says and grabs her plate. She walks to the lounge still mumbling to herself.

The girls look at each other and wonder what tomorrow will bring. Scared as they were about the police showing up, they know it was inevitable. But now they need to make sure no one finds out about their little secret.

3

Morning didnt come soon enough for aunt Nomathemba. By five am she was banging on Thando's door. Thando lay in her bed ignoring the banging on the door. It's not like she is in a hurry to find out where her father is. She knows where he is. And as far as she's concerned, he belongs in a sewer and not in her mothers garden, but they did what they had to do as quickly as possible without being seen. So the garden was the best choice.

Aunt Nomathemba opens the door and walks in.

"Hhaybo Thando, nganconcotsa kangaka awungiva yini? (Dont you hear me knocking?)" She asks standing by the door. Thando looks at her and sits up on the bed.

"I'm tired aunty. You and mom can go without me." She tells her. Nomathemba chuckles and crosses her arms on her chest.

"Your father is missing. Do you even care?" She inquired, a frown on her face.

"Honestly, no. I dont care. He is a grown man, he has a side chick he usually visits so for all we know, he is with her."

Nomathemba's mouth drops.

"Did he tell you that?" Thando shrugs her shoulders and gets off the bed.

"Ask anyone and they will tell you." She walks past her aunt and

goes to the kitchen. She plugs the kettle and waits for the water to boil. Her aunt appears behind her.

"Thando, who is this woman? Have you spoken to her to find out where your father is?" Thando sighs and turns back to her aunt.

"Njengoba besengshilo aunty, anginandzaba mine. (Like I said. I dont care.)" She tells her. Thando makes herself a cup of hot chocolate and heads back to her room leaving her aunt standing there dumbfounded. Her phone rings. Thulani's name flashes on the screen. She picks it up.

"Thulani." He chuckles.

"LaNkosi, unjani. (How are you.)" She puts the cup on the side table and gets back in the bed.

"Ngyaphila. (I'm fine.)"

"You didnt call me yesterday to come pick you up." He tells her.

"You do realise this will never happen right?"

"What?"

"Whatever it is you're trying to make happen." He laughs.

"I'm not trying to make anything happen. I just wanted to give you a lift home." Her lips curl into a smile. If things were different she'd explore her feelings for him.

"Okay then. I'll remember that when I need a lift."

"Good. So who is opening the shop today?"

"I am."

"Good. I'll be there in 30 minutes to give you a lift." He says and hangs up before she can refuse. The shop is just a fifteen minutes walk away. She tries to call him back but he keeps declining her calls. She gives up after the fourth call.

When she is done sipping on her hot chocolate and meditating, she gets up and goes to the bathroom to take a shower. When she is done she walks out to the sound of her aunt in her parents room. But there's also voices coming from the lounge. She hurries into her bedroom and quickly puts on some clothes. Today it's not that chilly so a pair of Jean's and a light sweater will do. She gets her school bag, her handbag and her phone and walks out. Her aunt is now in the lounge with whoever else is there. She gets there and she finds her two uncles, Daniel and Mfankhona, her dads brothers and his other sister Dumsile.

"Sanibonani." She says looking at each of them wondering why they are here.

"Indlela ibhekephi ekuseni kangaka? (Where are you going so early in the morning?)" Dumsile asks.

"I'm going to open the shop." She tells them. Daniel stands up and walks over to her.

"Khululeka sisi, ngtawvula mine. (Dont worry. I'll open.)" He says with his hand held out for the keys. Thando looks at his

hand and walks to the kitchen. She opens the drawer and gets the shop keys. She throws them in her pocket and heads back to the lounge.

"Ungatihluphi babelomncane, ngvukele kuya khona vele. (Dont worry, uncle, I woke up to go there anyway.)" The siblings look at each other then turn back to her.

"Thando halls phansi. (Sit down)" Mfankhona tells her. He is the oldest among them, well now he is the oldest since their father has eaten dust. Thando puts her bag on the dining table and takes a seat on the armrest of the couch. She looks at her uncle waiting for him to speak. "Lalela ke sisi, njengoba singamati uyihlo kutsi ukuphi, aunt wakho Nomathemba usfonele watsi site sitosita. Unyoko, Nomathemba nami sitawya emaphoyseni siyovula icase, Daniel utawhamba ayovula estolo. Dumsile yena utawsala lakhaya agadze bantfwana. (Listen, since we dont know where your father is, your aunt Nomathemba called us to come and help. Your mother, Nomathemba and I will go to the police station and open a missing persons case, Daniel will open the shop and Dumsile will watch the kids.)" He tells her.

"That's not happening." Phepsile says walking in. Nomathemba rolls her eyes.

"Askhulumi nebantfwana. (We are not talking to kids.)" Dumsile tells her. Phepsile stands next to her sister, arms crossed and



ready for anything that's coming.

"Phepsile, Thando, uyasbita make. (Mum is calling us.)" Ndumi says poking her head into the lounge. Thando and Phepsile get up and leave. They get to the bedroom and find Zethu already sitting on the bed. Their mum is dressed and ready for the trip to the police station.

"What's going on?" Thando asks. Her mum signals for her to close the door and lock it. She does as she is told and the girls all sit on the bed looking at their mother. She opens the closet and takes out two large envelopes. A white one and a brown one.

"I need you girls to do me a favour." She hands the envelopes to Thando. "Inside those envelopes are funeral insurance policies and life insurance policies. That's the white one. The brown one has title deeds for the shop and the house. I'm not sure why your aunts and uncles are here but I don't like it one bit. So I need you to hold on to that and make sure they do not get their hands on those documents. Are we clear." The girls nod their head. "And..." their mother keeps quiet when she hears shuffling outside the door. She opens the side table drawer and takes out a wallet, their father's wallet. She opens it and takes out his ID, his bank cards and his drivers license and hands it to Thando. She signals for her to put them in one of

the envelopes. She does as she is told and waits for the next instruction.

"I don't know where your father is, but if

Advertisement

God forbid, it so happens that they find him dead. I need you to make sure those documents do not land on any of your aunts and uncles hands otherwise we will be in trouble." She whispers. Thando's phone beeps and it's a message from Thulani. He is outside. She stands up and puts the envelopes inside her sweater.

"I have to go."

"I'm coming with you." Phepsile tells her. That explains her dress code.

"And you're leaving us with those people. Never, we are also coming." Ndumi says. "Asambe syogcoka. (Leta go get dressed.)" She tells Zethu. When they open the door they find their aunts with their ears on the door.

"Daniel umele tikhiya. (Daniel is waiting for the keys.)"

Nomathemba says trying to hide the shame of being caught eavesdropping. The girls walk past them and quickly rush to their bedrooms to get dressed.

"Are you going to be Okay with them?" Phepsile asks her

mother.

"I'll be fine. My sister and brother are on their way here too. I'll be fine. Go take care of the shop."

Phepsile and Thando walk out of the bedroom ignoring their aunts demand for the keys. Thando grabs her school bag and heads out with Phepsile behind her. They find Thulani standing next to the police van, still in his uniform.

"Sbali. Sawubona Mshengu. (Brother in law.)" Phepsile says much to Thulani's amusement and Thando's dismay.

"LaNkosi lomncane, unjani." He says with a smile on his face. His smile gets wider when Thando stands before him.

"Hi." Thando greets.

"Sawubona. Umuhle. (You're beautiful.)" He replies. Phepsile takes out her phone and takes a picture of the two of them.

They turn to her when they hear the click of the camera.

"What? This picture will be displayed on your wedding day."

She says and heads to the back of the van. She opens and gets in.

"She's also going to the shop?" Thulani whispers to Thando. She opens her mouth to answer but Phepsile beats her to it.

"Yes I am. And so is Ndumi and Zethu." She shouts over the small window of the police van.

"I'm sorry about that." Thulani just laughs and opens the car

door for Thando. She gets in and takes a deep breath trying to calm the butterflies in her stomach. She's known Thulani since high school. He moved here from Phongola to stay with his aunt. According to him, it was punishment for always getting into fights. They figured him moving here would be better for him. Even in high school he was too confident for his own good. He made moves on her his first week of being here, no matter how many times she said no he'd never give up. Eventually he had to settle for being her friend. Even that turned out to be an uphill battle. But she's been civil to him. That's all she could offer.

Letting someone close to her was too risky. She didn't want anyone knowing her deep dark secrets, even in school she had no friends. The past forty eight hours might have been the change in trajectory she needed to explore life. She'd spent most of her life thinking she was protecting her sisters by staying home and studying through distance learning, but even that she failed to do.

She watches as her sisters come running out of the house with her aunt Nomathemba shouting at them. They giggle and get in the back of the van. Thulani locks them in before getting in the drivers seat.

"So you're all going to the shop?" He asks as he starts the car.

"Yep."

"You're running from them?" She chuckles and looks at her aunts and uncles shouting out their names.

"Yep."

"Have you heard anything from your father?" Shd swallows and looks at him.

"No. They might come to the police station to open a missing person's case."

"I'll ask the guys to make the case a priority. My shift is over and by the time I get there it will be someone else's."

"Don't do that. Whoever gets it, let them do their best."

"I like you in Jean's." He says changing the subject. She looks at him and sees the smile on his face even though he is looking at the road ahead. She shakes her head and faces forward. She reminds herself she can't allow him to come too close. But he keeps creeping up on her.

He pulls up to the shop and gets off the car. He opens for the girls at the back. Thando gets off too. They find Syabonga and Ezrom already here. The boys laugh at the girls seeing them jump out of the van like convicted criminals. They open the shop and go in. Thulani says his goodbyes and leaves.

Thando takes over the till while the girls start cleaning up. She

takes the envelopes out of her sweater and puts them on the counter. They are not sealed so no one will know if she takes a peek inside. She opens the white envelope and looks at it. It has funeral policies for every one of them. There's their father's life insurance policy. She snickers when she sees the two million. That's how much that man thought he was worth. Good thing she didn't have to determine his worth because she was pretty sure he wouldnt be worth a bag of poop.

She puts the documents back and opens the brown envelope. Inside it is another envelope. She opens the other envelope and finds a will. Her fathers will. She opens it. According to it, if he dies, the shop goes to his brother Mfankhona since he doesn't have a son to carry on his legacy. Mfankhona is also supposed to marry her mother to make sure vultures dont descend upon his money and wealth. Thando shakes her head in disbelief.

"What's wrong?" Ndumi asks coming in with a bucket and a mop. She shows her the will and she reads it. Ndumi reaches under the counter and gets a lighter. She takes the empty bin next to her sister and holds the document over it.

"Ndumi, what are you doing?" Thando asks seeing the flame from the lighter. Ndumi says nothing and instead lights up the will. Thando silently watches as the papers turn to ash. She throws the papers in the bin and they both watch as the last of

them burn.

Thando sighs and looks up at her sister. Ndumi is angry, her nose keeps flaring and her cheeks are turning red, the disadvantages of being a yellow bone, everyone can see when you're pissed and angry.

"Why did you do that? What if mum knows about the will?"

Thando whispers at her.

"I dont care, that man is not going to screw us while he is alive and then continue to do it even in death. It's not happening."

She says still fuming. Thando takes a deep breath and looks at Zethu and Phepsile. They are busy packing new stock on the shelves and laughing.

"What do you think was going through Phepsile's mind when she stuck that spear in his chest?" She asks her sister. They both look at their younger siblings.

"I dont know. But I know she's way braver than me. I wish I had done something before he even got to her or Zethu." Thando blinks away her tears as guilt washes over her again.

"We need to get him out of there and leave him where he will be found." Ndumi quickly turns around and looks at her sister.

"Are you hearing yourself right now? How are we going to explain that? And how are we going to move the body, it was risky enough burying him in the garden now you want us to

move him. Are you serious?" She hisses.

"You and I both know boNomathemba and her crew wont stop looking for him, mum wont stop pining over him, we need to find a way to put an end to this and give mum the closure she needs." Ndumi sighs and plays with her braids.

"Fine. So how do we do it?"

"I was thinking since we can't move the entire body, we can get a piece of him, an arm maybe and put it somewhere where he might be found and they can put down his death to being eaten by animals or anything." Ndumi stands there with her hands on her waist trying to think. "We cant tell those two either."

Thando adds.

"Songimvelo." Ndumi says.

"What?"

"The game reserve. He used to love going there to hunt. If we can get his gun and the arm or leg and throw them in there the cops can say he was attacked by wild animals." Ndumi says excitedly. Thando looks at the glimmer in her eyes and thinks to herself what kind of father can do so much damage to a child that talk of them dying would excite them this much. Not that she wasn't happy he was dead, but still, the man was way worse than she could have imagined.

"Fine. That could work. But how do we do it with the devil's in



the house?"

"Convince mom to go to Carolina and visit Aunty Busi."

"I cant believe we are here plotting our own fathers demise."

Thando says.

"Technically speaking he is already demised or whatever they say. Plus he deserved it."

"That goes without saying. I just wish he could have been tortured first. Phepsile gave him an easy way out."

"That we can agree on. So, mum, Carolina?" Ndumi asks.

"I'll try and talk to her. I hope she agrees and those four devils can go back to their homes."

"That will be a rather difficult task." She says laughing. She takes her bucket and mop and leaves.

Thando does the books and gets ready to go to the bank. The past couple of days banking hasnt been done. She opens the safe hiding under the counter and gets the money for the past few days. She counts it and makes sure it's in order before putting it in a small plastic bag. She takes the envelopes her mother gave her and puts them in her bag. She does the paperwork for banking and gets off the chair.

"Hey, I'm going to town. I'll see you when I come back." Thando tells her sisters. She walks out and stands by the corner waiting for a taxi to come by. Instead Thulani pulls up. He opens the car

door from inside.

"Let's go." He says, a smile plastered on his face.

"Yeah I'm beginning to think you're stalking me." He chuckles and watches her get into the car. "What are you doing here? Aren't you supposed to be working night shift?"

"I am." He drives off. "The station commander asked me to come in and take your father's case. He says it's of utmost importance so it's all hands on deck. So where are you off to?"

"The bank." She says absentmindedly. She's thinking time is running out. Thulani happens to be one of the few good cops in this country and he takes his job seriously, if he is on the case chances of the truth coming out are very high.

"Cool. So how are you feeling about your father's disappearance?" He asks her. She shrugs her shoulders.

"He is a grown man. I'm sure he knows what he is doing." She tells him while her mind is trying to figure out how to put an end to this investigation.

"I have to tell you something." He says. She turns and looks at him. "Your aunt Noma something....."

"Nomathemba?"

"Yes, that one. She says you and your mum are suspects in your father's disappearance."

"WHAT?"

"I know. Crazy right?"

"That woman has lost her mind." Thando sneered.

"I know. My guess is they are trying to get their hands on the shop, I overheard her and her brothers talking about who is going to run the shop. My guess is they put you guys up as suspects to get you out of the way."

"So what are you going to do?"

"Well, I'm always weary of people who throw other under the bus, especially family. So I will be looking at them first." Thando said a silent prayer thanking the universe and Aunt Nomathemba's big mouth. She has somehow, unknowingly bought them a couple of days for them to put their plan in motion. Now to get them out of the house.

4

She hasn't slept much in the past few days. 2 hours of sleep is all she got. It's not anxiety or panic that keeps her up at night, it's anger. She's angry, not at the world or her siblings but she's angry at the man laying in their garden turning to fertilizer. She's angry because he got the easy way out, if it were up to her she would have had him hung on a tree and beaten to death with the world watching and everyone knowing what he did. But she'll never get that now. And somehow she has to make peace with it. But it's hard.

Her phone beeps with the hundredth message today, mostly from her friends at school and her boyfriend. She doesn't know how to explain her ghosting them but at some point she will have to. She sighs and opens the WhatsApp group she's on with her friends. There are over 200 messages. She figures she will catch up on the others later, the only thing she has to tell them now is what's going on.

'Hey, girls. Sorry I've been quiet the past couple of days. My dad is missing and we've been busy with that. I'll update you as soon as there are any changes. I love you.' She presses send and the message is gone. She thinks of texting Bokang but she figures a phone call will make more sense. She gets off WhatsApp and goes to her call log. She dials his number and

waits as the phone rings.

"Look at you, you remembered you have a boyfriend." He says as soon as he picks up. She sighs and tries to put on her best distraught daughter act. She sniffles a bit and that gets his attention. "Baby, what's wrong? Are you Okay?" He was angry a minute ago but now he is concerned. She gives herself an invisible pat on the back for an oscar worthy performance.

"I'm sorry I've been quiet. My dad is missing and everything around here is a mess." She tells him faking sobs in between her words.

"Oh baby, I'm so sorry. How are you holding up?"

"I'm not okay Bokang, I dont know where my dad is and I'm scared. Really scared."

"Eish baby, I'm sorry, have you gone to the cops yet?"

"We did and they are busy with his case now."

"Good. Tell me if you need anything Okay. I'm sorry I'm being so needy when you're going through so much." He is so sweet, probably the first man she's had be kind and respectful to her, although a part of her is waiting for the shoe to drop and he shows his true colors. Try as she might, she's come to terms with the fact that she'll never fully trust a man in her life, no matter how genuine he might be it will take a miracle.

She says her goodbyes to Bokang and watches the clock as the seconds go by. She's bored. Unlike her sisters she has nothing tangible to pour her emotions into when they get too much, so they pile up inside. She takes her phone and plays a game. It's almost knock off time for most people, some will come by to buy bread for lunch boxes tomorrow and others will be here to get tonight's dinner on credit. Thando is back from the bank and is busy checking stock to make sure they restock what they will need, Phepsile and Zethu are busy formulating a plan to expand the shop, they want to add food like chips and kotas. It could work, but she'll let them handle it.

With her head focused on her phone she doesn't notice a woman walk in until she is standing right in front of her. She lifts her head up with a smile on her face expecting to see one of their regular customers, or even one of the boys that stand outside the shop smoking and just being idle. Instead she comes face to face with her father's mistress. Her smile disappears like mist in the morning sun.

"Can I help you?" She asks her.

"I'm looking for your father." Ndumi feels her blood boiling.

This woman really has some nerve.

"Do you see him anywhere in the shop?" She sighs and looks around, the person she's come to see is not here.

"Can you please give me the meat your father promised me and I wont bother you again." She says. She looks desperate. Scared even. Ndumi crosses her arms across her chest, her brows furrowed and her head slightly tilted she looks at the woman who has been a constant third wheel in her parents relationship. She should hate her, she should, but she cant, because on most nights when he had spent with her, she got a break from being fondled and fucked by her father.

She sighs seeing the pain in this womans eyes, she's not sure what is going on with her but maybe, just maybe, for those free nights she slept in her bed without her father showing up, she owed her something. She gets off the chair and goes to the fridge. She picks up a two kg packet of chicken portions and hands it to her.

"My father is not here, I dont know where he is and I don't know when he is coming back, if he is coming back. So please let this be the last time you come here looking for him. If or when he comes back, he will call you. Now please leave." She takes the portions and walks out. Her sisters quickly rush to her as soon as the woman walks out.

"Did she buy that?" Phepsile asks.

"No." Ndumi says walking back behind the counter.

"WHAT?" The three sisters say in unison.

"Why would you just give away meat like that?" Thando asks her.

"Relax, I'll pay for it." Ndumi tells them.

"That's not the point Nondumiso, why would you give HER meat? You do know who she is right?" Thando questions.

"I know who she is. She wont come back. Relax." Seeing her reluctance to address the matter before them the sisters let her be and they go back to what they were doing.

"I'm going home. I'm going to start on dinner." She tells her sisters and leaves. The walk home is slow, with music blasting in her headphones she gets lost in her own world. A few houses away from home she bumps into someone's chest almost falling flat on her butt, but the person holds on to her upper arms holding her up. When she looks up she finds a man in sangoma regalia, well just a black and red kanga with white and red beads around his neck. He is young

Advertisement

probably late twenties or early thirties. If it wasnt for the beads she would find him attractive. But right now she fears he might just find out her inner most thoughts and secrets.

"I'm sorry. I didn't see you." She says pulling out her



headphones. He smiles and let's go of her arms.

"No problem. I'm sorry too. I should have been focused. How are you?" He asks trying to look at her eyes, but her eyes keep darting around.

"I'm fine, thank you. I should get going." She walks around him and walks away.

"It will be Okay you know." She turns around and finds him standing in the same spot, his back to her but his voice is loud enough for her to hear.

"What?" He turns around and takes a couple of steps, closing the gap between them. She takes one look in his eyes and it's like she is in a trance, her eyes can't move away from his.

"The huge burden you're carrying, it will be Okay."

"I don't know what you're talking about." She tells him. He smiles and takes a step back.

"Take care of yourself Nondumiso." He turns and walks away leaving her stuck in the same spot.

The sound of a car whizzing past her brings her back to her senses. She looks around and the man has disappeared. She didn't see which house he went into and she's not sure if anyone else saw him besides her. She walks home still confused and unsure of what just happened. As soon as she walks in the gate she hears voices coming from the house. Her steps falter

as she listens to the screaming voices. Its Nomathemba and Dumsile screaming the loudest. Her uncles voices arent as loud. She gets to the door and quickly texts her sisters telling them what's going on.

She walks into the house and the voices die down as they notice her. She walks in and sees her mother seated with her brother and sister.

"Sanbonani." She says slowly taking steps closer to the commotion.

"Aphi lamahlongandlebe labo sisi wakho? (Where are your disrespectful sisters?)" Dumsile asks taking a cup of tea and sitting down.

"Ma, uright? (Are you Okay?)" Ndumi asks her mum completely ignoring her aunt. Her mum smiles.

"I'm fine. Why are you back?"

"I wanted to start cooking supper. What's going on?" She looks around the room and her uncles are just sitting there arms crossed on their chests while the two whistles are speaking over each other.

"Its nothing nana, go and cook." Her maternal aunt Nomcebo says with a smile on her face.

"I'm not a child Ncane. I know something is wrong. What's going on?"

"Your aunts and uncles want your parents policy documents so they can plan your fathers funeral." Her uncle Elias tells her, earning himself stares from everyone. "What? Like she said, she's not a child. She deserves to know." He adds.

"That is not what we said." Dumsile says.

"What did you say?" Ndumi asks.

"Angsuye ntsanga yakho, ungakhohlwa. (I'm not your age mate, dont forget that.)" Dumsile answers trying to deflect from the question.

"Why are you here?" Ndumi asks. Nomathemba laughs and claps her hands.

"Are you really asking us that?" Daniel asks.

"Yes, I am. Why are you here?"

"This is our brothers house. We can come here anytime we want. You will not ask us that." Dumsile answers standing up with her hands on her waist.

"This is your brothers house, not your home. Likhaya lakini lise Kroomdraai. (Your home is in Kroomdraai.) There you can go in and out however you like. But here, this is Mzikayfani and Thulsile Nkosi's house, if you're not invited you're not welcome. Learn that." Thando says walking through the door.

"Anedzeleli nishaya emasimba ngesandla. (You're so disrespectful.)" Mfankhona says looking at his nieces.

"Babelomncane, unelkakho lawshaya khona umtsetfo wonkhe muntfu alalele, la, kukhala two weticatfulo, saMzikayfani nesa Thulsile. (Uncle you have your own home where you call the shots, in this home, two people call the shots, Mzikayfani and Thulsile.)" Thando added. "What is going on anyway." Ndumi laughs at her sister who came in guns blazing not even sure what is happening.

"They want to plan your fathers funeral." Her mother tells her. Her heart starts racing as questions fly around. Have they found his body? Why wasn't they told? Do they know what they did?

"What are you talking about? Have they found papa?"

"No. They want to plan, 'just in case'." Ndumi tells her. She relaxes a bit.

"I think you've all overstayed your welcome. It's time for you to go." She tells them. They mumble among each other in shock.

"Askies? (Excuse me?)" Dumsile says.

"Leave. You, your sister, your brothers, leave. The police will be in touch if they need anything from you. Please leave. Mum is stressed enough without you adding to it, so please leave."

Thando tells them.

"Uyascosha. Niyangvisa yini yeboNkosi, uyascosha emtini waBhuti. (She is throwing us out. Are you hearing this? She's throwing us out of our brothers house.)" Nomathemba says standing up. Just then a police siren and the sound of a car

stopping is heard outside.

"You called the cops?" Ndumi whispers to her sister.

"You said there was commotion happening. What was I supposed to do."

"So you called Thulani." Ndumi looks at her sister with a smirk on her face.

"Get your mind out of the gutter." Thando tells her. She chuckles and goes to open the door.

"Sanbonani." Thulani says walking into the lounge with three other officers behind him.

"And who called you?" Mfankhona asks them.

"LaNkosi, is everything okay?" He asks Thando with his eyes stuck on the four siblings.

"It will be, as soon as these four leave." Dumsile and Nomathemba laugh.

"Are you for real?" Daniel asks. Thulani turns to Mrs Nkosi.

"Make Nkosi?"

"Bayahamba mfanwami. (They are leaving son.)" She says and the four siblings are left with their mouths hanging.

"I'll get aunt Nomathemba's bags." Ndumi says going to Phepsile's room. She packs all of Nomathemba's things and brings the bag to the lounge.

"Asambeni bantfu labadzala. (Let's go my elders.)" Thulani says. The three officers walk towards them and they see how serious the matter is so they get up. They walk out shouting insults. They all get into Mfankhona's cressida and drive off.

"Thank you." Thando tells Thulani. Ndumi stands behind them and watches the interaction between the two wondering why her sister wont give him a chance. She walks back in the house and sits down. Thando joins them a few minutes later.

"How did it go at the police station?" Thando asks her mum.

"Well Thulani was assigned the case so I think we will find him."

"Good. And work?"

"I asked for a few days off."

"And I've been telling her she needs to come with me to Carolina, even if it's just for a few days so she can get her mind off of everything happening." Nomcebo says.

"I'll be fine. Besides, what if he comes back and I'm not here?"

"You make it sound like you're going to Mars. Ita just Carolina Thulsile. Besides, you dont know what those idiots might do to you." Elias says.

"So I must leave my children alone?"

"Ma, we will be fine. Go to Carolina, you need the break. We will take care of the shop and the house. Besides, school will close next week so we will all be here helping out. And if those

ones try anything, Thulani is a phone call away." Thando tells her.

"Speaking of Thulani....." her mum starts.

"I'm going to start cooking." Thando says and stands up heading to the kitchen leaving everyone laughing.

Ndumi stands up and follows her to the kitchen still laughing.

"You know you could just give him a chance. He is a great guy and he seems like he cares a lot about you."

"Until he finds out about all the mess and baggage I come with. No thank you." Ndumi sighs and sits down at the table wondering how Bokang would take it if she told him the truth. Would he love her any less? Would he see beyond everything she's gone through and love her for her? Would he see the broken little girl stuck in a womans body or would he only see a victim? Either way, maybe Thando is right, its better to protect herself and keep pretending to be whole. But for how long?

She's scared. No, it's not the monsters under her bed or the sounds of owls that send shivers down her body. It's the darkness that has suddenly engulfed their little town. Eskom has done it again, its pitch black, even the tiny light that was coming in from the outside light is gone. She looks out the window silently hoping for the electricity to come back. Right now the only light in the room is the dim light from Ndumi's phone.

Darkness isn't something she enjoys, well she used to, she was never afraid of it until the night a monster came into her room and hurt her, now she needs light, no matter how tiny, she needs a bit of light. Ndumi gets off the bed and goes to her closet. Phepsile watches her while she holds on to Zethu who is sleeping between them. Ndumi uses her phone light to search for something in her closet. All Phepsile sees is something black, probably one of her sweat suits. She watches her sister silently get dressed making sure not to wake them. She opens a drawer in her closet and takes out a beanie. She puts it on and then gets some gloves. Her boots finish the look.

Phepsile watches as her sister walks out the door trying hard to keep the noise to a minimum. She closes the door and walks away to God knows where. Phepsile is tempted to follow her and see where she is going, but the darkness keeps her rooted



in one spot. She turns the torch on her phone on and runs it around the room. She finally decides to put the phone on the side table with the torch lighting up the room. Now she can get some sleep. She drifts off to sleep with her arm around her little sister.

When she wakes up in the morning the sun is shining bright, the electricity is back. Thank God, she thinks to herself. She slowly removes her arm from under her sister making sure not to wake her up. Ndumi is still not back. She quietly walks out of the bedroom and heads to the bathroom. The sounds of someone humming and the smell bacon and eggs sends in a different direction to the one she was headed.

She peeks into the kitchen and finds Ndumi humming and and bacon sizzling on the stove. She's in a good mood. She stands there and watches her even dancing a bit, curiosity gets the better off her and she walks into the kitchen. Ndumi turns around and sees her sister. She puts the pan down and quickly comes around to hug her sister.

"Hey you. How did you sleep?" She asks Phepsile after pulling out of the hug. Phepsile looks at her as she dances back to her pan.

"I slept well Thank you. What's with the good mood?" Ndumi

smirks and dishes up for her sister.

"Life is beautiful. The sun is shining, birds are singing, what more can a girl want." She hands her sister the plate and sits down. She leans on her arm and looks at her sister like she's looking for approval for the meal in front of her. Phepsile takes the bacon and bites into it.

"This is good." Ndumi's face lights up.

"Right! It's a new recipe I found online." Phepsile smiles wondering what kind of recipe does frying bacon need.

"Where's Thando?" She asks stuffing herself with eggs and tomatoes.

"She went to open the shop. Speaking of which, I need to take her some food. You'll dish up for Zethu. If you decide to come to the shop make sure you lock up. I'll take the bakkie. I need to go to town to stock up. Maybe if you get to the shop early you can come with me." She tells her while dishing up. When she's done she closes the Tupperware and leaves with a bounce in her step. Phepsile shakes her head and finishes up her food.

When she's done eating she cleans the plate and puts it away. She dishes up for Zethu and puts the leftovers in the fridge before washing the pots and cleaning up in the kitchen. Zethu walks into the kitchen yawning. She sits on the chair and opens the food sitting on the counter.

"Is this for me?" Phepsile nods her head while Zethu digs in. "I'm going to take a shower. Hurry up and tidy up the lounge. We are going to the shop." Zethu nods her head and watches her sister walk away. Phepsile gets to the bathroom and locks the door behind her. She doesn't need to, but it's a force of habit. She had to start locking the door because one time she was in the shower and when she came out her father was sitting on the toilet seat watching her. It was creepy and scary, since then she learnt to lock the door.

She gets under the shower and quickly takes a bath. She gets out just as Zethu knocks on the door. She opens for her and watches her undress and get into the shower.

"Why are we going to the shop?" Zethu asks with the water running down her body. Phepsile stops brushing her teeth.

"Ndumi is going to town to get stock and we are going with her."

"Okay." She leaves her to finish bathing and goes to her room to get dressed.

"Zethu hurry up!" She shouts. She puts on a pair of black denim jeans and a white crop top with a pair of all stars. She looks at herself in the mirror.

"You look good." Zethu says coming into the room. She's

wearing a pair of biker shorts and an oversized hoodie with some white sneakers. Phepsile smiles and looks at her baby sister. She comes over to her and they stand together looking at the mirror. This is how most people their age dress, but for them, its not that simple. As good as they look, different thoughts run through their minds. The one they share in common is wondering if their dress code is appropriate enough. Phepsile wonders if the crop top she's wearing shows too much skin to entice some men out there. If her father would find her Mickey mouse nightdress she wore attractive, how would the men on the street feel about the five centimeters of skin she is showing. Will they also say she is asking for it?

Zethu looks at her legs popping out of the biker shorts, she's wanted to wear this outfit for a while now, she's seen it on others and liked it, her friends have worn it and looked good, but now that she has it on, all she can think about is what if someone touches her buns because she is advertising herself?

"I'll go change." They both say as if they are reading from a teleprompter. They head different directions and come back changed. Zethu is wearing a pair of boyfriend Jean's over her biker shorts and Phepsile has on an oversized tshirt and a sweater.

"Are you ready?" Phepsile asks her little sister. Zethu nods her

head. They gather their stuff and leave. They lock the door and the gate then walk down to the shop.

They get to the shop and find their sisters laughing together behind the counter. Them being in a good mood is not something any of them have experienced. Happiness has been a rare occurrence in their life. It comes few and far between. But today it seems to have visited them. Ndumi was in a good mood an hour ago and now her and Thando are laughing like they are watching a comedy. It's beautiful, but Phepsile cant help wondering what brought on this sudden bout of joy.

"Hey. Share the joke, what's going on?" Phepsile asks standing on the other side of the counter looking at her siblings. The two girls look at each other and try to hide the smiles on their faces.

"Its nothing." Thando says. "Ndumi was just telling me about her boyfriend." Sbe knows they are lying, but for now, she'll just let it slide. As long as they are happy.

"So when are we going to Town?" Zethu asks not paying attention to her sisters happy mood.

"Now. Let's go so we can get all the stuff we need before the sun gets too hot." Ndumi says taking the keys and the business card from her sister.

"Please bring me some slap chips with chillies." Thando asks. Ndumi holds out her hand expecting her to give her cash.

"Really? You have a card in your hand."

"This is a business card. We cant be using it for personal cravings." Ndumi answers making Phepsile and Zethu giggle.

"Really? You think R30 will bankrupt the shop?"

"Oh, so if I want to buy a pair of Jean's I can do it? And if Zethu wants pizza I can get it too?" Ndumi asks. Thando sighs and takes out a fifty rand note from her pocket and puts it in her sisters hand.

"You're annoying." She tells her. Ndumi laughs and walks to the other side of the counter.

"I know. But you love me anyway." She tells her then sticks her tongue out like a little child. "And I'm keeping the change." She adds running out of the shop with her siblings behind her.

## **THANDO**

It's been a week since their mum left to visit her sister. She's been silently hoping for an opportunity to do what she and Ndumi spoke about

Advertisement

but they haven't had a chance. Schools are closed so she has been in the shop full time. She wants to hire someone to manage the shop when schools open. Phepsile and Ndumi have to go back to school, Zethu also has to focus on her matric year and she can't give up her teaching career to watch over the shop.

She's come home tired on more than one occasion, even when she plans that they will execute their plan, she ends up dozing off and when she wakes up, it's already sunrise. Today has not been any different. She got home and had supper with her sisters in front of the TV, took a shower and got into bed. She did a bit of work prepping for the new term, but that also didn't last long, she fell asleep with the papers next to her.

She's woken up by someone shaking her and whispering her name. She jumps and tries to get as far away from the person as she could. She can't see who it is, it wasn't dark when she went to sleep but now it's pitch black, the only thing lighting the room is the torch being shone in her face. She lifts her arm up hiding her eyes from the glare of the torch.

"Hey, it's me." Ndumi says when she sees the fear in her sister's eyes. She shines the light on her own face to show it's her. Thando sighs and rubs her eyes removing sleep from them.

"Ndumi, what time is it?" She asks searching around for her phone with her hand.

"Past two. We have to go."

"Where are we going?" Thando asks.

"Songimvelo. We need to do what we said we'd do." Ndumi tells her. Only then does everything register in her head.

"Now?"

"Yes now. There's loadshedding. Electricity will probably be back around five. We have less than three hours to go there and come back before people wake up." Ndumi tells her.

Thando gets off the bed and feels her way to the window. She slightly opens the window and looks outside. It's dark. The homes are dark, the streets are dark, tired as she is she knows her sister is right, this is an opportunity that won't present itself again. She takes the phone from Ndumi and uses the torch to search for something to wear. She takes a pair of leggings and an oversized tshirt with a sweater on top. It's a bit chilly outside so she takes her beanie too and puts it on. She puts on some sneakers and she is ready to go.

"We have to leave the phones behind." Ndumi tells her.

"Why?"

"Because they can trace phones."

"Fine. We'll take the torch." Thando answers. "We'll have to



take the hunting gun too. If we want them to buy the story we need to make sure things make sense."

They head to the kitchen with their phones and their torches in hand. They search for the torch in the drawer. Thando finds it and checks if it's working. It seems to be working just fine. They go to the backyard and open the shack where they store all the tools. They both get shovels then head to the spot under the mango tree. They stand there for a hot minute before they start digging. It's not as easy as they thought it would be. They are trying not to make so much noise with the shovels hitting the ground.

"Thirty minutes later they hit him. They stop and use their hands to dig some more until they feel the black refuse bag under their hands.

"How are we going to do this?" Thando asks.

"I've been thinking about this, we can't cut off his arm.

Pathology will show it wasn't an animal that tore off his arm."

Ndumi whispers to her.

"So what do you suggest?"

"His shirt. We get a piece of his shirt that has blood on it."

Thando doesn't argue. It makes sense to her. She figures the hours she spends watching crime shows are finally paying off.

They open the plastic bag removing the ropes holding it together. The smell of his rotting body hits their nostrils before they can even see him.

"Eew, he stinks." Ndumi says.

"What did you expect, rats stink." Thando adds. It's not that hard to find a bloody part of his shirt. A little cut on the collar with a knife and his shirt rips from top to bottom. Thando lifts up the stinky bloody shirt.

"I think this will do." She says.

"Yeah. Let's close up so we can go."

An hour later they have decently covered up enough of the hole to not raise suspicion. They use the tap in the back to wash their hands and clean themselves up. They get back in the house, lock the door and search for the gun. They find it in the garage. They load everything up in the car then push it out of the yard. They close the gate then push the car a few houses down before they and get in. They take the thirty minute drive to Songimvelo. There is a little hole on the fence most people use when they want to go through the game park. It's a short cut, so most people say. But how short can it possibly be when there are lions and elephants roaming around.

They park next to the hole. It's almost dawn, even without electricity the sun is about to rise and they need to be back

home by the time it rises. They find the hole and go in. They walk for about five minutes.

"Let's stick the shirt in a stump or a tree." Ndumi says. "That way it will look like it tore as the animal dragged him away."

Thando looks at her sister and wonders how long she's thought about this. Even though she has a lot of questions she knows this is not the time nor the place. They find a cut down stump with a couple of branches on it. Thando pokes a small hole on the shirt piece before sticking it in the tree which tears it a bit more. They throw the gun next to the stump.

"Are you sure this will be enough?" Thando asks.

"It will be fine. I hope. Let's go before people start roaming the streets." They walk back to the car and begin their drive home.

"Can I ask you a question?" Thando says. Ndumi looks at her sister in anticipation. "Why does it seem like you've been thinking about this for a while now?" Ndumi sighs and faces the road.

"Haven't you?"

"I have. But I always thought I'd call the cops, he'd be arrested, the prisoners he'd be kept with would find out what he did then they would do the same to him. Then he'd be so ashamed he'd hang himself." Ndumi chuckles.

"You're too kind for your own good. Well, in my dream, I'd call the cops, he'd get bail, they always do, he'd come back home,

as they do, the community would find out and a mob would gather, they would tie him up in a tree or a pole, strip him naked and then allow us to do to him whatever we want. I'd whip him till his flesh fell off, bit by bit until we see his bones. He'd die a slow painful death." Thando looks at her sister not sure if she is shocked or scared.

"Wow. That was vivid." She says facing the road again.

"Well a girl can dream right?" Ndumi says and laughs. They notice car lights following them. Panic sets in? Are they about to get caught? What if the person saw them?

**NONDUMISO**

**For the first time in a long time she can see the light. It's not at the end of the tunnel, just a ray of sunshine peeking through a hole of the tunnel but a light nonetheless. She's hopeful, more hopeful than she's been the past few days. If their plan goes as planned, she will close her father chapter forever. And boy can't she wait for that moment. But right now, the only thing standing in their way that could derail their plans is the car that's tailing them.**

They drive on in silence, the long stretch road ahead of them has only a couple of turn offs, the person behind them seems to be going the same way as them. Ndumi counts down from a hundred as the car gets closer and closer. She's trying to calm herself down. Thando is trying to keep her head focused on the road, although her hands are sweating on the steering wheel, she's trying not to show it.

When Ndumi gets to twenty the car takes a left turn and disappears between the homesteads behind them. They sigh and breath in.

"That was close." Thando says wiping her hands on her

sweater.

"Tell me about it. For a moment there I thought we'd be busted." Ndumi adds.

They get home and drive in. They park the car and sit in it for a second trying to calm their beating hearts. The lights go on and they look at each other, they burst out laughing realizing they were five minutes away from being found on the streets.

"We need to put concrete under the tree." Ndumi says looking in front of her at the garage door.

"I'll give you some money to buy the cement." Thando tells her.

"There is sand on the corner by the fence, we'll use that and seal the place in for good."

"How will we explain it to mum though?" Ndumi asks.

"Simple, tell her we wanted to build an outside garden for her to relax on when she's gardening. We can buy some garden furniture and put it under there. It will look nice."

"Garden furniture is expensive Thando, a couple of plastic chairs will do." Ndumi argues.

"I have some savings, they should cover it. Besides, I haven't paid rent or bill's or bought groceries since I started working so that money's been piling up. It will be fine." Thando reassures her sister. Ndumi smiles and turns to look at her sister.

"Since there's all that money sitting idle, maybe we can buy me a new phone." Thando laughs and opens the door and gets out.

"Ucalile. (You've started.)" Ndumi gets out the car and follows her sister into the house.

"Come on. You've been working since you were what, 19, theres a lot of money there. A new iphone wont kill you."

"Get a job." Thando shouts going to the bathroom.

Ndumi throws herself on the couch. She's tired, and sleepy. For the first time in a long time sleep seems to be paying her a visit, but this is not the time for that. She decides to start on breakfast before the others wake up. She hums a song while cooking. She makes a mental list of the groceries they are running out off. She'll need to buy some when she goes to buy stock. Thando comes back dressed and ready to go to the shop.

"Sit down, I'm almost done." She tells her.

"Can't, I'm running late already. The bakery will be at the shop in ten minutes." Thando answers taking an apple from the fruit bowl.

"Okay

Advertisement

I'll bring you some later."

"Thanks. I'm out." Thando shouts running out the house.

Ndumi finishes up cooking. She feels someone behind her and

when she turns its Phepsile. Her good mood propels her to hug her sister. The confusion in Phepsile's face is amusing for her but she ignores it.

"Hey you. How did you sleep?" She asks Phepsile after pulling out of the hug. She feels her sisters eyes on her as she dances around ge kitchen.

"I slept well Thank you. What's with the good mood?" Ndumi smirks and dishes up for her sister.

"Life is beautiful. The sun is shining, birds are singing, what more can a girl want." She hands her sister the plate and sits down. She leans on her arm and looks at her sister like she's looking for approval for the meal in front of her. Phepsile takes the bacon and bites into it.

"This is good." Ndumi's face lights up.

"Right! It's a new recipe I found online."

"Where's Thando?" Phepsile asks stuffing herself with eggs and tomatoes.

"She went to open the shop. Speaking of which, I need to take her some food. You'll dish up for Zethu. If you decide to come to the shop make sure you lock up. I'll take the bakkie. I need to go to town to stock up. Maybe if you get to the shop early you can come with me." She tells her while dishing up. When she's done she closes the Tupperware and leaves with a bounce in



her step.

She grabs the car keys and walks out. She gets in the bakkie and puts the Tupperware on the other seat. She drives to the shop. As soon as she gets there she sees the bakery truck driving out. She parks the car and takes the Tupperware and walks into the shop. It's still early so its not that busy. She joins her sister on the other side of the counter and hands her her food.

"Thank you. I'm starving." Thando says opening up the container. "Ooh, you are in a good mood today." Thando exclaims looking at the food in front of her.

"Of course. Life is beautiful." Ndumi answers humming yet another song. Thando shakes her head and eats her food. "So vele you're not buying me the phone?" She asks her sister. Thando rolls her eyes and pretends like she didnt hear a thing. "I know you heard me." Thando bursts out laughing almost choking on a piece of egg.

"Ndumi leave me alone." She says between coughs.

"Noluthando, come on. Let's make it a loan ke." Thando shakes her head.

"No. Besides, if they find that little parcel we left your father will be proclaimed dead and then you can use his life insurance policy money to get you a new phone." Ndumi frowns.

"I dont want his blood money. Do you?"

"Not really. But it might seem rather suspicious if we refuse to take it. Mum will wonder why?"

"Maybe you're right. It could come in handy for emergencies."

"I'm always right." Thando tells her.

"I know, Miss Know It All." Thando throws the tissue she was using to wipe her hands at her sister and it lands close to her mouth. The sisters burst out laughing as Ndumi tries to wipe her face.

Phepsile and Zama walk in to the store ready for the trip to town. Ndumi takes them with her and they drive to town with some amapiano music playing. When they get to town they head for the market first to get vegetables. Thirty minutes later they are almost done, they go to the last vendor, Make Shongwe. She's been their spinach supplier for years now.

"Hawu Nondumiso, nguwe lo? (Is this you.)" She asks with a huge smile on her face. Ndumi smiles back while her sisters look around.

"Ngimi lo. (Its me.)"

"Uphi uyihlo, solo ngzama kumfownela kepha lucingo lwakhe alungeni. Bengfuna kuletsa spinach ngoba ngbona solo angeti ngala. (Where's your father. I've been trying to call him but his phone doesn't go through. I wanted to deliver spinach to him since he wasn't coming around here.)" Make Shongwe says packing up bundles of spinach in a huge sack that used to be white.

"Natsi asmati kutsi ukuphi. Solo ahambekhaya kulelviki lesisuka kulo. (We also dont know. He left home last week.)" Make Shongwe's mouth opens in shock. She walks around and stands next to Ndumi.

"Hhaybo Nondumiso, utsin manje? (What are you saying?)" She whispers.

"Injalo nje. (Its like that.)" Ndumi answers and takes the sack and carry's it to the bakkie. Sbe comes back with the cash she withdrew and hands it to Make Shongwe who hasnt moved from where she was.

"Awungtjele, make wakho utsini ngalenzaba? (What is your mother saying about all this?)" Make Shongwe quietly questions instead of writing a receipt.

"Angatsini nje. Soyshiye etandleni tebemtsetfo. (What can she say. She's letting the police do their job.)" Make Shongwe claps her hands once and goes back into her stall.

"Ngyacala kemine kuva kutsi indvodza lendzala kangaka inga bhunguka nje kanjalo ishiye umndeni wayo. Mine ngyasola kukhona lokwentekile kuye. (This is my first time hearing of a grown man disappearing and leaving his family. I suspect something happened to him.)" She says handing Ndumi the receipt. Ndumi shrugs her shoulders.

"Asati ma, sestawbona kutsi emaphoyisa atfolani. (We dont know, we'll see what the police find.) Anghambe ma, sitakbona. (Let me go. We'll see you.)" Ndumi says, turns and walks away.

"Sitambeka emthnadazweni. (We will pray for him.)" Make Shongwe shouts.

Ndumi gets in the car and finds her sisters sucking on some ice blocks.

"So you left me alone to carry that heavy spinach. Nginletse leni la? (Why did I bring you here?)" Ndumi asks them. Zethu hands her an ice block.

"We weren't ready for nosey Make Shongwe. That one should have been in the FBI. She knows too much about everyone." Phepsile says. Ndumi drives out of the market and they head to the shopping centre across the road.

"She wanted to know about dad, I told her he's missing."

Phepsile and Zethu look at her like she's crazy.

"Why would you do that?" Zethu asks. Ndumi parks the car and sucks on her ice block.

She knows her sisters won't understand why she did what she did, but Make Shongwe is the unofficial radio gogo around here and she's always ready to spread news like wildfire. By the end of the day the whole town will know their father is missing and once that happens people will want to help find him, and when they start searching they will find the shirt, and if things go according to plan, she will close this chapter sooner than she thought. Now all they have to do is cover the 'unofficial grave'.

**THANDO**

**It worked, Ndumi's plan worked. When she explained it to her a week ago she was sure it would backfire. Make Shongwe spread the news of their father's disappearance like it was breaking news. By the time the girls came back from buying stock a couple of neighbours had come to ask her about it at the shop. She tried to act like she didn't know what they were talking about but it was hard. When Ndumi showed up she explained things to Thando, she was scared of everyone knowing and the attention that would come with that. Even their mother had to come back home because neighbours and her colleagues would show up to the house offering prayers and words of comfort.**

Three days ago the shirt they planted was found together with the gun by a neighbour who'd gone hunting at Songimvelo. They called the cops and everything went fast like lightning after that. DNA was taken, his blood was tested, Thulani was seriously on top of his game. But Thando was still scared. What happens if they get caught? Thulani is determined to find out what happened. All she could think about was what would go wrong, worse case scenarios played out in her head like a

movie on repeat.

Today, everything became official, their father has been declared dead. Thulani was here just half an hour ago. Their mother has been wailing in her bedroom. Phepsile and Zethu are there comforting her while Thando and Ndumi are sitting in Thando's room in silence. Their plan worked. That's all that's running through Thando's head. Tomorrow family, neighbours and friends will be here to pay their respects so they have to put on their distraught daughter's act on full display.

"Are we going to start on supper?" Ndumi asks after sitting there for what seemed like forever.

"We have to, I doubt mum will eat though." Thando answers.

"I'll go get started then." Ndumi says standing up and walking out the room. Thando sits there for a while before getting up and getting the bottle of wine she keeps hidden under her bed. She walks out the bedroom. Instead of going to the kitchen she heads to the backyard. The little 'garden area' they created turned out better than they anticipated. He is officially covered in concrete.

She takes a seat on one of the four chairs and takes a sip of the wine. She takes another sip before pushing the chair back and sliding down to sit on the concrete grave. She pours a few

drops of the wine on top of the grave she laughs. A silent, sad laugh mixed with some sobs.

"You know the only thing I regret about this is that people will never know the real you." She softly says. "People will never know the monster you were behind these walls. But I know, we, your children know. I hope you're burning in hell, and I hope the devil reminds you everyday of the sins you committed against your own children. While everyone will be sad and crying, I will be celebrating. Every day I'll take a glass of wine and thank God for Phepsile's bravery. I'll curse the day you were born because you didn't deserve to be in this world. But now I'm pretty sure you're right where you belong, in the trenches of hell. I hope all the children I aborted because of you haunt you for the rest of your miserable life. When they bury your empty coffin I will laugh, because that's all it will be. An empty coffin, and you will be here, buried like the dog you were. Heck, even a dog deserves a better burial than you." She wipes the tears rolling down her face and takes a gulp of the wine. She stands up and takes a sip of the wine again. She looks down at the concrete she's standing on top of before spitting on it.

She walks back into the house with eyes red as blood. She takes one last swig of the wine before throwing the bottle in the dustbin outside. She gets in the house and goes to the kitchen.

Ndumi is busy chopping vegetables. Thando goes to the garage and comes back with two large containers and empty boxes.

"What are those for?" Ndumi questions her sister.

"To pack away all the dishes, plates and spoons. Tomorrow when people start coming here it will be chaotic. And you know by the time this funeral is over, there will be no cutlery left."

Thando tells her as she opens up the cupboards and starts emptying all her mothers good dinner plates and puts them in the boxes.

"So how are we going to serve people?"

"We will buy plastic plates, spoons and cups tomorrow. These will be locked up in my room." She answers as she takes more of her mother's Tupperware and throws it in. When Ndumi gets done cooking she helps her sister carry the boxes and containers to her room. By the time they are done there are six containers with all the cutlery, pots and pans, glasses and all their mothers Tupperware. The wall unit is empty, the cupboards are empty, all that's left are just the artificial flowers their mother likes so much.

Ndumi dishes up for her mother and takes the food to the bedroom. Thando's phone beeps and when she checks it's a message from Thulani. He is outside. She washes her hands and walks out. He is parked across the road, now he is driving his



car, a Polo GTI. He opens the passenger door from inside and she gets in and gives him a hug.

"Hey, what are you doing here?" She asks after pulling out of the hug.

"I wanted to check on you. How are you feeling?" She shrugs her shoulders and looks out at the road ahead of them. "I got you something." He reaches onto the side of his door and takes out a chocolate bar. Her favourite, milky bar with rice krispies. The smile on her face is all the confirmation he needs that he just made her smile, even for a moment.

"Thank you." She takes the chocolate and opens it. He watches her as she savors the milky delight.

"You're welcome. So how are you guys holding up?" She throws another piece in her mouth and sighs.

"We will be fine. It hasn't sunk in yet."

"I can imagine. Losing a parent is no child's play. It's a loss that leaves a gaping wound in your soul." She nods her head, but deep down she knows with her, her father's death closed that gaping wound. Not completely, but it's closed. After the funeral she can finally plan her life for her and no one else.

When she had decided to stay home after high school she thought she'd be the shield between her father and her siblings

Advertisement

she thought she'd protect them from him, but she failed. That's what she keeps telling herself, she failed them. Because she has no friends, she can't really talk to anyone about her feelings, right now she'd like to tell Thulani the truth, tell him how lighter she feels, tell him that her father's death is an answered prayer. Even though she doesn't believe in God, this one time she can say he is real. But she can't share that with anyone.

"You know if you want to talk I'm here. If you want to get away from everything, my place is available. I have movies, music and I can organize junk food. And I promise you I will not try anything." She laughs and throws another piece of chocolate in her mouth.

"I'll think about it. So what's going to happen with the case now?"

"Well the station commander wants to rule it an accidental death." A bit of hope rises up inside her, but she is still cautious, Thulani doesn't give up that easily.

"And you, what do you want to do?"

"I don't know but something doesn't make sense. The area where we found the shirt and the gun, it should have been bloody, I mean if he was dragged away by an animal there should have been blood spatter all around the place, but there was none." Thando's heart starts racing, just when they thought they are over the finish line another hurdle presents

itself.

"So what do you plan on doing?" She asks, her voice weak and shaky.

"Try and figure out what really happened. I feel like someone probably killed him then planted the shirt there just to throw us off." Tiny drops of perspiration form on Thando's forehead, she clasps her hands together with her knuckles turning white.

"What if he really was attacked by an animal?"

"Then I'll find that out." He tells her. She doesn't need to know how serious he is because the determination in his voice is clear.

"You don't have to do that. It's not like it will bring him back."

"I know. But don't you want closure?" She sees a car drive up the road and it pulls up at the house. She sees someone get out and open the gate. They drive in. Only when they are under the light she sees her aunt Nomcebo and uncle Elias together with a couple of other family members, probably uncle Elias' wife and their other sister Nonhlanhla.

"I have to go. Thank you for checking up on me." She says opening the door.

"No problem, I'll come check on you tomorrow."

"Okay." She quickly gets out of the car and rushes into the house. She wipes the sweat on her forehead before walking

into the house. She walks in and greets her aunts and uncle.

"Sanibonani." She says and takes a seat on the couch. Her mother is still in the bedroom.

"Thando, ninjani sisi? (How are you?)" Aunt Nomcebo asks her.

"Si right Aunty. Ngumake longekho right. (We are fine. Mums the one who is not Okay.)"

"Hhay kona kubuhlungu mani, kepha mine angvisisi kutsi sbali kwentekeni kani ngoba bekangacali kuyotingela lapha. (Its painful. But I don't understand what happened though cause it wasnt the first time he went hunting there.)" Elias says. Ndumi comes in with plates of food and hands a plate to each of them. They say thank you and dig in.

"Manje nitsi kwentiwa njan ke manje, ngoba nibona unyoko anjena nje, senta njan? (So what happens now cause you can see your how your mother is. What do we do?)" Elias asks.

"Hhay bhuti, loko sitakbona kusasa, kwamanje kumele silungselele labantfu labetako. Naletimfene takaNkhosi titawbe tishaya umtsetfo la. (No brother, we will discuss that tomorrow, for now we have to prepare for the people who are coming. Even the Nkhosi monkeys will be here calling the shots.)" Aunt Nonhlanhla says.

"Kungako kumele sikhulume manje bangakafiki. Tindzaba tetimali nabomasngcwabsane kumele sente sicinseko manje kutsi konkhe kume ngemumo. (That's why we need to discuss

this now before they arrive. Money issues and funeral policies, we need to make sure everything is in order.)" Elias argues.

"Cha malume konkhe kume ngemumo. Make wangnika onkhe emaphepha ema policy and all that. (No uncle everything is in order. Mum gave me all the policy documents.)" Elias claps his hands once.

"Good girl. Wena ke utawbhekana naloko, ideath certificate nako konkhe nje lokudzinga kwenteke kutawba setandleni takho. Tsine sikhona kunisita, labo aunty wenu bangacali nje basondzele etimalini. (You will be in charge of that, the death certificate and all that will be your responsibility. We will be here to help you, your aunts cannot get their hands on anything that has to do with money.)" Elias tells her. She nods her head and helps Ndumi clear up the empty plates.

Thando and Ndumi follow each other to the kitchen and they clean up the dishes.

"Do you want me to dish up for you?" Ndumi asks her sister.

"No, I'm good. Did mum eat?"

"A bit. Phepsile gave her sleeping pills. She'll be out till morning."

"Good. We need to wake up early and clear up the lounge and make space for the mattresses."

"I'll set my alarm. So why was Thulani here?" Thando frowns wondering how her sister knows that. "I saw his car outside."

Ndumi answers the unasked question.

"He is not giving up till he finds out what really happened to that monster. I wish he'd just give up." Thando says sipping on some water.

"He won't. You know how he is. But there is nothing to find anyway and I know we are far from being suspects, so we are good." Ndumi quietly tells her sister.

"Let's hope so. Now to bury the devil."

**ZETHU**

**Breathe! Breathe! That's all she's been telling herself the past week. To breathe and not allow anything to come into her space. People have come and gone lamenting on the great loss the community and his family have suffered. If only they knew. Her art has been her escape from all of this, the tea making, the cooking and the pretense she's had to put up with every hour of the day. She's had to shed a couple of tears just to make her 'life's believable.**

Today is the day of the night virgil. Her mothers church will be heading the service since their father wasnt much of a church person. Once or twice a year was enough for him. People have been trickling in from far and wide, his whole family has been causing havoc since they got here. If it wasnt for aunt Nomcebo and Nonhlanhla the Nkosi's would have walked all over their mother.

She's closed herself off in her room with just her art. Instead of shouting and screaming out there, she's chosen to put all her emotions on her art. The door opens roughly and it bangs against the wall as aunt Nomathemba walks in with her hands

on her waist.

"Ngyalingwa na yeMalangeni? Zethu? Uhletileni la, awukho umsebenti longawenta kunekutsi wente le nonsense loyentako? (Am I being tested? Why are you sitting here, dont you have anything better to do than this nonsense you're doing?" She says oblivious to the air pods in Zethu's ear blasting music on high. Her anger rises as she notices Zethu not paying attention to her. She walks over to her and grabs the brush from her hand and beats her with it leaving streaks of paint on her head and face. Zethu lifts her hands up to protect her head from the brush.

"Ngkhuluma nawe awungnaki. Slima semntfwana. (I'm talking to you and you're not listening, stupid child.)" Nomathemba hisses with every streak she leaves. She stops to catch her breath before breaking the brush in half. She tries to get her hands on the other brushes but Zethu is quick to get to them. "Oh, ufuna smile? (Do you want us to fight?)" She asks looking at her niece. Zethu takes one airpod out of her ear and looks at her aunt, nose flared and anger rising up inside her. "Asilwe phela, angtsi ungu Mike Tyson wena, uyalwa. Asilwe. (Let's fight. Since you're Mike Tyson, you fight. Let's fight.)" Nomathemba shouts. Elias, Thando and Nomcebo come rushing into the room to find the tension on high.



"Kwentekalani lana? (What's going on here?)" Elias questions looking at his sister and then his niece. Zethu sits quietly her eyes not moving from Nomathemba's face.

"Akusiso nasi sicalekiso semntfwana yebhuti, ufuna kulwa nami. (Its this curse of a child my brother, she wants to fight with me.)"

"Hhaybo aunty, umdzala ungaka ucamba emanga. (Old as you are, you're lying.)" Thando replies standing next to her sister. Nomathemba laughs and claps her hands once.

"Nginemanga mine Thando? Nginemanga? Bowkhona la? (Am I lying Thando? Am I lying? Were you here?)" She asks.

"Shano ke sisi, njengoba utsi Zethu uyakulwisa, lopente lanhloko yemntfwana ufike njan khona? (Tell us, since you're saying Zethu was fighting you, what is the paint doing on her head?) Nomcebo asks.

"Phuma kimi wena. (Leave me alone.)" She answers and marches out of the room with her brother behind her. Zethu sighs and tries to wipe the paint off of her face.

"Don't do that. You're just spreading it around." Thando tells her. Zethu stops and breathes in and out.

"Kwentekeni Zethu? (What happened?)" Nomcebo asks. Zethu explains to them what happened. Nomcebo clicks her tongue and crosses her arms on her chest. "She's lucky this is a funeral.

Bengtomshaya anye mine. Umdzidzi wakhe. (I would whoop her ass, asshole.)" Zethu and Thando look at each other before they burst out laughing. This is probably the first time they hear Nomcebo cuss. She's a whole pastor's wife so she's very careful about the words that come out of her mouth. "Nihlekani? (Why are you laughing?)" She asks trying to hide the smirk on her face. "Go wash that paint off." She walks out leaving the sisters in stitches.

"I can't believe she said that." Zethu says.

"I know. She'll probably hold a fast to ask for forgiveness from God just for saying that." The girls laugh. "Are you Okay though?"

"I'm okay. I just wish this whole thing would be over. I'm tired of those people." Zethu says putting away her canvas and brushes.

"You and me both. I've had to keep the bank cards and anything that has to do with money inside my bra. I caught Dumsile trying to break into my room." Thando says throwing herself on the bed.

"I swear if I didn't know they were related to dad, I'd think they are the demons."

"Well he was a devil himself so the brands align. Anyways, go take a bath so we can go close the shop."

"Okay." Zethu grabs her towel and toiletry bag and goes to the

bathroom. Twenty minutes later she is clean and although there are some stubborn streaks of paint that won't wash away she's cleaner than when she got in the bathroom.

She walks out of the bathroom to find Elias standing by the door.

"Babeomncane, bofuna kungena? (Uncle, did you want to come in?)" She asks. Elias smiles and looks at her exposed legs under the towel.

"You missed a spot." He says getting closer to her and trying to remove a dot of paint on her shoulder. Fear instantly grips Zethu as she stands there numb with her uncle running his hand on her shoulder. She clutches onto the towel and her toiletry bag as her uncle takes saliva from his mouth and rubs her shoulder again.

After a moment she gets her senses back and takes a step back.

"The paint is not gone." He says oblivious to her trembling lips and chin. "Relax." He says taking another step towards her.

Zethu turns and sprints to her room. She quickly closes the door and locks it. Thando quickly stands up when she sees the fear gripped Zethu slowly slide down the door until she is sitting on the floor. Thando kneels in front of her sister.

"Zethu, what's wrong? You look like you've seen a ghost." She asks worry consuming her. Zethu tries to catch her breath, breathing in and out until her racing heart calms down.

"When I came out of the bathroom, Elias was standing outside." Zethu starts. "I thought maybe he wanted to use the bathroom

but the way he was looking at me was creepy. He saw paint on my shoulder and tried to move it, but the way he was doing it was just weird. It reminded me of dad." She whispers the last part. Thando brings her close and hugs her. She feels her sister shivering in her arms, and she knows it's not because she is cold.

"Okay, let's get you dressed so we can get out of here. I'll be right back." Thando helps her up. "Lock the door when I leave." She tells her. Zethu locks the door as soon as Thando leaves. She sits on the bed trying to get her mind off what just happened, but it's hard, because it just took her back to when she was twelve years old. She was taking a bath inside a wash basin, in the bathroom before it was completely functional. Her father had walked in just as she was done bathing and ready to get out.

"Wait." He'd said. "Awukacophi langemuva. (You didn't scrub your back.)" She sat back down as he took the sack and stone. He lathered the sack with soap and started running it all over her back. He moved from her back and brought it to the front. He ran the sack down her front making sure to linger longer on her tiny boobs. Her mother had tried since she was ten, when her breasts started forming, to reverse the process by hitting

her boobs with a broom. It worked for a while, but when she turned twelve her boobs came back like they were fighting. No matter how many times her mother had tried to beat the boobs back it didnt work.

Her father ran the sack around her boobs with her fingers pinching the nipples every now and then. She wasnt sure how to react, so she sat there until he was done. He told her to stand up and then ran the sack down her legs and on her back rubbing her butt. He brought back the sack to the front and ran it up between her skinny legs. His hand went up until it got to her little private parts. At that moment she was gripped with fear as his hand would go up until he touched her little clit with his thumb. She could see his bulging erection as his other hand held on to his manhood massaging it. She heard him groan as he ejaculated inside his pants. All she could see was the stain on his khaki pants.

When he was done he wrapped a towel around her and took her to her room. He told her to get dressed. She sat there scared to move. Ten minutes later he came back with a different pair of pants.

"Sheshisa ugcoke, I'm taking you for ice cream. (Hurry up and get dressed.)" He said poking his head in her room. When he left again she got up and got dressed. He knew how much she loved ice cream. For her, it could make anything better. He took her and her sister's and loaded them up in his old cressida. He

took them to town and bought them ice cream. That became his way of bribing her into silence. Every time he did what he did to her he'd buy her ice cream. For a while it worked, until he moved to penetration. His 'ice cream dates' couldn't work anymore, so threats began. Threats of not sending her to school, he knew how much she wanted to be a pilot, as young as she was, that was her dream. He'd also remind her that if she told anyone, a monster would slice her in her sleep, playing on her fear of the dark. Till this day, she can't sleep in a dark room alone. She could have easily outgrown her fear, but his threats made things worse.

She gets off the bed and puts on a pair of leggings and an oversized t-shirt, as soon as she is dressed she gets under the covers, tears streaming on her face. For the past few weeks she was slowly beginning to come out of her shell, she was laughing a little more. Yes, her trauma would never be forgotten, but in the absence of her father, she was beginning to see the light, she was beginning to live again, the little twelve year old girl she'd lost in that bathroom was slowly finding her way back to the light. But just one creepy touch from another man who is meant to be a protector has sent her back into the dark again.

**THANDO**

**The empty casket is carried into the yard with Elias and Daniel leading the pallbearers. Thando watches as Nomathemba and Dumsile wail, drawing attention to them. A somber song accompanies the empty casket into the house. It's a basic stream maple casket with strips of darker maple complementing the full maple wood effect of the casket. Its beautiful, too beautiful for a man like Jerome Nkosi. As far as Thando is concerned, he deserved a cardboard box at most. But at least it's not the Cherry High Gloss casket Nomathemba wanted.**

"Why is there a coffin?" Phepsile whispers in her sister's ear. Thando covers her half her face with the doek sitting around her neck.

"You know your aunts and drama. We've already had a funeral for the son of a bitch. This should have been a small prayer not an entire funeral." Tha do whispers back. Phepsile giggles and wraps her arms around Thando's shoulders.

"I know this shouldn't be funny, but I'm glad after this no one will be looking for that monster." Thando sighs thinking about Thulani's determination to get to the truth. After the funeral

she has to find a way to put an end to the investigation.

Nomathemba comes out of the house and searches around with her eyes until they land on Thando and Phepsile. She walks over to them, the sorrow she was projecting just minutes ago seems to have vanished.

"Uphi Zethu?" She asks impatiently.

"Why?" Phepsile asks. Nomathemba scrunches her face looking at her.

"You need to go inside and view your father." She tells them.

The sisters exchange looks with Thando trying her best to hide the laugh that's slowly creeping up from inside her.

"Aunty, akunalutfo lapha ebhoksini, ngisho litsambo noma leltwane kute, yin lesyoybuka, ngumoya? There is nothing in the casket, not even a toe bone, nothing, what are we going to view, air?" Thando asks her laughter sitting at the back of her throat.

"Yentan lelengitsi kwenteni, funa Zethu ubuye naye. (Do what I say you should do. Find Zethu and bring her.)" She sneers before turning and walking away. As soon as she gets in the house the sisters throw their heads back laughing.

"Aunty wakho utsi siyobuka umoya. (Your aunt wants us to look at air.)" Thando says clapping her hands. Ndumi comes in through the gate earning herself some looks of disgust from the



mourners for the pants she's wearing. She joins her sisters and they fill her in on their aunts instructions. Her mouth opens wide in shock and amusement.

"Ngintjelile kutsi ningamniki lomcombotsi lomuntfu, niyabona nyalo ubona imimoya. (I told you not to give her the traditional beer, see now she is seeing spirits.)" The girls giggle, not caring about the eyes starrng at them. Thando sees Elias walk out of the house to the back.

"I'll be right back." She announces and leaves her sisters talking. She follows him to the back where the disposable bathrooms have been erected. She grabs a machete sitting next to the wall and slowly follows him. He gets into one of the toilets, but before he can close the door Thando pushes it open and sticks the machete in his neck.

"Memeta ngtokuncamula. (Scream and I'll slit your throat.)" She hisses and pulls the door closed behind her.

"Noluthando, nginguyihlo. (I'm your father.)" He cries with his lips trembling and his body shaking uncontrollably.

"No. You're not my father. Nghlulekile kuvikela bantfwana bakitsi kubhuti wakho, but I'll be damned if I let you carry on where you brother left off. (I failed to protect my sisters from your brother.)"

"Ukhuluma ngan manje ntfombi yam? (What are you talking

about my girl?) He begs.

"Touch any of my sisters and this machete will cut your head off. Tomorrow after the stupid funeral, you take your stupid siblings and never set foot here ever again. There is nothing for you here, your brother is dead so dont ever come back here again. Are we clear." He nods his head as the blade slowly pierces through his bare skin. Thando pulls it away when she sees a few drops of blood running down his neck. She takes a step back and looks at him from head to toe.

"Utichamele. Sies man, umdzala kangaka. (You peed on yourself, old as you are.)" She spits on the ground before opening the door and walking out.

She walks into the house just as Nomathemba is shouting around the lounge for God alone knows why. Thando ignores her and goes to Zethu's bedroom. She knocks a couple of times with no response.

"Zethu, vula, ngimi. (Open up, it's me.)" She hears footsteps before the lock turns on the door. Zethu opens the door and Thando walks in, making sure to lock the door behind her. She gets on the bed with Zethu and holds her in her arms. She can feel the heaviness around her sister. She's back in her dark hole again, and all thanks to Elias.

"After the funeral, Elias and his sisters will leave, they will never

come back here again. I'll apply for teaching jobs in Joburg or Pretoria, as long as it's far away from here. After your exams we will leave and we'll never come back here. I don't know how but we'll be Okay. We'll heal, we'll breathe again, we'll see the light and the rainbow will not have dark streaks anymore. We will be Okay. I promise you. Promise me we'll be Okay?"

Thando whispers in her sister's ear. She can feel Zethu's breath

Advertisement

its steady, normal, but the tear drops hitting her hand that's sitting under her neck tells her she is anything but Okay.

"Promise me." She begs.

She needs her word, she needs her promise because she fears what this might do to her. She knows what it's like to be in that dark hole, she knows how far her brain has gone to try and make it all stop. She knows about the moments she's wanted it all to end, when she wanted to gulp down a shitload of pain pills, as if that would end the emotional pain. Well it would end the physical pain, and without the physical pain she'd be Okay. It took a lot of fighting with her own inner demons to calm those thoughts, and her sisters were a big part of that, so losing one of them would tear her apart, especially over this.

"We'll be Okay." Zethu whispers back. Thando sighs and kisses

the top of her sisters head holding her tighter.

"Are you hungry?"

"Not really." Zethu answers.

"Well, I'm going to get you food anyway. You haven't eaten the whole day. I'll be back." She kisses her one more time before getting off the bed. "I'll lock from outside." She says opening the door. She takes the key and walks out. She locks the door and puts the key in her pocket.

When she gets to the kitchen she finds Dumsile shouting orders to the women busy chopping vegetables and cooking for the funeral. They've turned the garage into a makeshift kitchen with gas stoves and an aroma of different meats being cooked.

"Thando, kukhona lokudzingako? (Do you need anything?)" One of the women wearing the black tshirts with Masibumbane Stokvel written on them. Dumsile turns to look at her.

"Yebo ma, ngicela kuphakela Zethu kudla, solo akadli imini yonkhe? (Can I dish up food for Zethu, she hasn't eaten the whole day?)" Dumsile chuckles and turns her full body towards her.

"Yehhake madam. Nihleli imin yonkhe anenti lutfo, manje ntongena ngekufuna emabele? Anitikhandzi nibo madame nje. (You've been idling the whole doing nothing now you want food? You must think you're the madams.)" She says looking at

her from head to toe.

"Ufuna kudla noma emabhanisi? (You want food or scones.)"

The lady asks ignoring Dumsile's rant.

"Ngcela kudla. (Food please.)" Thando answers. Dumsile chuckles and claps her hands.

"Kumnadzi kuba ngini shem. (It's nice to be you.)" She says and walks out of the kitchen. Thando pours a glass of juice for Zethu and waits for the plate of food.

Nomathemba comes marching into the kitchen. Her steps falter when she sees Thando.

"Ngcela tikhiya tasekamerweni, inyama iyashoda. (Can I have the keys, the meat is short.)" Nomathemba asks her. Thando turns to the woman fishing up for her.

"Ma, inyama nitaydzinga manje? (Do you need meat now?)"

The lady smiles at her.

"Not right now sisi. Kudla kutawba enough for umndeni.

Inyama yakusasa sitaytsatsa maybe ngabo three ekuseni.

(There will be enough food for ths family, meat for the funeral we will need around three in the morning.)" Thando smiles and turns to her aunt.

"Kukhona lokunye? (Anything else.)" Nomathemba laughs and walks close to Thando.

"I dont know who the fuck you think you are, but remember this, the funeral will not be a forever occasion. It will come to

an end and I will show you who I am." Thando smiles and takes the plates on a tray being handed to her then turns back to her aunt. She holds the tray with one hand and the glass of juice on the other.

"I look forward to it."

She leaves her aunt standing there anger emitting from her pores. When she gets to Zethu's bedroom she finds Ndumi and Phepsile standing by the door.

"Kuphi kwetfu? (Where is ours?)" Ndumi asks taking the tray from her sister.

"Go ask in the kitchen." Thando answers reaching into her pocket and taking out the key. She opens the door and walks in with her sisters behind her. The glass in her hand slips out of her hand when she sees her sister sitting on the floor, a razor blade in her hand and blood dripping from cuts lined up on her thighs.

Zethu looks up when she hears the glass break. With tears glistening in her eyes she looks from her sisters and back to her bloody thigh. Thando kneels next to her and takes away the blade.

"I'll get the first aid kit." Ndumi says putting the tray on the pedestal.

"I'll get warm water and a mop." Phepsile announces and

follows her sister out. Thando hugs her sobbing sister and says nothing. Ndumi comes back and kneels in front of Zethu, Phepsile comes back with a bucket filled with warm water and disinfectant. She closes the door behind her and locks it.

She kneels next to her sister and they sit quietly as Ndumi cleans the cuts. None of them having any judgment to give. They've been there too, they've wanted the pain go end. They've wanted to find peace, no matter how it comes about, they've wanted to wake up in a different world with a different life, so no, they cant judge how their sister copes with her pain. When Ndumi is done cleaning the cuts and Phepsile is done cleaning the floor, they all get under the covers and hold on to each other like they used to do when they were kids. No matter the darkness, they vowed the day they buried their father in the garden that they will never leave each other. If one is feeling the darkness creep in, then they will hold each others hands and fight through it. And right now, right at this moment, all they care about is making sure their sister finds a way out of the dark hole. No matter how long it takes.

**PHEPSILE**

**The mood is somber, people are crying, according to the many speakers who've stood up and spoke through out the night, the community has lost a pillar, a good man, a dedicated family man, it's not just a loss for the Nkosi family, it's a loss for the entire community. Phepsile has been up since 3 AM when the stokvel ladies needed food from the locked bedroom so they can start cooking. She decided to let her sisters sleep and not disturb them.**

Once all they will need was out she locked the bedroom again. Thando's bedroom has been the designated store room since this whole farce began. Instead of going back to sleep she decided to join the mourners in the tent. She got there just as the Chief's representative got up to speak. She was busy chatting to her friends with one headset in her ear when he started to speak.

"Asibonge mphatsi weluhlelo. (Thank you master of ceremonies.)" He begins. He has a piece of paper in his hand, this is an important 'funeral', Nkosi wasnt just another member of the community, he was a trusted advisor to the chief, his



speech needs to embody that.

"Nginbingele bazalwane. Good evening brethren.)" Lazy Amen's are heard all around the tent. It's been a long night, but not for Phepsile, she's fresh from sleep. "My name is Gatja Magagula, I am here representing the chief. As you all know, Babe Nkosi was a member of the chiefs council, he was also his trusted advisor. Kufa kwakhe kustumile mani. Besibusy nje sikhuluma ngendzaba yekulungisa lapha eskolweni, sisandzise, ngoba naku phela sesemukela nebantfwana bakuletinye tinkhundla, ngendlela labothishela labasebenta ngekutikhandla ngako sifiso sakhe bekungkutsi siskhulise tutsi kucashwe nabothishela labanye. Babe Nkosi bekaytsandza imfundvo kakhulu, kungako lomfundzate losasite linyenti lebafundzi labaphuma khona lasgodzini setfu uchubeka ukhula. (His death caught us by surprise, we were busy discussing renovating and enlarging the school since it's been accepting pupils from other districts so his wish was to grow it and hire more teachers. He was passionate about education, that's why the scholarship we started has helped a lot of students from around here and it keeps growing.)" He continues. All Phepsile can do is roll his eyes.

Gatja continues singing Nkosi's praises, Phepsile rolls her eyes when he starts talking about how he loved his family. She sticks the other earphone in her ear, earning some stares from the

people sitting next to her. When the clock hits 5AM and the stokvel ladies start distributing scones and tea to the mourners she goes back inside the house. She goes to the bathroom and fills up a bucket with warm water. She takes the bucket to Zethu's bedroom where her sisters are sleeping. She takes a quick bath before waking her sisters up. She goes back to the bathroom and throws the water down the toilet then fills it up with more water. She takes the bucket back to the bedroom so one of her sisters can bath. Thando gets up and takes a quick bath while Phepsile gets dressed. She gasps when she sees the time.

"Shit, I forgot to wake up early to get the food out."

"Relax, I took care of it." Phepsile assures her. She sighs and finishes up with her bath.

"Thanks. Where are the demons you call your aunts?"

"I don't know and quite frankly, I don't care." Thando chuckles and takes the dirty water to the bathroom and pours it down the toilet. She fills the bucket up with water and heads back to the bedroom. Ndumi and Zethu decide to bath together. They get some stares from Phepsile and Thando.

"Don't look at us like that, the procession is leaving in a few minutes." Ndumi tells them. They chuckle and continue getting dressed. By the time they follow each other out of the bedroom

the funeral procession is about to begin. They head to the lounge where a prayer is being held. The pastor is standing at the head of the casket reciting a prayer. Their mother is still sitting on the mattress, but the loud brim hat and the black double breasted jacket she has on with a lace cover on top of her shoulders tells them she is ready to 'bury' her husband.

When the pastor says Amen the pallbearers take the casket and slowly walk out with it. Their mother follows with Nomcebo holding her hand. They follow the procession and watch as the empty casket is loaded up in the hearse. They quickly rush to the mini bus reserved for family. They get in and sit at the back. Their aunts follow with their mother. Nomathemba turns to look at them, she frowns when she sees the miniskirt Phepsile is wearing. Even though she has a pair of black stockings underneath the skirt, it's still short.

"Kute lesinye skeptic bongasgcoka ngaphandle kwaleskhindi? (Was there no other skirt you could wear other than this short one?)" Nomathemba questions. Phepsile looks at her skirt then looks up at her aunt and shakes her head. She clenches her teeth and figures this is not the time or the place for this so she faces her front.

The drive to the cemetery is not a long one. Ten minutes and

they pull up close to where the grave is. They get off the car and walk down to the small tent. They take their seats, leaving two seats in front for their mother and aunt. When aunt Nomathemba shows up she finds all the front seats occupied. The girls mother sits down with Nomcebo next to her. Nomathemba and her sister clench their teeth before sitting behind the girls.

They watch as the casket goes down. This is it, the end of their trauma. Or is it? For Phepsile, it just might be. They watch as soil is poured on the grave. Their mother stands up, barely, and slowly walks to the grave. With tears in her eyes she throws the rose petals Nomathemba insisted on inside the grave. When it's time for the girls to do the same they refuse. Whispers go around, people don't understand why the girls would refuse. Even their mother has stopped crying and is gawking at them, silently commanding them to do the right thing. But the girls are adamant, they refuse, even after the pastor begs them to, they silently sit there in their mini protest until people give up.

After the funeral is done people disperse and head back to the house for refreshments. The girls decide to stay behind. The people from the funeral home clear up their belongings, the girls get up and the chairs they were sitting on are taken away,

the tent is pulled down and the artificial turf is taken. When everyone is gone

## Advertisement

silence consumes them. They walk closer to the grave and look at the pile of dirt. Spiritually, this is where their father will lay for all eternity, but physically he lay in a refuse bag under a mango tree, in his garden, that's where he belonged.

Phepsile squatted down and poured the water she was holding in her hand on top of the grave.

"I wore a mini skirt today." She begins. Her sisters stand behind her holding hands. "For the first time in my life I look like my peers, I'm not hiding behind baggy Jean's and tops. I'm not afraid of you anymore. You're a coward, a monster and a pervert, I'm sure the devil is having the time of his life with you. But your hold on me ends today, I dont know how, but I am officially letting you go today. The pain you caused me, it remains right here, the shame I've felt and hid from the world, it remains right here, with you. You're the only one who deserves to carry the shame, not me. But the world will never know what you did, and no, it's not because I'm afraid to tell them, it's because even if they knew, you wont be here to see the nast stares and hatred from people. I will heal, we all will, and you will be nothing more than a tribulation we had to

endure and overcome. The fear you instilled in me, I leave it right here, with you. You didn't deserve to be our father when you were alive and you sure as hell will not receive that honor in death." She stands up and spits on the mound of dirt. Thando reaches out her hand and Phepsile takes it.

Ndumi kneels down to. She looks at the dirt in front of her and chuckles.

"You're not worth it." She says and gets up. She spits on the grave too and stands back. They look at Zethu and she has her eyes glued on the grave in front of her. She feels her sisters staring at her, she looks up and shakes her head.

"Like Ndumi said, he is not worth it." Thando squeezes her sister's hand before letting it go and squatting down.

"One day, when you stand before God and have to account for all your sins, I hope you remember one important thing, you failed the one important job God gave you, being a parent. We will live, we will heal, we will find happiness in life, we will be so so happy that nothing you did to us will take that happiness away. We will not define ourselves by what you did to us. You on the other hand, hope hell has a special place for you." She stands up and prepares some saliva to spit on the grave then she decides otherwise. "You're not worth even my spit."

The girls turn around and walk away leaving the mound of dirt

behind, feeling a little lighter than when they came down here. When they get to the road they find Thulani's GTI parked by the side of the road.

"Your boyfriend is waiting for you." Phepsile says to Thando and the girls giggle. Thando walks onto the drivers side. She sighs when she sees Thulani sleeping. Even though she hasn't spoken much to him the past week, she's felt his presence. When the tent was erected he was there, every evening he'd come by just to help out. She knocks on the window and he jumps up reaching behind him to get his gun. He relaxes when he sees Thando.

He opens the door and gets out of the car, he stretches himself. "Why are you here?" Thando asks. He smiles and buries his hands in his pockets.

"Well, I saw you guys staying behind when people were leaving so I thought I'd wait for you and give you a lift." A feeling of butterflies fluttering in her stomach fills her up.

"You didn't have to. We would have walked." Thando is trying hard to hide the redness from her cheeks from all the blushing. It doesn't help that her sisters are standing by giggling and laughing at her.

"I don't mind. You're ready to go?" He asks. Thando nods her head and walks to the passenger side with Thulani in front of

her. "Ladies." He greets as the girls get closer too.

"Sbali." Phepsile says. Thulani chuckles but Thando is unimpressed. The girls giggle and get in the backseat. Thulani opens the front door for Thando. She gets in and he closes the door.

"Such a gentleman. When are you marrying him?" Phepsile adds just as Thulani gets in the car.

By the time they get home people are busy eating from takeaways all over the yard. The aroma of the food is quite impressive, even for a funeral. The girls get out of the car and walk into the house.

"Syabonga Sbali. (Thank you brother in law.)" Phepsile shouts. Thando shakes her head and looks at him smiling. He is a rather beautiful man. That she cant deny.

"I'll go get you some food." She says and follows her sisters inside the house. She finds her sisters standing in the middle of the lounge with both their mother and their father's families filling the rather large room. Thando looks at Phepsile with questioning eyes. Phepsile shrugs her shoulders.

"Asenichaze ke, yin lamanyala lenwente lemathuneni? (Explain yourselves, what was the shit you did at the graveside?)"

Mfankhona asks. Phepsile steps forward and looks at them.

"You wouldn't believe us if we told you. All you need to know,



that man wasn't the angel you think he was. Whatever animal ate him did the world a favor." She announce then turns on her heels and walks away. Her sisters look at each other and follow behind her leaving both families with their mouths on the floor and their mother sobbing. The little fighter in her is slowly coming back, right now, she is prepared for anything her family will throw at her, but one thing they wont do is find fault with their choice not to mourn their father. This is a new beginning for her and she refuses to let some old geysers take that from her.

**NONDUMISO**

**It's been a long day, even though they've been locked in Thando's room munching on the scones mourners brought and watching movies on Thando's laptop, they know they still have to face the music for their actions earlier.**

People are slowly fading as they take their leave. That's what usually happens at most funerals, when all the mourners have gone home, that's when the family really starts to mourn. Its slowly getting dark outside. The movie credits go up and the girls clap their hands. Ndumi laughs looking at her sisters.

"Typical black people. Why are you clapping your hands?" The girls laugh.

"We are happy, leave us alone." Phepsile argues.

"Mine I'm hungry. I'm going to find food." Thando announces and gets up from the floor.

"I'm coming with you." Ndumi announces and follows her sister out of the bedroom.

"Bring us some." Phepsile shouts after them. They get to the kitchen and its clean. Ndumi looks out the window into the backyard and the mobile toilets are gone. Under the mango

tree, there is a large pile of firewood. She goes out through the backdoor and looks around the yard. The tent is gone. You wouldn't think there was a funeral just hours ago. The stokvel ladies have really done a good job. The pots and pans are clean so there is nothing for them to do except take everything back where they rented them from tomorrow.

Ndumi gets back in the house and finds Thando warming up some leftover food.

"They left some?" She asks her sister.

"Nami I am just as surprised." She places the plastic plates on the table and dishes up the warmed up rice while the meat goes into the microwave. Nomathemba comes into the kitchen and looks at them with her arms crossed on her chest. Thando rolls her eyes wondering what they are still doing here. They should be gone too.

"You know I'm glad my brother is not here to see you spit on his grave and disrespect him like that." She says looking at the girls with disgust all over her face.

"Me too hey, I didnt know God answered prayers until he took him from the world." Ndumi answers. Nomathemba's mouth flies open in shock. Even though she was close to her brother and she loved him, his daughters have never been her favourite, and as far as she's concerned, the past week they

have shown her why she doesn't like them. She claps her hands once and goes back to the lounge. Ndumi and Thando giggle watching her walk away. Elias comes into the kitchen and looks at his nieces. He can see something is going on with them, he doesn't know what, but he has his suspicions.

"Girls, please come to the lounge when you're done eating, we have a meeting." He tells them.

"NOW!" Mfankhona shouts from the lounge. "Asnobuswa ngibotsine. (They don't make the rules.)" Elias shakes his head and shrugs his shoulders.

"I'll go get them." Ndumi says and walks past her uncle. She gets to the bedroom and finds the two girls have already changed into pyjamas. "There's a meeting. Let's go." She says and walks back out. Phepsile and Zethu follow behind her. They go to the kitchen first and take their plates of food and walk to the lounge.

"Sit down." Mfankhona tells them. There's no space to seat, just a reed mat sitting on the floor. Phepsile hands her plate of food to Zethu and goes to the kitchen. She comes back with a bench and places it next to the wall. They squash themselves onto the wooden seat. They eat their food waiting for their elders to speak.

"We need to discuss what's going to happen to the shop."

Mfankhona starts. The girls look at him, Ndumi snickers, in her head she already knows whatever he is planning on saying will be just crap. "I will take over the shop from now on." He announces. Thando and Ndumi throw their heads back laughing, earning themselves side eyes from their aunts and uncles.

"Yin lehleksako Nondumiso? (What's funny?)" Dumsile asks.

"Everything he just said. Cha babelomncane don't quit your day job just yet. Comedy is not your thing." Ndumi answers and shoves a spoonful of rice in her mouth.

"Besinganbuti, besintjela. (We are not asking, we are telling you.)" Nomathemba mutters.

"Angeke yenteke lentfo leniyshoko ye Aunty. (That wont happen.)" Thando tells her aunt looking at her straight in the eye. "That shop is ours. Nangabe beningati, make na babe were married in community of property. That means konkhe lobekukwababe sekwamake, if naye angasfuni lestolo, sikhona tsine. (If you didnt know.) (Everything that belonged to dad belongs to mum now, and if she doesnt want it then we are here.)"

"After that little show you put up at the graveside

disrespecting your father and now you want to lay claim to his business? I wouldnt be surprised if you are the ones who killed

him." Nomathemba screams at them.

Phepsile and Zethu freeze looking at their aunt. Ndumi feels the change in energy around her sister and she reaches her hand out and holds Zethu's hand. Thando laughs and stands up.

"Ngcela slalelaneni yeboNkhosi. La, kuka Jerome Nkosi.

Lesastolo sa Jerome Nkosi. Jerome beka shade na Thulsile. Ani naright yekufika la nistjele lenyongo leniykhulumako. I'll burn that shop down to ashes before we hand it over to any of you. The only time any of you ever gave a fuck about us was when you wanted something from Jerome. He is gone now, there is no reason whatsoever for you to be here. Leave. (Let's be clear about something, this is Jerome Nkosi's house, that shop is Jerome's, Jerome was married to Thulsile. You have no right to come here and spew the bile you're spewing right now.)" She hisses between clenched teeth. Mfankhona stands up and faces Thando.

"Ngyabona bhuti uhlulekile kunkhulisa ngendlela ngiko nicabanga kutsi ningasgibela etinhloko ngatsi sibontsanga yenu. (I see my brother didn't raise you right that's why you think you can walk all over us as if we are your peers.)" He shouts at her.

"I said I am taking over the shop, and there is nothing you can do about it. Are we clear?" He roars.

"Thando please just let it go." Their mother says sobbing.

"If you want to get to that shop, you'll have to walk over my bloody cold dead body." Thando grunted ignoring her mother's sobbing pleas. "Imali yakho ye pension wayidla nalamagoya ebantfwana bakho manje you think you can come here and take over our inheritance. You must be kak drunk. (You are your pension money with your kids.)" The room goes silent when Mfankhona slaps Thando. She touches her painful cheek and looks up at her uncle. She chuckles before she sends a loaded fist and connects it with his bearded jaw sending him flying across the room as everyone gasps.

"THANDO!" Her mother shouts standing up from the mattress.

"What are you doing?" She holds the fuming Thando back from inflicting any more damage. Ndumi sits back and watches as her uncle is helped up from the floor. She's impressed by her sister's tenacity. Thando is no fighter, she's over protective yes, but she's never been the violent type. So this is a new side to her no one knew about. Mfankhon sits on the couch with the help of his siblings and holds on to his throbbing jaw. Even though he is trying to hide it, his eyes are glistening with unwashed tears, making Ndumi chuckle.

"Wena." Thando starts pointing at Daniel. "I told you that when the funeral is over, take your siblings and get the fuck out of here. But you're still here. Awuva neh? (You dont listen.)" The tension in the room is palpable. Elias and Nomcebo are the only ones remaining from their mothers side of the family, they are

sitting there in shock, not sure how to react. They exchange looks, as if to say 'I told you so'. Thando leaves them there and heads to the garage. Even though it was cleared up for the funeral, her father's things are in a huge storage box in the corner. She opens the black box and searches around. She finds her father's second hunting gun at the bottom. She takes out the shotgun and cocks it. There are two bullets inside. Enough to scare those fuckers. She thinks to herself.

She walks back into the lounge with the gun on her shoulder.

"Nisela? (You're still here?)" She asks. Everyone turns to look at her, fear grips them when they see the shotgun in her hands.

"Thando!" Her mother pleads.

"Out!" Thando hisses at them.

"You wouldn't dare." Nomathemba sneers. Thando chuckles and cocks the gun again.

"Try me. I'm giving you five minutes to gather your things and get out." She tells them. Daniel and Dumsile drag their siblings to the bedroom they've been using since they got here. They quickly pack their things and come back. They follow each other walking past a fuming Thando.

"Wena. Your day is coming." Nomathemba says walking past her niece.

"Noluthando, leni nje? Leni nkosyami? (Why? Why my God?)"  
Their mother asks slumping down on the couch.



"What? This thing is not even working." Thando answers. Her sisters burst out laughing.

"SHUT UP!" Their mother shouts. They become silent. She stands up and looks at her daughter, she's angry. "I dont know who the fuck you think you are but you need to remember whose house this is. I've given you way too much leeway to do as you please, it ends, today." She says pointing at all of them. "I raised you better than this Noluthando." Thando chuckles and throws the gun down on the floor.

"Raised us mama? Really? You raised us? If you'd actually raised us you would have known what was happening right under your roof. While you were busy playing Jesus second in command in that God forsaken church, your husband..... your husband....." She struggles to get the words out of her mouth, they seem to be stuck in her throat.

"My husband what?" Her mother questions.

"You wouldnt believe us if we told you." Ndumi says standing up. She holds her sisters arm and drags her away to the bedroom.

Thando sits on the bed and breathes in and out.

"Three months. Just three more months and I'll be out of here." She mumbles to herself. Ndumi sits down next to her.

"We have to tell her at some point."

"She'll never believe us."

"I know. But she needs to know anyway." Phepsile and Zethu

join them in the bedroom.

"I don't think I'm ready for the judgement that's going to come with that." Thando answers.

"I didn't know you could throw a punch like that." Phepsile says breaking the tension. The girl's laughter fills the room.

Elias and Nomcebo sit in the lounge digesting what just happened. The faint sounds of the girls laughing sends their eyes looking down the passage.

"Something is not right with those girls." Elias whispers. Their sister is in the bathroom so she can't hear this conversation.

"I know. What just happened is not normal. Especially for Thando. We need to get to the bottom of this." Nomcebo pointed out.

"Tell me about it. I suspect their father did something to them. Thando was so close to saying something." He adds.

"Yeah. I'll talk to them tomorrow. One of them has to tell us what's going on." Elias nods his head as his sister comes back from the bathroom and sits down.

"I need to call Pastor Gamedze, I need him to pray for those kids. They seem to be possessed by the devil." She says scrolling down her phone. Elias and Nomcebo exchange looks wondering how their sister can be so naive that she can't see something is wrong with her children.

**THANDO**

**She is tired. Not just from the funeral but from everything else she's been carrying. She keeps going back to last night, she didn't mean to do what she did, replaying the whole thing in her head she still cant believe she did that. Sure it got Daniel and his greedy siblings out of the house but how long before the cops come knocking and she is arrested for assault.**

By the time morning comes she hasnt tasted sleep. Not even a bit. She figures theres a lot to do so she might as well get a headstart. She gets up and decides she'll shower once all the work is done. She changes into a pair of sweatpants and tshirt. She covers her head with a bucket hat and she's ready to go. She puts her flops on and quietly walks out of the bedroom with her airpods in her ears. She turns the music on and heads to the garage first.

She opens the garage door. Her father's bakkie is parked on the other side of the yard. She needs to get it by the door before she can do anything. Good thing she hid the keys, otherwise it would probably be gone by now. She goes back to the house to get the keys. She drives the bakkie and reverses it to the front of the garage. She gets off and starts packing up all the things

that have to go to the rental place. The two gas stoves, the pots, the chaffing dishes and plates. Some are broken so she'll have to pay for those.

"You're up early." Nomcebo says coming from behind her. The music blasting from her ear pods prevent here from hearing anything. Nomcebo taps her on the shoulder and she jumps and screams. Nomcebo takes a couple of steps back as Thando pulls the earpods out of her ear. "I'm sorry I didnt mean to scare you." Thando lowers herself onto the bakkie door and sits down trying to calm her beating heart.

"It's fine. I didnt hear you."

"I'm sorry. You know you dont need to do that today right? We can always take those things back tomorrow." Thando shrugs her shoulders and looks around.

"Its fine. I needed something to do." She tells her aunt.

Nomcebo takes a seat next to her.

"How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine."

"No Thando, I mean how are you feeling? For real this time. Last night when all that commotion happened you almost said something about your father. What did you want to say?"

"Nothing." She answers looking at her earpods in her hands.

Nomcebo turns her body to face her.

"Thando, maybe I am overstepping or something but I think there is a lot you want to say. You refused to throw soil on your father's grave, you haven't shed a single tear since you heard he died, you and your sisters have been acting out of character, it's almost like you're happy he died." Thando turns to look at her aunt with tears glistening in her eyes. For the first time in her life it seems like someone sees past the huge walls and defences mechanisms she's put up for herself. Not even her mother could see the pain and hurt dripping through those walls. She wipes the tear running down her face and stands up.

"Please, just tell me what's going on. I promise I won't judge you. Just let me help you carry this burden that looks heavy on your shoulders, just let me help you." Her aunt says holding Thando's hand.

"You can't help me Ncane. No one can." Thando argues, tears streaming down her face.

"Let me try." She sighs and lets go of her aunt's hands and wipes the tears with her arm.

"I'm hungry, I'm going to make some food. You want some? No? I'll make you some anyway." She turns and walks back into the house leaving her aunt standing there not sure what to do.

She gets into the house and pours herself a glass of water. She

gulps down the liquid and stands by the kitchen window looking out at the makeshift grave under the mango tree. "Thando, ngcela ungentele litiya. (Please make me tea.)" Her mother says coming into the kitchen. Thando stands there ignoring her. "Thando ngkhuluma nawe. (I'm talking to you.)" She adds hitting the table with her hand. Thando sighs and turns around. She looks at her mother and shakes her head before filling the kettle up with water. "Pastor Gamedze is coming by later today. I need you and your sister's here to talk to him." She announces looking at her phone.

Thando takes out the cup and saucer and puts it on the table. She takes out another one when her aunt comes in from the garage. She silently pleads with her eyes asking her to leave things as they are. For a moment she thinks maybe she understood her, until her uncle comes in and sits down at the table.

"Thando, hlala phansi, kumele skhulume. (Sit down, we need to talk.)" Elias says. Nomcebo sits on the other chair leaving her stuck between them.

"Akangentele leltiya acedze kucala. (Let her make me tea first.)" Her mother says.

"Asewume ngematiya Thulsile. Thando hlala phansi. (Stop with the tea, sit down.)" Elias insists.

Thando pulls out the chair and sits down. Her mother is sitting there looking bewildered and angry.

"Thando, we need to talk about last night."

"I'm not going to apologize Malume. Mfankhona deserved it."

"I know. And I don't expect you to. We need to talk about how you even got to the point of punching an elder like that. That's not you, it's not who you are. What happened?"

"Can I make the tea please?"

"Thando, your actions this past week were not those of a daughter mourning her father. From the looks of it, it seems like you hate your father." Nomcebo questions. Thulsile stands up.

"This is a waste of time. Thando has grown too big for her own boots. She thinks because I gave her the policy documents and all that now she is the boss. She needs to grow up." She says and walks away.

"He raped me." Thando muttered making her mother turn around and look at her. She wasn't certain about the look in her mother's eyes, it wasn't surprise, it wasn't shock either. Anger perhaps

Advertisement

irritation even, but it sure as hell wasn't shock.

"What did you just say?" She questions taking steps closer

again.

"Your husband, he raped me." Thando insists. "Not once, not twice, countless times. I've had four abortions because of him." Nomcebo gasps and buries her head in her hands, tears welling up in her eyes.

"STOP LYING." Thulsile screams hitting the table. "Do not lie about your father." She hisses at her daughter. Thando stands up and wipes the tears running down her face.

"You can stand there and pretend your husband was a saint, he wasn't. Not to me. He was a monster."

"Noluthando, I swear to God if you don't keep your mouth shut right now...."

"You'll what? Hit me? There is nothing you can do to me that's worse than what your husband did. Being woken up in the middle of the night by a grown ass man who jerked off on his children's thighs or buttocks. Yes, I'm happy he is dead, heck if I could I'd make a statue for the animal that killed him."

"Stop talking about your father like that. He was a good man, he would never do something like that. What is wrong with you?" Thando chuckles.

"You're so naive. You've spent a better time of your life campaigning to be God's second in command while your husband turned his children into his wives. That man didn't give



a fuck about you and those endless church seminars or whatever it is you were doing there because he knew he had four daughters he could fuck at anytime and no one would do a thing about it. He knew no one would have believed us." She shouts.

"Thando, stop lying. You know that's not true." Thulsile argues.

"Ask Nondumiso how many times she's had to have an abortion because of your husband. Ask Phepsile why she never comes home. Ask them why they ran the first opportunity they got. Ask Zethu why she has lacerations on her body from cutting herself because she couldn't deal with the pain that man caused. I'm lying? You have no idea what's been going on under your own roof. That man deserved to die a slow painful death."

"If all that you've said was true, then why didn't you tell me? Mhmm. I'm a nurse and I'm your mother, I would have believed you." Thulsile screams pointing at her daughter. The little perfect life she thought she'd build for herself and her children is slowly tumbling down around her.

"Would you have believed us?" Thando asks.

"Of course I would have. I'm your mother." She hisses.

"You didn't believe those two girls who accused Pastor Gamedze of raping them." Thando tells her.

"What? What's that got to do with anything?"

"You and the women in that church made those girls lives a

living hell. You ripped them to shreds for simply saying they were raped. And you think you would have believed us? You must be joking."

"Fine. Maybe we went too far with those girls but lying about your father is not right."

"Thulsile are you hearing yourself right now?" Elias questions standing up to look at his sister. "Your child just told you her father raped her and her sisters and you still dont believe her? What is wrong with you?"

"Bhuti, I know my husband, he was a good man. I will not let Thando drag his name through the mud, especially after he is dead. He is not here to answer for himself." She insists.

"Thando is telling the truth." Ndumi says walking into the kitchen with her sisters behind her.

"Ndumi stay out of this." Thulsile tells her.

"Why? Because you're not ready to hear that the man you loved was a demon who terrorized his children every chance he got? Thando did say you wouldnt believe us. And she was right. You're no different to that man. For all we know you were aware of what he did and you turned a blind eye to it. Did you know mama?" Ndumi shoots back at her mother. Phepsile and Zethu stand huddled together in the corner with Zethu sobbing on her sister's chest.

"He started raping me when I was nine." Thando starts. "For as long as I can remember everytime you were not here, whether you were working night shift or in church he'd get an opportunity to molest me. When I was thirteen he found me throwing up in the bathroom, I'd been throwing up every morning for two weeks, he took me to a clinic in Nelspruit. He told you we were going to Barberton for some things he needed for the shop. He took me to the clinic and told the nurses that I needed the abortion because my 'boyfriend' was denying the pregnancy and he didnt want a baby ruining my future." She chuckles wiping her tears. "The nurses were so impressed, they said they'd never seen a father care so much about their child. I couldnt even tell them the truth because he never left my side. The second time he took me to Barberton for the procedure. The third and fourth time he crushed pills and put them in my food. I bled for eight days and you thought I was having my period. I didn't leave after matric because i thought if i was here then he wouldn't do to them what he'd been doing to me. I thought if I left then he'd automatically turn to them but if I was here then he wouldn't. I was wrong. I failed to protect them. I tried, God knows I tried." She turns to her sisters, tears flowing on her face. "I'm so sorry. I am so so sorry. I was supposed to protect you and I failed. I am so sorry." She sits back on the chair sobbing. Nomcebo stands up and holds her. She holds her face in her hands and lifts her up to

look at her.

"Thando, sisi, It wasn't your job to protect them. You're not responsible for that man's actions."

"I failed them Ncane. I failed to protect them. I should have known he wouldn't stop with me. I should have known but I was selfish. If I had told someone then he wouldn't have carried on this long. I failed to protect my sisters Ncane. I failed them." She sobs. Zethu comes to her and kneels down in front of her. She lays her head on her sister's lap and sobs too. Ndumi stands behind her and wraps her arms around her neck sobbing on her sister's back. Phepsile joins them and they hold each other, sobbing. Thando keeps repeating the words 'I'm sorry' over and over again.

Elias looks at her sister who is standing there, numb.

"You could atleast pretend like you care." He tells her. She turns and walks away locking herself in her bedroom.

**No one quite knows how to react to a chilling revelation like the one that has engulfed the Nkosi household. Thulsile is sitting on the floor of her bedroom trying to make sense of everything her children told her. For her, its hard to believe the man she's always looked at and seen as a dedicated and attentive father has turned out to be the opposite of everything she thought he was.**

She used to thank God everyday because he loved his kids, she would come home from work tired but the kids would be clean and in their pyjamas, fed and sitting quietly watching whatever was on TV. He'd take them out for ice cream daddy daughter dates, he loved spending time with them, he never complained when she had to work night shift or go to prayers at church, everything she thought she knew about the man she married seems like a far fetched dream right now.

She listened to her children sobbing in the kitchen and she couldnt even comfort them. More than anything, at this moment she's filled with pain and guilt. She's a nurse, she should have seen something was going on. Those are thoughts that keep going through her mind. She should have known. Now how is she supposed to face her children knowing she failed them.

Nomcebo and Elias are sitting in the lounge, just as confused and heartbroken. The only logical thing to do at this point would be to call the police, but how will they help when the man is six feet under already. They police can't arrest a ghost now can they.

"Do you think she knew?" Nomcebo asks her brother, breaking the silence.

"I dont know. I hope not." He says rubbing his hands together. He is itching to put his hands around Jerome's balls and twist for dear life. His death was easy, as far as he is concerned. If he had the power he would wake him up and kill him again.

"She must have known." Nomcebo persists. "I mean she didn't seem shocked when Thando told her what was happening, then she didnt believe her and then she locked herself in her room while her children cried their eyes out in the kitchen. Any mother would have atleast tried to comfort her children." Elias sighs and stands up from the couch. He looks out the window as a car pulls up at the gate.

"I really hope you're wrong. I'd hate to have to disown my sister. But I will. If she knew about this and did nothing, I'll make sure she never sets her eyes on those kids ever again." Nomcebo nods her head as realization sets in.

"Now things are adding up." She says.

"What?" He asks watching Pastor Gamedze walk through the gate with his bible under his arm.

"Why he never wanted the kids to visit us. Our children weren't allowed to visit here and the girls were not allowed to visit any family members, he knew we would notice something." Elias nods his head and walks to answer Pastor Gamedze's knock on the door. He stands at the door with his hands in his pockets looking at the man before him.

Pastor Gamedze smiles and extends his hand towards Elias but he doesn't take it.

"Sanibonani." Gamedze says looking at the man who seems twice his size at this moment. Or maybe it's because he is standing on the bottom step so he looks shorter. "Bengcela kubona make Nkosi. (Can I see Mrs Nkosi.)" He continues seeing as Elias refuses to budge.

"Akekho. (She's not here.)" Elias answers and tries to close the door but Gamedze stops him.

"Uhm, Ngyacolisa kepha lelengkutele lana kumcoka. (I'm sorry but what I came here for is important.)" He tells him. Elias looks at him from head to toe, making him uncomfortable.

"Lalela la yemfundisi. Ngcela uphume ngalelgede longene ngalo kungakanuki umswane. (Listen pastor, please use the same

gate you used to get in and get out before things turn bad.)"

Gamedze takes a step back as Elias closes the door in his face. He takes his phone out of his pocket and calls Mrs Nkosi. Her phone rings unanswered. He calls again and he gets the same response. Eventually he leaves seeing as he is getting nowhere.

Elias watches him through the window until his car drives off then he sits down.

"We need to help the girls." He says looking at his sister.

"How?"

"I dont know. If that man was alive the police would have been a great start but now that he is dead, where do we even begin? I know we need to help them, I just dont know where to start." He answers frustration washing over him. He is not the kind of person who sits down and does nothing, he needs something to do instead of just talking.

"Counseling would be a great start." Nomcebo suggests. "I'll go check on your sister."

She gets to the main bedroom and knocks. She tries to turn the handle but its locked. She knocks a few times before she hears footsteps coming towards the door. The key turns and her sister opens the door. She follows her in and closes the door behind her. She watches her sister go back to the spot on the floor where she's been sitting for almost two hours now.



Nomcebo pulls up a chair and sits in front of her sister. Even though she can see the puffy eyes she wonders if those are from the pain her children went through or they are from guilt.

"Sisi, I'm going to ask you this and I need you to be honest with me." Thulsile looks up at her sister. "Did you know?" Nomcebo asks. Thulsile's brow furrows in confusion.

"Know what?" She questions.

"What Jerome was doing. Did you know?" Her mouth falls open looking at her sister's serious face.

"How can you ask me that Nomcebo."

"Can you blame me though? When Thando told you what happened you stood there screaming at her and calling her a liar. And instead of comforting her you chose to lock yourself in here. So yes, I have questions, did you know?" Thulsile snickers and buries her head in her hands.

"I didnt know what was going on Nomcebo." She answers

Advertisement

her eyes still not on her sister. "But I understand why you may think that." She looks up again as fresh tears make an appearance. "I have helped countless people get rape kits done at the hospital, I've seen children who were raped by people close to them, I've seen what rape can do to people, and the

moment it was right in my house, I failed to see it. I failed to see my children's childhood being destroyed right under my nose, what kind of mother does that make me? I thought..... I thought i was one of the lucky few women who could proudly say 'my husband would never', it turns out I was wrong. And now my kids hate me." Nomcebo sighs seeing the pain in her sister's words. This is not what she was expecting when she came in here. She was ready for a fight, but now she's conflicted.

"They dont hate you." She says trying to comfort her sister.  
"They do. And I dont blame them. If I hadn't defended Pastor Gamedze maybe my kids would have come to me and told me what was going on." She wipes her tears and looks at her husbands picture with the girls hanging on the wall. "I don't know the man I married Nomcebo. I dont know how he could have looked at his own children and seen them attractive enough to sleep with them. To the point of them even falling pregnant." She stands up, wipes her tears and takes the picture off the wall and looks at it. "How did I not see their bodies changing? How did I not notice them having morning sickness or missing their periods? I have four children but I have absolutely no idea who they are and what they have gone through. I failed them, I FAILED MY CHILDREN." She screams and throws the photo on the other side of the wall. She

watches as the wood breaks and the glass scatters all over the floor. "This is not a cycle that should have been repeated." She hisses under her breath, her eyes still stuck on the picture.

Nomcebo stands up and comes around to stand in front of her. She holds her hands.

"What do you mean this is a cycle that should not have been repeated?" She asks quietly. Thulsile's eyes slowly dart back to her sister. She shakes her head and tries to pull away from her but Nomcebo tightens her hold.

"I need to check on the kids." She tells her sister.

"The kids are sleeping. I gave Thando a sleeping pill and the others refuse to leave her side. Please let them be." Thulsile nods her head and sits down on the bed. "Talk to me sis wam. What happened?"

"It doesnt matter. It won't change anything." She answers staring into space.

"Maybe. But it would help to talk about it." Nomcebo urges her sister. Thulsile sighs and closes her eyes as if she is remembering something.

"You know I used to check them. Everyday." She says and chuckles. "When they were little I'd come back from work and bath them, ask them questions, 'did anyone touch you?' 'Did anyone put their hands on your private place?'. Every day, I'd

ask them. Even when they were with their father, until he told our pastor that I don't trust him with the kids. He said he felt like I wasn't allowing him to parent his kids. The women at the church told me to trust him, that man like him don't come often. I should be grateful that he wants to be more than just a sperm donor to them." She shakes her head as tears stream down. "I let my guard down. I trusted him with my children. How could I let my children down? How am I any different from mum?" Nomcebo quickly let's go of her sister's hand and stands up. She stands in front of her sister and looks at her.

"Thulsile, what do you mean how you any different from mum?" She tries her best to keep her emotions in check but in her head, things are not adding up the way they should. She knows her sister and mother have never got along. Thulsile was rebellious as a teenager and their mother couldnt care less. Everyone had blamed Thulsile when their mother had a stroke, instead of taking care of her Thulsile continued on with life like her mother wasnt lying in a hospital bed fighting for her life. And when she came out of hospital Thulsile still refused to take care of their mother.

"I'm going to check on my kids." Thulsile announces and stands up. She heads out with her sister calling her name behind her. Nomcebo decides to go talk to her brother, he is not in the

lounge, she sees the front door open so she walks out and finds her brother sitting on the stoop outside.

"How did it go?" He asks as soon as his sister sits down next to him.

"I'm confused."

"Why?"

"Thulsile said something about history repeating itself and then asked how is she any different from mum because she failed to protect her children. I dont understand what she meant by that." Elias takes off the cap he is wearing as realization dawn's on him. He was nine years old when it happened, Thulsile was seven. Nomcebo was just a baby and her mother had taken her to the clinic for her shots. A neighbor had come to the house to borrow a cup of sugar. When she knocked on the door she heard someone whimpering in pain. She'd come into the house without knocking. She followed the sound till she came to one of the bedrooms. Thulsile was sitting in the corner, crying. Her dress was torn and her underwear was lying on the floor, bloody. Their father was sitting on the bed looking at her with his pants in his ankles. The woman left the house screaming after seeing that. It wasn't long before a mob had formed. Their father tried to run but the mob was faster. They beat him half to death. Elias had come back from playing to find the police and a large crowd in his home. He pushed through the crowd

until he got to the front. All he saw was his sister being wheeled into an ambulance and his father's limp body being thrown in the back of the police van.

At nine years old he wasn't sure what was happening and no one would tell him anything. His mother had come back and when she was told what happened she refused to believe it. Their father succumbed to his injuries a few days later. When Thulsile came back from the hospital her relationship with her mother had completely changed. Her mother blamed her for her father dying. Her mother told the community that what the neighbor had witnessed wasn't true. All their father was trying to do was discipline a wayward child. She'd told that story for so long that eventually everyone had believed her. Thulsile grew to hate her mother just like their mother hated her. She'd lost her husband and she blamed her daughter for it. It was only in his teenage years when everything finally clicked to him. Even though they never spoke about that day ever again, it was etched in his memory forever.

"Bhuti please talk to me. What's going on?" Nomcebo questions as confusion seems to be her middle name at this point. Elias sighs and stands up.

"Yeah this family is more fucked up than I thought." He says and walks back in the house leaving his sister bewildered.

**PHEPSILE**

**Her grumbling stomach is relentless. She's been trying to wait till morning but the hunger pangs are not giving up. She hasn't had a proper meal in over 24 hours and her stomach needs to be fed. She carefully pulls her hand out from under her sister's head. With only the light from her phone she walks out of the bedroom headed to the kitchen.**

She turns the light on in the kitchen and almost runs away when she sees someone sitting at the kitchen table.

"Sorry, I didnt mean to scare you." Her mother says not turning around. Phepsile walks in and looks at her mum, confusion evident in her face.

"Ma, its 3 in the morning." Her mum smiles cuddling the cold cup of tea in her hands. "How long have you been sitting here?"

"I don't know. I couldnt sleep." Phepsile takes the cup away from her mum and turns the kettle on. She pours the cold brown liquid down the drain and rinses the cup. She sets two cups on the table, takes out the bread, cheese and butter from the fridge and sets it on the table before sitting down waiting for the kettle to boil.

"So what's stopping you from sleeping?" She asks her mum

while buttering the bread. Her mum sighs and crosses her arms on the table. She has so many questions, but fear of asking the wrong ones keep her mouth shut. She watches as her daughter moves around the kitchen making food.

"Thank you." She mutters as Phepsile hands her the cup of tea. She sits down across from her mother and digs into her meal.

"Did he..... did....." she stutters trying to get the words out of her mouth. Phepsile stops chewing and looks at her mother.

"He did?" She answered the unasked question. Fresh tears form in her mother's eyes. She's been trying her best to keep her emotions in check but right now, looking at her daughter and imagining the pain that she went through, with their mother oblivious to everything happening right under her roof.

"How come none of you ever thought to tell me? Not a hint, not a clue. Nothing. Why?" Phepsile stares at her mother wondering if she really wants to hear the truth or she is just trying to ease her conscience. She's not sure if she can trust her, yes her concern seems genuine, but trust is not something she easily gives away.

"Would you have believed us?" Thulsile sighs and looks down at her tea. She would have believed them. She would have done things differently from her mother. But she also understands why they wouldn't trust her. She had unknowingly broken that



trust when she failed to believe Sanele and Sphelele. Instead of being a mother to them she allowed herself to be swayed by her role in the church. She had to protect the church, which also meant protecting her pastor. And thus breaking the trust her children should have had in her.

"I'm sorry." She says wiping a tear away. "I'm sorry I failed to protect you. I'm sorry I wasn't there when you needed me the most. I'm sorry." She looks up to her daughter but all she finds is a cold stare looking back at her. Phepsile's face is indifferent. All she does is eat her bread and drink her tea. This is not the reaction her mother was hoping to get. She finishes eating and takes the cup and plate to the sink before sitting back down.

"Why?" She asks.

"Excuse me?"

"Why are you sorry? I mean I understand you saying you failed to protect us and all, but why? Yesterday you were screaming at Thando and calling her a liar and today you're remorseful. What happened between then and now?" Thulsile sighs realizing it won't be so easy putting her family together again. "I've been thinking about everything she said and I feel horrible. I should not have reacted that way. If anything

Advertisement

I should know better than to put my trust in a man." Phepsile still has a hard time believing anything coming out of her mothers mouth. But for now she chooses to give her the benefit of the doubt.

"I'm going back to sleep." She announces and stands up. Her mother nods her head and watches her daughter walk away from her with a heavy heart. Phepsile gets to the bedroom and finds Ndumi sleeping alone. She goes to the other bedroom and finds Zethu putting on her school uniform. She watches her sister struggle to zip up the grey pants. She throws herself on the bed as Zethu holds her breath and the zip finally goes up. She breaths out and Phepsile laughs.

"You're getting fat." She tells her little sister.

"Thank you for telling me. I had no idea." Zethu says sarcastically and rolls her eyes.

"You're sure you're ready to go back?"

"I have to. I've missed out on a lot." Phepsile nods her head.

"Mum said she's sorry." Zethu stops what she's doing and looks at Phepsile.

"Sorry for what?"

"For not protecting us, not believing us blah bloody blah."

"And what did you say?" She shrugs her shoulders and scrolls through her phone.

"I'm not buying her sudden change of heart. It's too sudden. Yesterday she was screaming at Thando saying she's lying and today she is sorry? I don't buy it." She says shaking her head. Zethu stands there not sure what to make of this new information. If there is one thing she's prayed and hoped for it was for their mother to believe them, even if there would be no justice served but to know that their mother believes them, it, in some small way gives her a bit of calmness.

Zethu finishes getting dressed and gathers her books. Thando walks into the bedroom ready to go.

"Hurry up, we'll be late." She says and walks back out.

"How is it having your sister as your teacher?" Phepsile asks.

"The same as any other teacher." Zethu answers and shrugs her shoulders. Truth is she's been trying not to let it go to her head. Even though Thando has taught at her school for three years now as a permanent teacher, she also did her practical there so she's always had her around. It's also what contributed to them being close. Zethu has no friends, so most of her breaks are spent with her sister. The other kids however have their own ideas. Some think she gets special treatment and access to tests and assessments before they do that's why she gets distinctions most of the time. She's learnt to drum out their constant bickering and just focus on her school work. It's carried her well up to this far.

She gets her bag and walks out of the bedroom to the kitchen. She finds Thando already preparing lunchboxes for them.

"Breakfast?" Thando asks taking out a pan from the cupboard.

"Yes please." Zethu answers and takes over making the lunchboxes while Thando makes breakfast.

"How are you feeling about your first day back?" Zethu shrugs her shoulders.

"Okay I guess." She answers as the smell of fried vienna's hit her nostrils. She quickly closes her nose with her hand and looks at her sister with a disgusted look on her face.

"What's wrong?" Thando questions her sisters look.

"Are you sure those vienna's are still fine. They smell bad."

Thando scrunches her face and gives her sister a dazed look of bewilderment. A part of her has her suspicions but the other part of her is hoping this is just a case of 'spoiled' vienna's and nothing more. She picks one piece out of the pan and brings it up to her nose. It doesn't smell rotten. So what could be Zethu's problem.

Phepsile walks in and sees Zethu with her eyebrows pulled down, her nose wrinkled and her upper lip is pulled down. She crosses over and looks at Thando who is still not sure what is going on.

"What's going on?" She asks when she sees Thando quickly

putting the vienna's in a container and sealing it before putting the pan in the sink and filling it with water.

"Cereal it is then." Thando says ignoring her sister's question. Zethu opens the windows allowing the fresh air in. Thando and Phepsile exchange a look between them then go back to watching her sister open the door and walk out.

"What's wrong with her?" Phepsile whispers.

"She said the viennas smell rotten." Thando answers. Phepsile's jaw drops as realization sets in.

"Please don't tell me she is....." Phepsile's voice trails off as she tries to let everything in. "No!" She whispers under her breath. Zethu walks in and the disgusted look is gone.

"Just what I needed." She announces and continues with the task at hand. "Thando hurry up we have to go." She tells her sister, oblivious to the looks she's getting.

"Yeah." Thando quietly says and walks out of the kitchen. Phepsile follows her to the bedroom.

"Please tell me it's not what I think it is?" She says as soon as she gets in the bedroom. They find Ndumi laying on the bed scrolling on her phone.

"What do you think what is?" She asks looking up at her sisters. Phepsile sticks her head out to the passage making sure Zethu is still in the kitchen.

"We think Zethu might be pregnant." She says as soon as she sees the coast is clear. Ndumi sits up letting her phone fall on the bed.

"What did you just say?" She questions looking from one to the other.

"I made viennas and she said they are rotten." Thando tells her.

"Maybe they were rotten." Ndumi argues. Thando rolls her eyes and gets her bags.

"They are fine. I'll have them at work."

"I'll book an appointment with a doctor. We will have to go after school." Phepsile says throwing herself on the bed.

"And how are you going to convince her to go to the doctor?"

Ndumi asks. Phepsile looks at Thando, hoping for an idea or some clue. But she gets none.

"We will figure it out. Book the appointment." Thando tells her before walking out.

"I really hope it's just stress from all that's been happening."

Ndumi says looking up at the ceiling. Phepsile sighs and joins her sister at looking up to the ceiling. Just when they thought Jerome was out of their lives, now this. Hopefully this is just the universe playing a prank on them. But then again if there is one thing they've learnt, the universe hasn't been too kind to them, when it dishes the bad, it makes sure.

**THANDO**

**The gloomy weather is almost a perfect match for how she is feeling. She has been consumed with work and making sure her students catch up with their school work. But in between classes and those rare moments when she got just a second to herself, her mind would go back to this morning, seeing her sister almost throw up because of 'rotten viennas' is not how she wanted to start her first day back at school.**

Zethu on the other hand has been oblivious to her sister's musings. She is carry on with life like nothing is wrong. Thando is more scared of how, if her suspicions are true, will Zethu handle all this. She is the most fragile of all of them. She is not good at coping as much as they thought. Sure her paintings help, in some way. But this, this is more than a canvas can fix. This will break her.

"Earth to Thando." Miss Gule says snapping her fingers in front of Thando's face. Thando blinks and forces a smile onto her face.

"Hey."

"Are you Okay? You look like you're deep in thought." She says dragging a chair and sitting down. Thando has been sitting in

the lab through out her break.

"I'm fine. Just tired." She answers, her smile not leaving her face. Miss Gule reaches over the table and takes Thando's hands into hers.

"You dont have to act tough Thando. Everyone knows you've been through something traumatic. If you need to talk, we are here. I'm here." She says. The bell rings saving Thando from an awkward moment. She knows she couldnt just spill her guts to Miss Gule, unless she wanted the whole town to know about her family business.

"Let me prepare for my next class." Thando says shuffling test papers around. Miss Gule stands up, disappointed that her mini excursion for some gossip proved futile.

"Of course. Remember, I'm here if you need to talk." She says and walks out just as the grade 11s walk in for their lesson. The kids quietly take their seats. Its oddly quiet, even with them there. *That's new* Thando thinks to herself. When she looks up the school head prefect and another girl are arguing in the back.

"Grace and Qondile, would you like to hold your debate up front so we can all hear?" Rhe class turns to look at the girls. Grace stands up and Qondile follows. They both have their hands behind their backs. They stand next to their teacher.



"What's going on?" Thando asks with her eyes still buried in her lesson plan.

"Ma'am." Grace calls out. Thando looks up and the girl takes out a bouquet of flowers from behind her and puts it on the desk. While a bewildered Thando is still trying to make sense of what's happening Qondile places a box of chocolates with a card next to the flowers.

"What's this?" Thando questions, her eyes getting misty the longer they stare at the white Rose's in front of her.

"Well, as a class, we just wanted to let you know that we are sorry for your loss and we are thinking of you. So we donated some money and we bought these for you. Hope you dont mind." Qondile tells her as a drop of salty liquid hits the white paper laying in front of her. She looks up at them and tries to blink the tears away but fails. She stands up and gives the two girls a hug before wiping away her tears.

"Thank you. This means a lot to me." The girls make their way back to their seats. "Thank you guys." She says to the class as some students wipe their own tears away. "Okay, enough crying for today. Let's get down to work."

The lesson goes faster than she expected. But looking at the flowers in front of her makes everything better. As soon as the

class leaves and heads back to their class she sits down and opens the card. Everyone in the class signed it with different messages. Beautiful thoughtful messages. She's going to miss them next year.

She stands up and gathers her documents and hand bag, she takes the chocolates and the card and throws them in her bag before walking out with her bag and documents in one hand and the flowers in the other. For just a moment she was able to forget about her neverending problems, and she is grateful for that.

As soon as the bell rings, putting an end to the day, Thando is already halfway to the gate. Zethu comes running after her and they stand at the gate waiting for Zethu and Phepsile to pick them up.

"Nice flowers." Zethu says smelling them.

"Thank you. The grade 11s got them for me." Thando says proudly.

Ndumi pulls up in their father's bakkie with Phepsile in the front. Phepsile gets off and gets in the back with Zethu. Thando gets in the front seat with Ndumi.

"Nice flowers." Ndumi says and starts the car.

"Thank you. Did you tell your mother where you were going?"

"Nope. Just told her we had to get some stock in town. How was she?" Thando sighs shaking her head.

"Oblivious. I dont think she knows what's going on." They drive to the doctor's office in silence. Thando is more nervous than anything. This could set Zethu off and send her back to her shell. Getting her out in the past was a struggle, but lately she's been getting out of her shell more. Laughing more and talking more. This could be the one thing that sends her back to that dark hole again.

They get to the doctor's office and walk in. Phepsile goes to the receptionist and tells her about their appointment. She's told to have a seat, the doctor is still busy with another patient. They sit down nervously paging through the old magazines.

"Why are we here again?" Zethu asks closing the magazine and throwing it onto the small table. Thando and Ndumi look at each other, each waiting for the other to speak. But they both cant seem to come up with a lie.

"Annual check up." Phepsile answers.

"Okay." Zethu says and picks up another book. The doctor comes down the passage talking to a patient. He says his goodbyes and watches the old lady walk out the door before turning to the girls.

"The Nkosi sisters. It's nice to see you again. Who am I seeing

first?" He asks looking around.

"Me!" Thando answers and stands up. She quietly follows the doctor to his office while mentally preparing herself to tell him exactly why she is here. Hopefully he will be willing to help them.

"So, Noluthando

Advertisement

unjani? (How are you?)" He asks taking a seat. Thando takes a seat across from him.

"Ngyaphila dokotela Nduli, unjan wena? (I'm good doctor, how are you?)" She replies with a nervous smile on her face. This task is proving harder than she thought.

"Siyaphila natsi. (We are well.) So what seems to be the problem? Your sister didn't specify to my nurse why you needed the appointment." He stands up again and opens his small file cabinet. He takes out all four of their files.

"Actually, the appointment is for Zethu. I think she might be pregnant." The doctor frowns and puts down the file in his hand.

"What makes you so sure? Is she sexually active?" She breathes in and out trying to formulate the right answer to that question. But she cant seem to find one. Zethu is not sexually active, but she's also not about to tell the doctor that is she is indeed

pregnant, then the child might be her own sibling.

"I dont know. Can we just do the test? But I dont want her to know just yet, so maybe we can all do the tests just so she doesnt suspect anything." If there is a picture next to the word confused in the dictionary, its probably doctor Nduli's face right now.

"I'm sorry, I'm not understanding. How can she not know she might be pregnant? Is she sexually active or not?" She closes her eyes and heaves out a deep sigh.

"Honestly doctor, I dont know. All I want to know right now is if she is pregnant or not. Please." The doctor takes out his glasses and puts them on the table, he squints his grey eyes and looks at the woman sitting before him. He puts his elbows on the table and rests his chin on his balled fists.

"Let me get this straight, you want me to test Zethu for pregnancy without her suspecting she might be pregnant?" Thando nods her head. The doctor shakes his head and opens the files again. "So now I have to pretend I did the test on you and then your other sisters?"

"Yes." Thando answers with fingers crossed.

"Okay then. Let's get on with it. Let's call in Ndumi."

"Thank you. I owe you one." Thando stands up and goes to the waiting area. She calls Ndumi and she walks down the passage

to the doctor's office. A few minutes later she walks out and Phepsile follows suit.

"If you ask me, I don't know what the doctor is doing in there but it ain't it. I mean you guys came out within ten minutes, so what kind of tests is he doing." Zethu whispers to Thando. All Thando can do is smile and pretend like she is happy, yet deep down her heart is galloping at twice its normal speed. Phepsile comes back and Zethu goes in. A few questions and a test later she walks out and sits down with her sisters.

"So what now?" She asks looking from one sister to the next. Doctor Nduli comes down the passage, his lips turned into a small smile that ends at the curve of his lips. He looks straight at Thando. She gets up and follows him to the office with her sisters behind her. Thando and Zethu sit on the two chairs facing the man. He looks up from the files.

"Well ladies, I have your test results. Everything seems in order. Except for Zethu." He announces, looking at her.

"What's wrong with me?" She asks. For once in her life she hopes she can get an answer to the questions she's asked herself so many times before.

"You're pregnant." The doctor tells her. She zones out with the words constantly ringing in her head. She's never had sex with

anyone before, except for those moments when her father had his way with her.

She stands up and pushes the chair back with eyes welling up with tears.

"No. Do the test again." She says roughly wiping her tears away with the back of her hand.

"Zethu." Thando calls out to her trying to calm her down. She knows what her sister is going through, she's gone through it four times. The disbelief and the shame of it all, no one wants to ever face the reality of carrying their own sibling.

"No. No. No. No. No." Zethu cries. She looks at her sisters and sees the pity in their eyes. They've been here too. They know how this feels.

She feels her body getting weak, her sister's faces double and then triple around her. Everything seems to be going in a circle around her. She looks up to the ceiling, her eyes get heavy as her pupils travel to the back of her head before darkness takes over. All she hears are the screaming sounds of her sister's voices, but even they are fading away, slowly, until the darkness consumes her in its entirety.

**ZETHU**

**The beeping sounds of machines play in a rhythmic motion it almost feels calming. Her throat is dry and her body seems stuck in one place. Her eyes slowly open and close, the light coming in from the window is blinding. She closes and opens her eyes for a while until they adjust to the glaring light. Her pupils move around the room, there is nothing but white walls, a light above her head and a smell of disinfectant.**

The beeping sounds get louder as her senses come back. She moves her head to the side and sees where the beeping sounds are coming from. There's a ventilator and a heart monitor on one side. The door opens drawing her attention to it. A nurse comes in with her head buried in a file. She walks to the monitor and starts making sure everything is in order, still oblivious to the patient watching her every move. Zethu tries to lift her hand up, and only then does the nurse see that there is life. Her head moves from the hand up to Zethu's face. She



smiles at her.

"Welcome back. I'll get the doctor to come see you." She leaves the file on the small table at the edge of the bed and walks out. Within minutes the room is swarming with doctors and nurses poking and prodding her. Zethu looks out at the small window on the door and she sees Thando standing on the other side, anxiously watching.

"Okay, I think you can let the family in." One doctor says as the others make their way out leaving Zethu with the doctor and the nurse. Thando and her parents walk in. Zethu's heart starts racing at the sight of her father. He is dead. At least that's what she remembers. They buried him in the garden. He shouldn't be here.

The doctor notices her heart rate and looks at her.

"Zethu, you need to calm down. I know you've been here for a while but we don't want you going back into the coma now do we?" The doctor says trying to reassure his patient. But Zethu's eyes never leave her father's eyes. Fear and wonder masking her face. *What if I am being haunted?* She silently asks herself. She looks at Thando and she seems unfazed by her father's presence next to her. *What is going on?*

"How is she doctor?" Her mother asks the man in a white coat. The doctor looks at Zethu then looks back at her mother.

"Well we still need to monitor her to make sure she is okay but so far so good. The infection seems to be gone. So I'd say we are looking at having a full recovery." The doctor tells them with a smile on his face.

"Oh thank God." Her mother says clasping her hands together in a prayer pose. Her father stands there with his hands in his pockets, looking at his youngest daughter.

"I will leave you alone. Mr and Mrs Nkosi, I'd like to see you in my office if you dont mind. In about five minutes." The doctor says and walks out.

"Hey." Thando says looking at her little sister. Emotions get the best of her and she allows the tears to fall. Zethu looks at her sister and her heart breaks, she's three sizes down from her usual size 38 frame. Her face is free of make up and her eyes are shallow. She looks like she's been crying for a while. Her eyes have bags under their them.

"Hey, I'm glad you're okay. You gave us such a scare." Her mum says sitting on the edge of the bed and holding her hand. Zethu stares at her mum unsure of what to make of all this. All she remembers is being in the doctor's office and being told she is pregnant. Her father is dead, she saw him bleed to death in her room, she saw her sister's drag his body out to the garden and

bury him under the mango tree, she remembers an empty coffin being buried after his bloody shirt was found at Songimvelo. So how is he here?

She looks up at her father and his eyes are as dark and cold as she remembers. It would be easy to say she was hallucinating but everyone seems well aware that the man is here.

"Nkosi, asambe syobona dokotela. (Let's go see the doctor.)"

Her mum says standing up and looking at her husband.

"Hamba na Thando, ngtawsala na Zethu mine. (Take Thando with you. I'll stay with Zethu.)" He tells her, a smile on his face. Zethu squeezes Thando's hand a little tighter. Thando doesn't miss the gesture. Even though Zethu is looking at her parents, she feels her sister's need for protection.

"The doctor said he wants to see the both of you. Go, I'll stay."

Thando tells them. Her mother nods her head in agreement.

Jerome clenches his teeth, frustration written all over his face.

"Asambe Nkosi. (Let's go.)" He sighs and follows his wife out of the room, shooting one last glance at his daughter he walks out of the room. Zethu quickly turns to her sister.

"What is he doing here? He is supposed to be dead." She says slurring her words. Thando frowns and looks down at her sister.

"Why would he be dead?" Thando asks, panic slowly creeping

in. Wondering if her sister has lost her mind. Zethu tries to sit up but her body has been in the same position for two months now so her bones have yet to adjust.

"Thando, we killed him. Dont you remember?" She asks.

"I'll go get the doctor." Thando says and stands up but Zethu's grip on her hand tightens.

"I'm not crazy. You were there. We all were. Phepsile found him on top of me, raping me, she stuck a spear in his heart and he bled out on the floor in my room. You remember, right?" She continues, the adrenaline taking over and for a moment, allowing her words to flow freely.

Thando sits back down on the bed and looks at her sister.

"Zethu, do you remember how you got here?"

"Yes. We went to Doctor Nduli for our annual check up a few days after dad's burial. He said I was pregnant and then I fainted. You were there, you and Ndumi and Phepsile too. You were all there. Have you forgotten?" She looks at her sister like she has lost her mind. Thando's tears flow down and she brings her sister's hand up to her mouth and places a light perk on them.

"Zethu, we found you in your room

Advertisement

bleeding on the bed. The doctor said you took some abortion pills, you overdosed on them that's why you were bleeding so much. When we rushed you here the doctors found out you also had an infection in your womb." Thando narrates. Even though she's had her suspicions, it all makes sense now.

When she came home from giving extra classes at school her father was already home, which wasn't the case on most days. He was sitting in the lounge watching TV. Even though her relationship with her father is not good she asked him where Zethu was. He told her she was taking a nap. She had finished writing her homework and was now sleeping. Thando left him there and went to her room to change, making sure to lock the door behind her. Even though she was too old for him to molest her the way he did when she was little, her sixth sense always told her to lock her doors.

As soon as she got out of her work clothes she decided to go check on her sister. She knocked on the door a couple of times with no reply.

"Leave her alone." Her father screamed down the passage. Thando ignored him and went in. Zethu was laying on the bed, like she was sleeping. "See, I told you she's sleeping." Jerome said walking into the room. Again Thando ignored him and sat down on the bed but Zethu wouldnt move. She's a light sleeper,

always has been, but on that day, she slept like she had been drugged.

"Zethu, wake up, you have to help me cook." Thando called out but Zethu wouldnt budge.

"Thando, leave her alone." Her father insisted. Thando pulled the covers back trying to wake her sister up. Her heart sank to the bottom of her stomach seeing the pool of blood her sister was laying on. She took out her phone trying to call an ambulance but her father grabbed the phone out of her hand.

"Give me my phone back." Thando hissed at her father.

"Dont forget I'm still your father." He reminded her. "Who are you calling anyway?"

"An ambulance. Who would you like me to call for your daughter who is bleeding on her bed? Probably dying?" Thando screamed and grabbed the phone back from her father.

Her mother would be home soon, she was working the day shift this month. Thando figured the ambulance would arrive faster if her mother sent it so she decided to call her. Fifteen minutes later Zethu was strapped into a gurney and was being wheeled out of the house. When they got to the hospital doctors had to rush her to the operating room just so they can try to stop the bleeding.

They stopped the bleeding alright, but with it they stopped Zethu's chances of ever having kids. Her uterus had to be taken out because of the severe infection she had. The abortion pills she had been fed had ruptured more than the fetus that was growing in her womb. Thando added one plus one and came to her conclusion. Even though she'd tried to protect her sister from the same pain she'd gone through, it wasn't enough. And for two months she'd beaten herself up over it. She'd blamed herself and cried herself to sleep every night. Her now size 32 - 34 frame proof of her constant stressing.

"Thando. I'm not going crazy, I know what happened. But I don't understand why he is here. We killed him." Zethu reiterates. The door opens again and Thulani walks in with another officer. He smiles at Zethu then comes around to stand next to Thando.

"LaNkosi, welcome back to the land of the living. How are you?" Zethu smiles back at him and wonders if he knows what they did.

"Thanks." She answers. Thulani looks at Thando with a spark in his eyes.

"So, what's going on?" He asks her. Thando looks at her sister and gives her a reassuring pat on the hand. The door opens again and Thulsile and Jerome walk in. Jerome stops dead in his tracks when he sees the cops in his daughter's room.

"What's going on?" Thulsile asks. Thulani looks at Thando also waiting for an explanation. She stands up and looks at her mother.

"I am opening a case of rape." She announces. Thulani and the other officer take out their notepads and start scribbling down.

"What are you talking about?" Thulsile asks.

"I am opening a rape case." She repeats.

"Against who?"

"Against, Jerome Simon Nkosi." The room goes silent except for the beeping sounds of the heart monitor. Thulani looks at the woman he has had a crush on for a long time now wondering if he heard right. Jerome stands there like a pillar of salt, not sure what to do.

"Thando, stop this?" Her mother says

"I'm not stopping anything ma, your husband has got away with this too many times." She turns to Thulani who has a pitiful look in his eyes. That's one of the things Thando fears more than anything, the pity in people's eyes. But right now, that fear needs to take a backseat. "My father raped me from the time I was ten up until I was seventeen."

"THANDO!" Her mum screams at her but she continues narrating everything to Thulani. His pity has now been replaced with anger.



"And I know for a fact he also raped Zethu." She adds turning to her mother. "Zethu wasn't sleeping around ma, she didn't have an abortion because she was afraid of being pregnant, your husband gave her abortion pills, I know because he has stuffed me with them a couple of times. He is responsible for Zethu being here and I will prove it." Thulsile sinks to the floor as Jerome tries to run off but the officer is too fast. He tackles him and he falls to the ground. The officer gets on top of him and cuffs him.

"YOU UNGRATEFUL STUPID CHILD." He screams at Thando as the officer lifts him up from the floor. "I AM YOUR FATHER. YOU WILL REGRET THIS. I PROMISE YOU." Thulani and the other officer drag him out while reading him his rights. Their mother gets off the floor and follows behind the officers dragging her husband. Zethu turns to her sister looking for some sort of explanation.

"What just happened?" Thando sits back down on the bed and smiles at her sister. This time her smile reaches all the way to her soul and it shows in her eyes.

"Justice. For every single time he has hurt you, hurt us. He is going to pay." She tells her but Zethu is still confused. Her mind is slow in processing everything, she's still not sure what to make of everything.

"So he didn't die? We didnt bury him, you didnt punch Mfankhona in the face and pointed a gun at him?" Thando's brows furrow in confusion.

"It was probably just a bad dream. You've been here for almost two months now, for a while there I thought I'd lose you."

Zethu looks at her sister's shallow glimmering eyes and wonders if everything she thought she knew was a lie. Was it really a dream? But how can a dream be that long, and that vivid?

**THANDO**

**The sounds of Sfiso Ncwane's Ngpholise have been blasting from her mini speaker since she woke up at 5AM. She's been laying in her bed trying to master enough strength to start this day. Its Saturday and she has to fetch Zethu from the hospital. She moved out of home a week after Zethu was admitted in hospital. Mainly because she couldnt stand looking at her father knowing what he'd done. And him sitting there and acting like a concerned father was not sitting right with her.**

The one thing that had pushed her over the edge was when the doctor told them they had to perform a hysterectomy on Zethu because the infection in her uterus was too severe. And as she suspected, it wasnt the first time her father had shoved abortion pills down her throat, her womb wasnt cleaned the last time and that just escalated everything. Thando's gate for her father at that moment became so severe she knee she couldnt keep quiet about all that had been happening.

The night Zethu was admitted, Thando had come back home and cleaned her sister's room. Instead of taking the sheets and

throwing them in the washer she chose to keep them hidden away. When the doctor told them about Zethu's prognosis she asked the doctor to do a DNA test on the bloody sheets and she gave him her father's toothbrush. When the tests came back a week later as a match, her decision was made. It was time for Jerome to face the consequences of his actions. All she had to do was wait and pray that Zethu wakes up. That's all she could do.

She gets off the bed when she hears a banging sound on her door. This little two bedroom backroom she'd found was her perfect escape. It wasn't too big and it was in a safe place. She walks to the front door and the closer she gets the louder the banging gets. Her lounge area has just one double couch, a small ottoman serving as a coffee table and a tiny TV stand with a 32 inch TV on it. She sits on the couch and listens as her mother continues banging on the door.

"Thando, ngyati ukhona. Vula lomnyango. (I know you're here. Open the door.)" She shouts. Thando can hear the frustration mixed with anger seeping through the wooden door. Good thing there's a burglar door on the other side otherwise her mother would have broken into the house already.

"Awutsi ngzame. (Let me try.)" A Male voice burrows through the door making Thando sit up and look at the closed door. The

banging begins again, this time its louder and more violent. "Noluthando, I'm going to count to ten. If you dont open this door I'm breaking it down." Her uncle announces before starting counting. Thando counts with him in her head, she's certain she's not about to open the door.

Her phone starts vibrating in her hand. She stands up and quickly tiptoes back to her bedroom before bringing the mobile onto her ear.

"Hello." She whispers.

"Thando. Why are you whispering?" She looks at the phone and it's a private number, but the voice is Phepsile's. She puts the phone back in her ear.

"Its nothing. How are you?" Phepsile sighs, not fully buying her sister's story. But they havent seen each other in three years so maybe she doesn't know her sister the way she used to.

"I'm fine. I heard dad was arrested." It sounds more like a statement than a question but Thando answers her anyway.

"Yes. A couple of days ago. He will be appearing for his bail hearing on Monday." Phepsile heaves out another sigh, she's not really upset about her fathers arrest, she's glad the rumors are true, but she needs her sister to tell her the full story.

"Why was he arrested? What did he do?"

"He raped me. And he raped Zethu. I tried calling you a couple

of months back but your phones were either off or you blocked me I dont know." Thando tells her while listening to the relentless banging on her door.

"What happened?"

"He fed Zethu abortion pills. She almost died from the bleeding. I found her in her bed laying on a pool of her own blood. She was in a coma for the past two months. She woke up a couple of days ago." Phepsile closes her eyes and allows the tears she was holding in to run free on her face.

She hasn't been home since she left to go to varsity three years ago. No matter how many times her mother asked her and Ndumi to come home they refused. They'd blocked any and everything that would connect them to Jerome, including their sisters. For the first time in a year she regretted it. But her conscience keeps telling her she did what she had to do to protect herself. That's the only voice that's carried her through all the mess she's been through.

"I'm sorry I wasn't there for her. How is she?"

"She will be Okay, but she will never have kids. Her womb was removed because of an infection." Thando hears her sister's sobs from the other side of the phone. A part of her feels sad for her but the other part is angry at her. She left and never looked back. Her and Ndumi got the better end of the deal.

Her, she is the big sister who took it upon herself to protect her sisters. She could recall countless nights when she'd bundle her sister's together in her room just so her father wouldnt get to them. She'd make sure the door was locked and no matter how many times he told them to sleep in their own beds, Thando would insist on them sleeping together. But no matter how hard she tried to keep them safe, she failed, and Jerome got to them, and that's a pain and guilt she carries with her around like a second skin.

"I'm coming home. I'll be there in a few hours." Phepsile announces. Thando takes the phone off of her ear and looks at it as if she can see her sister, and wondering if she heard right. Phepsile is coming home? Really?

"You don't have to do that. Don't put your life on hold for us. We'll be fine." Thando answers, unknowingly shoving the dose of guilt deeper into her sister's heart.

"No. I'm coming. I'll tell Ndumi too. We have to be there." She insists.

"Fine. But I've moved out of home. I'm staying in one of Babe Ngcobo's back rooms."

"Okay. I'll see you soon." She hangs up the phone and forgets about her sisters coming home. She's heard that line too many times and she's quietly watched the gate waiting for her sisters to come home but they never did, so why should this time be

any different.

She goes back to the lounge and the knocking has subsided. She peeks through the window and sees her mother, her uncles Mfankhona and Daniel and her aunts Nomthandazo and Dumsile sitting on the stoep outside.

"YeLaNhleko, imali ye bail itabakhona yin ngalomsumbuluko? (Will bail money be available for Monday?)" She hears Mfankhona asking her mother. It takes a while for her mother to respond.

"Itawbakhona. (It will be available.)" She tells him. A part of Thando's heart breaks at her mother's answer, she was hoping she'd be supportive, but it's obvious that's not going to happen. It's clear she is on his side. But then again what was she expecting, for a nurse, her mother always has a hard time believing any 'slander' directed towards the people she holds in high regard. She couldn't protect a couple of girls from the church who'd accused the pastor of rape

Advertisement

so why should this be any different.

Thando goes to the ring kitchen and plugs the kettle to make herself a cup of tea. Someone outside hears the kettle boiling



and the banging starts again.

"Yewena Thando, ngeke uhlale lapho ingunaphakade. Ekugcineni utawphuma. (You won't stay in there forever. Eventually you'll come out.)" She hears her mother shouting. She tries her best to ignore them. Just then a police siren is heard outside. The banging stops when the police greet them. Thando rushes to the window and watches as Thulani and a couple of other police officers escort her family out of the yard. She watches him as he walks back and knocks on her door. She takes a deep breath before opening the door allowing him in. Still wondering how he knew to come here.

"Are you Okay?" She takes a seat on her couch and sips her tea. "I'm okay. I just need to fetch Zethu from the hospital." He sits down next to her and holds her one free hand.

"I hear all that but how are you feeling?" She looks in his eyes and the pity she saw a couple days ago is not there anymore. Right at this moment she sees the adoration he's always had for her. Even though he has made his feelings for her clear from the get go, he has allowed their friendship to happen without trying to get more out of her.

"I'll be okay." She tells him.

"Thando, I don't know what you've been through, but I know that this journey you've started on, it will be long and hard. But one thing I can do is promise you that I'll be with you every step

of it. I'll do my best to make sure you get the justice you deserve. You and Zethu deserve justice and I'll do whatever it takes to make sure you get it." As grateful as she is of his dedication, a part of her doesn't want him to go to extremes just for her. Everyone knows the justice system in this country is as weak as a wet tissue.

Ever since she's laid charges against her father she's also had to come to terms with the fact that by Monday the man would walk free. There is a possibility everything she's gone through would be all in vain. All she wants is to see her father pay for his crimes. But she's also not holding her breath.

"Thank you."

"Go take a bath, I'll take you to the hospital." He tells her. She nods her head and gets up. She goes to the bathroom and takes a quick cold bath before getting dressed. Finding clothes to wear has been difficult lately, her pants are loose and even her dresses have become oversized. She takes a black printed summer dress and puts it on, it's loose too, but not too loose that a belt can't fix it. She puts her sneakers on then grabs her bag and walks out of the bedroom. She finds Thulani laying back on the couch with his eyes closed like he is sleeping.

"Hey, I'm ready to go." He opens his eyes and rubs them with

his fingers and stands up. "You look tired. Maybe you should sleep. I'll take a taxi." He smiles and opens the door.

"I'm fine. Let's go." He takes the key out of the door and locks. They get into the police van and drive to the hospital. When they get to the ward Zethu is in they find her surrounded by the family. She's sitting on the bed already dressed to go.

"Thulani, wasita wafika. Zethu has something to tell you. (Good thing you're here.)" Nomthandazo says. She's standing next to Zethu and from the looks of it, Zethu has been crying. "Khuluma Zethu. (Speak.)" She continues, nudging her on the shoulder. Zethu looks at her sister with tears running down her face. Thando sees the plea in her sisters eyes and she takes a couple of steps towards her but Mfankhona and Dumsile block her way.

"Zethu, asambe. (Let's go.)" She says with her hand outstretched. Zethu try's to stand up but Nomthandazo pushes her down on the bed.

"Akayinzawo angakakhulumi liciniso lona. (She's not going anywhere without telling the truth.)" Dumsile tells them. Thando looks around the room and sees that her mother and Daniel are not here.

"Aunty, nawe babelomncane, ngyacela, angfuni kulahlekelwa ngulelcetu lenhlonipho lengsenalo for nine. Ngcela nisuke

endleleni yami. (Uncle, please, I don't want to lose the little respect I have for you. Please move out of my way.)" Thando says, surprising herself on how calm she is, even though deep down she is boiling with anger.

"Angnandzaba nekuhlonishwa nguwe mine. Kepha intfo leningeke niyente kubophisa bhuti wam ngendzaba yemanga. (I don't care about your respect. What you will not do is have my brother arrested because of lies.)" Mfankhona tells her, wagging his finger at her.

"Babe Nkosi, ngcela usuke endleleni ngaphandle nangabe ufuna kujoiner Bhuti wakho. (Please move out of the way, unless you want to join your brother.)" Thulani tells him with his one hand moving from his pocket to his gun. Mfankhona's gaze follows the movement of the hand and he sighs and gets out of the way. Nomthandazo takes over the space he was standing in.

"Wami Bhuti akasuye umdlwenguli. Leloke liciniso lengitalimela futsi ngilfele. (My brother is not a rapist. That is a fact I'm willing to stand and die for.)" She says crossing her arms on her chest. Thulani walks up to them and pushes between them, making Nomthandazo fall flat on her butt. She starts screaming and shouting insults at Thulani. He ignores her and grabs Zethu's small bag with one hand and holds her hand with the other and pulls her towards Thando. The sisters embrace with

Zethu sobbing in her sister's chest.

Security and the doctor come rushing into the room when the commotion becomes too loud.

"What's going on here?" The doctor questions looking from each of them.

"Do you have the discharge papers?" Thulani asks the doctor. He nods his head and they follow him out of the ward with the three siblings shouting insults. The doctor turns back to them.

"Can you please stop. This is a hospital, you cannot be shouting like this, you're disturbing patients." He yells at them.

"Not until those liars tell the truth. Our brother is innocent." The doctor signals to the security to get them out. They keep screaming as the security drags them out of the hospital.

After signing all the necessary paperwork, Thulani drives the girls back to Thando's place.

"You moved?" Zethu asks seeing that they are not going home.

"Yep. Now you wont have anything to worry about." Thando tells her. Zethu smiles and rests her head on her sister's chest.

"They wanted me to change my statement. They said if I dont they will make sure i suffer for the rest of my life. Why did you decide to speak?" Thando sighs and kisses the top of her sisters head.

"I'll tell you all about it later. For now just focus on getting

better. We will get through this. You and me, we will get through this."

"So I really was dreaming about Phepsile and Ndumi being here?" Thando chuckles and hugs her sister tighter.

"Maybe one of these days you'll tell me about this dream of yours. It sounds interesting."

**PHEPSILE**

**She hasnt been home in over three years, a lot has changed. Some roads have been tarred and some houses have been extended, plastered and painted. Its different from how she left it. But its home. It doesn't feel like it but this is supposed to be home. The closer they get the harder her heart beats.**

"Turn left." Ndumi tells her boyfriend Bokang. Phepsile has been quietly listening to music the whole way from Joburg. Bokang insisted on bringing them here. Ndumi wasnt so keen on coming back, Phepsile had to guilt trip her into coming back. But now that they are close she's slowly wondering if she didnt make a mistake.

They pull up to Babe Ngcobo's place. The place looks beautiful, the last time she was here there were just a few one rooms and a couple of shacks. She gets out of the car and looks around. The car itself is already drawing attention to them, and she doesnt like it one bit. She takes out her phone and calls Thando. The phone rings and goes straight to voicemail. She tries again

and Thando picks up.

"Hello."

"Hey, it's me. We are outside." She hears her sister breathing on the other end of the line but saying nothing. "Thando?"

"I'm here. You said you're outside?"

"Yes."

"Outside where?" Thandi asks surprised.

"Outside Babe Ngcobo's place."

"Oh okay. I'm coming." She hangs up the phone and waits a few minutes before she sees her sister walking out of one of the new flats. She's wearing some leggings and an oversized tshirt with just an oversized cardigan. She's different to what she remembers but the look in her eyes is one of shock and surprise. She walks to her and stands in front of her with her arms crossed on her chest.

"Hi."

"Hey." An awkward silence falls over them as Ndumi and Bokang get out of the car. Ndumi comes around and stands next to Phepsile.

"Hi sis." She says and leans on the car.

"Hi." It seems no one knows where to go from here. Its awkward. Really awkward. Bokang clears his throat drawing Thando's attention away from her sisters.



"Hi. I am Bokang. Ndumi's boyfriend." He says with a smile plastered on his face and his hand outstretched. Thando shakes his hand and forces a smile on her face.

"Nice to meet you. Please come in." She turns around and walks back to her flat with her guests behind her.

They get in and squash themselves on the small couch.

"Can I get you anything to drink?"

"I'm fine." Ndumi says.

"Me too." Phepsile adds.

"Just water please." Bokang says. Thando goes to the kitchen and comes back with a glass of water on a saucer and hands it to him. She drags a chair from the kitchen and sits down. They sit there for a hot minute without saying a word to each other.

"Where is Zethu?" Phepsile asks breaking the awkward silence.

"She's sleeping. Her meds knocked her out."

"So what really happened?" Ndumi questions.

"She was raped, she fell pregnant, he gave her abortion pills and then watched TV while she bled half to death in her room. She had an infection so they had to remove her uterus and she was in a coma for two months."

"And you didn't think to tell us." Ndumi adds. Thando chuckles and stares at her sister, anger seeping through her pores. But she tries to keep her emotions in check. Especially in front of a

stranger.

"You blocked me." She reminds her.

"I didnt. I just changed my number." Ndumi defends herself.

"Well, I dont have your new number. You never bothered to tell me."

"Can we forget about the numbers for a second, kwentekalani nge case ya papa? (What's going on with dads case?)" Phepsile chimes in trying to ease the tension that has filled the room.

Thando sighs and turns to her.

"He has a bail hearing on Monday."

"How sure are you the case will stick? You know who he is and how the community sees him?" Ndumi asks.

"I'm not the judge the least I can do is tell the truth."

"It took you long enough." Ndumi mumbles to herself but clear enough for everyone to hear. Thando chuckles and stands up.

"I'm going to check on Zethu." She says and disappears into the bedroom.

"Did you have to say that?" Phepsile hisses at her sister.

"Mxm."

"Girls, I think I should get going. I still have a long drive ahead of me." Bokang says standing up. Ndumi stands up with him and they walk to the door.

"Come get your bags. Ucabanga kutsi utawphatselwa ngubani? (Who do you think will bring them for you?)" Ndumi says and

follows Bokang out. Phepsile gets up and follows the couple. She gets her bags and walks back into the house.

"You can put your bags in the other bedroom." Thando tells her and walks to the kitchen. She walks to the bedroom and puts her bags in then walks to the other bedroom. She sees Zethu sleeping soundly on the bed. She takes a deep breath before walking to the bed. She kneels on the floor and rests her arms on the bed, staring at Zethu. She wipes away a tear and runs her hand on Zethu's back.

"Hey. I'm sorry I wasn't here for you. I know I should have come home, I'm sorry. I'm really sorry sis wam. (My sister.) I hope one day utongcolela. (You will forgive me.)" Zethu stirs and slowly opens her eyes. A smile forms on her face when she sees Phepsile.

"I'm not dreaming again am I? You're really here?" Phepsile blinks a couple of times trying to hold back her tears.

"I'm here Thuthu. I'm here nana." Zethu sits up and the two embrace each other with Phepsile allowing her tears to run free. They stay in their embrace for a while before they pull apart.

"I'm the one who should be crying." Zethu says wiping away her sister's tears.

"How are you?" She shrugs her shoulders and lays back on the bed.

"I'm okay. I'll be better once all this is over."

"Are you ready though? You know cases like these can be draining?" A faint smile forms on Zethu's lips.

"Sometimes I wish Thando hadn't found me. Things would have been a whole lot easier for everyone."

"And then he would have gotten away with it? That's not right?"

"He might get away with it. I mean we've all been quiet for all these years because we all know the justice system has never been kind to people like us. And it doesn't help that mum thinks we made all this up. Bo Aunty nabo babelomncane (uncles) are deadset on proving us as liars." Phepsile stares at her sister surprised at how calm she is. She thought she'd find her close to a mental breakdown, but she's calm.

"Why are you so calm about this?"

"Because no matter how this turns out, my truth will remain that, my truth

Advertisement

no matter who believes me or doesn't I have at least one person in my corner who will do anything to make sure I'm okay."

"And who is that?"

"Thando." Phepsile sighs and sits back on the bed. The girls quickly jump off the bed when they hear voices coming from the kitchen slowly rising. The rush to the kitchen to find Thando and Ndumi staring at each other, both throwing daggers.

"What's going on?" Phepsile asks.

"Ask your sister." Ndumi answers and crosses her arms on her chest not moving her eyes from her sister.

"Ndumi." Zethu whispers. Ndumi quickly turns to her sister and gives her a hug.

"Hey. How are you feeling?" She asks as soon as they break the hug.

"I'm fine. You came?" Zethu answers and squeezes her sister's arms to make sure she isn't dreaming.

"Of course. I'm sorry I wasn't here for you. I didn't know."

Thando chuckles and turns back to the stove.

"It's okay. You're here now. That's all that matters." Zethu assures her.

"You do know you don't have to go through with this right? We can go to Joburg and I'll find you a school there and you'll never have to come back here again." Ndumi tells Zethu.

"Of course. That's your solution for everything. Run." Thando says turning back to her sister.

"I think she's been through enough. Do you know the trauma a

court case will do to her? She'll have to relieve the whole thing over and over again. That's not right."

"How would you know what she's been through. You haven't been here for five years. Stop pretending like you care now."

Thando shouts back.

"If you had spoken up sooner we wouldn't be here right now. He wouldn't have had a chance to get to any of us. And now you want to play super hero with Zethu's life when you had a chance to prevent all of this. Dont bore me." Ndumi argues.

"So now it's my fault he did what he did?" Thando asks, a lump forming in her throat.

"If the shoe fits, wear it sisi. You had a chance to end this. It should have ended with you, the first time he did it to you should have been the last time. But you kept your mouth shut and gave him leeway to get to us. You might not have told him what to do but you paved the way."

"Fine Nondumiso, it's fine. Ngente Jesu, ngente ngfele tono labantfu, kulungile. (Make me Jesus and make me pay for someone's sins. Its fine.) But remember this, when you point your finger at me, three fingers are pointing right back at you." Thando says and walks out of the kitchen and Zethu follows her.

"Was that necessary?" Phepsile asks looking at Ndumi who

seems unbothered by what just happened.

"It needed to be said." Ndumi argues.

"No it didn't. Whether you want to believe it or not, we are all victims here. We've all been hurt by our father, and he is the only one who should bear the shame for this, not Thando."

Phepsile tells her. "And she is right, we also failed Zethu. I could also blame you for not speaking up sooner and Zethu can blame me too, but that's not going to solve anything. Right now we should be United and making sure that man pays for everything he has done to us. We need each other now more than ever. We cant allow this to push us farther apart than it already has. I get that you're angry, but you're taking your anger out on the wrong person."

Ndumi sits down at the kitchen table as Phepsile walks out on her. She looks at her shaking hands as memories flood back into her mind. Memories she though she'd forgotten, memories she had tried to push to the back of her mind. She sits there and allows her tears, for the first time in five years, to fall.

## NONDUMISO

**It's been a tense weekend. When Phepsile forced her to come here she didnt think things would go this way. Five years of not being home and she wishes she'd go back to Joburg. Go back to her job and her apartment where she doenst have to deal with any of the mess that's happening here. Being here has forced her to dig up memories she thought she'd long forgotten. The nightmares are also not helping. She's gone back to sleeping an hour or two a night and she hates it.**

Today she decided to go see her mother. Its almost dark outside and to avoid any interactions with Thando she took the thirty minutes walk to her childhood home constantly having to greet people along the way who were just as shocked to see her. She walked past her father's shop. Today it closed early. She figured him being in jail contributed to it.

She gets home and stands by the gate just watching the house. The lights are on and their mothers Yaris is parked outside next to her father's bakkie. After a few minutes of contemplation she opens the gate and walks in. The front door is slightly opened. She knocks once and gets in. Her mother turns from the TV and almost has a heart attack. She stands up with her



mouth on the floor.

"Nondumiso?" She asks not believing her eyes. She's begged her a few times to come home but she wouldn't. She didn't even attend her graduation. She only found out about it when people showed her pictures on social media. She was heartbroken. Not even Thando had invited her to hers, so she had hope that Ndumi would invite her but she didn't. And now she is here, standing in front of her like nothing happened.

"Sawubona ma." Thulsile takes a few steps closer to her daughter.

"Nondumiso?" She asks again before pulling her into a bone crushing hug. Ndumi stands there emotionless with her hands stuck in her sweater pockets. "I'm so happy you're home. Where are your bags?" She continues as soon as she pulls out of the hug and looks around.

"I'm not staying." Ndumi tells her. Shock washes over Thulsile's face.

"What do you mean you're not staying? Your father needs our support tomorrow." She pleads. Ndumi takes a step back and walks around her mother to sit down on the couch. Thulsile sits next to her and holds her hands.

"Do you actually believe he is innocent?"

"Of course he is. He is your father. He would never do something as despicable as that. He is a good man. You know that. He would never do that." Thulsile says.

"Why?"

"What do you mean why?"

"Why do you think he wouldnt do it? He is a man isn't he? Why is it so far fetched to you that he would do what Thando is accusing him off?" Thulsile let's go of Ndumi's hands.

"Nondumiso, I know that man. I've been married to him for almost thirty years now. If he was a rapist I would have known. You know how much the man loved you and your sisters. He would never do anything to hurt you." Ndumi sighs and runs her hands over her face. For the first time since she found out her father molested Thando before moving to her, she understands why Thando didn't speak up. Even with all the evidence in front of her, Thulsile is still refusing to believe her, so why would she have believed a twelve year old child?

"Ma, you dont know your husband as much as you think you do. Thando is not lying. He did rape her and he did rape Zethu." Her mother stands up and moves away from her.

"She got to you didnt she? She found a way to get to you the same she got to Zethu. Oh dear Lord. I hope she didn't get to Phepsile too." She sits down on the opposite couch with her mind going haywire. "Why would she do this? What is she

hoping to gain from tarnishing a good man's name?" She asks to no one in particular.

"Are you for real right now?" Ndumi questions. "Why are you refusing to see the truth that's right in front of your eyes?"

"Nondumiso?"

"Is it not enough that he has destroyed his children one after the other. Zethu doesn't have a womb right now because of your husband. She'll never carry children of her own and all you care about is that man. Tell me something, when last did you call Zethu to find out how she is holding up after she came close to death? Do you even give a fuck about her or us for that matter? You've never bothered to ask yourself why Phepsile and I left home and never came back? You have your head so far up that man's ass you can't even see how broken your children are. I mean....." Before she can say anything else, Thulsile sends a slap across Ndumi's cheek sending shivers down her spine.

"THULSILE?" Ndumi and her mother turn to the door to find her brother Elias and her sister Nomcebo standing by the door, shock written all over their faces. "What in the hell is going on here?"

"Bhuti. You're here?" Elias and Nomcebo walk in and put their bags down on the floor.

"Thulsile, what's going on? Why are you hitting the child?" Elias ask while Nomcebo hugs Ndumi.

"Ask her what she said? She's joined Thando and Zethu in believing these lies against their father. And it seems Joburg has turned her into a disrespectful brat. They are trying so hard to tarnish Jerome's name, for what?" Ndumi chuckles and wipes her tears away.

"And this is exactly why we never come home. And I pray to God that your husband rots in jail." Ndumi announces before walking out of the house with her aunt and uncle calling out her name. The walk back to Thando's place seems long, but she's grateful for the darkness because no one can see the tears running down her face.

For the longest time she's blamed Thando for not speaking out. She's always told herself Thando should have done more to protect them. She should have shouted it from the rooftop the first time it happened. But she kept quiet allowing their father to move on to each of them, and now it makes sense why. If their own mother can turn a blind eye to their pain, and believe her husband is innocent, then Thando never stood a chance.

When she gets to Babe Ngcobo's place she finds Thulani's car parked outside. She wipes her tears and tries her best to put on

a brave face but her red puffy eyes are a dead giveaway. She walks in and Thando and Thulani in the lounge watching the news.

"Evening." She says and walks to the kitchen. She finds a plate of food covered on the table. She sits down and eats.

"You went to see her, didnt you." She looks up and finds Thando standing next to the table.

"I dont want to talk about it." Ndumi answers. Thando turns to walk back to the lounge. "I'm sorry." She stops and looks back at het sister.

"What?"

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have taken my anger out on you."

"Its fine Nondumiso."

"No its not. I should have known better. And if we are going to dish around blame then I deserve my own portion. I'm really sorry." Thando pulls out a chair and sits down.

"What did she say to you?"

"She said we are trying to tarnish papa's name."

"Of course she did."

"What's going to happen if he gets bail?" Ndumi asks.

"I dont know. Right now we just need to get over the first hurdle and then figure out what to do after that."

They hear a knock on the door. Thando gets up and opens the door. Elias and Nomcebo walk in.

"Malume, Ncane."

"Yebo Noluthando." Elias says before looking at Thulani. He gets the message and stands up.

"I should get going. Thando I'll pick you guys up in the morning." Thando nods her head and watches him walk out. Elias and Nomcebo sit on the couch. Thando gets a chair from the kitchen and sits down with Ndumi next to her.

"Anisahlali ekhaya? (You're not staying at home?)" Elias asks them.

"Cha malume. Ngiphume after kulala kwa Zethu esbhedlela. (I moved out after Zethu was admitted.)" Thando tells them.

"Ngyeva. Ngjtjele kesisilcalalolvulele uyihlo, makwakho utsi niyamphoca Jerome, utsi nenta konkhe loku ngoba nizama kufihla kukhulelwa kwa Zethu. (I understand. Now tell me, the case against your father, your mother says you're making it up, she says you're doing all this to hide Zethu's pregnancy.)"

"Malume, Zethu una 18, mdzala kabi kutsi singafihla kutsi uyajola. (Zethu is 18 years old. She's too old for us to hide that she is dating.)" Thando answers.

"Futsi nje, loku lekakwentile babe, bekangacali nga Zethu. Sonkhe soy four, bekatitika ngatsi. (And, what dad did with Zethu wasn't the first time. He has done it to all of us.)" Ndumi adds.

"What do you mean he has done it to all of you?" Nomcebo asks, her voice laced with shock and anger.

"Just that. It doesn't end there Ncane. At some point we've all carried his children. And he made sure to feed us abortion pills or take us to clinics or hospitals far away from here to get the abortion. Why do you think Phepsile and I left and never looked back. That house holds nothing but horrible memories for us." Ndumi tells them. When she is done talking it's like half the weight she's been carrying around has been lifted off her shoulders.

"I can't believe this. You kids have been carrying around all this for so long. Why didn't you tell anyone?" Nomcebo questions. Thando shrugs her shoulders.

"No one would have believed us." Nomcebo gets off the couch and takes a seat on the ottoman and takes both their hands into hers.

"I would have believed you. We would have believed you. Thando there was no need for you to go through all this alone." She tells them.

"Sisi there is no need to relive the past. Right now we need to make sure Jerome doesn't get bail tomorrow." Elias says.

"He works with the chief, chances are he will be out before the sun sets." Thando tells him.

"Not if I can help it. I need to find out who is the judge that will

be presiding over the case. If its who I think it is, I'm sure I can talk to him to keep him locked up."

"Where is Zethu and Phepsile?" Nomcebo asks.

"They are in the bedroom. They were watching a movie on the laptop burning sure they are sleeping now. Zethu's meds make her drowsy."

"Okay. I am going to get our bags from the house. I am not sleeping in that house. Thulsile got us here claiming everything was just a misunderstanding. For her sake I hope she didnt know shit about this. Because if she did, she'll join that man behind bars." Elias says and walks out.

"Can I make you some food?" Thando asks Nomcebo, wiping her tears away.

"No baby dont worry about it. You need to get some rest and prepare for tomorrow."

"Okay. The four of us will share the one room. I dont know who between you will use the other one." Nomcebo throws her head back laughing.

"Me of course. One of you can sleep with me, Elias can use the couch."

The girls laugh imagining Elias, as tall as he is sleeping in the small couch. But most of all, they are just happy to have someone in their corner. Now to prepare for tomorrow.



**The court is packed. More than anyone thought it would be. Thando and her sisters are sitting on one side with Elias, Nomcebo and Thulani next to them. Her mother, Nomthandazo, Dumsile, Daniel and Mfankhona are on the other side with other Nkosi family members. Its tense, the media is here and some members of the public. There are more people sitting on the other side than those on the sister's side. Its daunting for Thando, her heart is beating out of control.**

There are more people outside. Thando's students are picketing with placards, women from the church are on the other side also picketing, in support of Thulsile and her husband. The community is divided and its clear as daylight.

Jerome walks in wearing a suit and tie. He looks decent and presentable. With cuffs on his wrists and shackles on his cuffs he slowly walks into the court. Whispers fill the court. He looks at his daughters and smiles at them before taking his seat. Zethu tightens her hold on Thando's hand. The prosecutor walks in with the defense lawyer behind him.

"Oh shit." Ndumi whispers drawing attention from her siblings.  
"What?" Phepsile asks.

"His lawyer, that's Mgazini Ntshangase."

"What's so special about him?" Phepsile asks.

"He is a criminal lawyer, he is ruthless. He's been known to make witnesses cry." She answers.

"And how do you know him?" Thando asks.

"Long story." Ndumi tells them as the judges arrival is announced. They stand up and watch the beautiful woman in her black robe takes a seat.

"Judge Nancy Mabena presiding in the case of Mr Jerome Dumezweni Nkosi's bail application. He has been charged with the rape of his two daughters, Noluthando Nkosi and Zethu Nkosi." The court clerk announces. The prosecutor stands up and introduces himself.

"Good morning My Lady. Samkeliso Khumalo for the prosecution." He says and sits back down. Jerome's lawyer stands up.

"Good day my lady. Mgazini Ntshangase for the defence." He says and sits down.

"May the prosecution state their case." The judge says. Samkeliso stands up and looks at her.

"My lady the prosecution opposes bail on the grounds that the defendant will intimidate the victims should he be let out. Also

he is a flight risk. His shop account has over 400 thousand in it and his personal bank account also has unlimited funds. He works with people who are heavily connected and it will be easy for him to run. With that said, we would like for Mr Nkosi to stay behind bars while awaiting trial. Thank you my lady." He takes his seat and the judge looks at Mgazini. He stands up and fixes his robe before confidently looking up at the judge.

"My Lady. Besides the fact that this whole thing is a sham and a mockery, my client is an upstanding member of the community. He runs a shop that services the communities day to day needs. He works with the chief as an advisor, he is part of the schools governing body and he employs two people who rely on him to put food on their table. Just because he has the funds to run doesn't mean he will. He is determined to prove his innocence no matter what, and for him to do that he needs to be out there. So we request bail My Lady. Thank you." He takes his seat and the judge looks at the documents in front of her.

"Well, I hear both your arguments and they are compelling. Bail is set at R1000. Court adjourned." The judge says and stands up to leave while the other side of the courtroom cheers.

"I thought you said you'd make sure he doesn't get bail."  
Nomcebo asks Elias as they stand up to leave.

"Wrong judge." Elias answers and leads the girls out. They get through the crowds of people and reporters and they get into Thulani and Elias' cars with questions being thrown at them. They drive off with Elias, Nomcebo, Phepsile and Nondumiso in the front, Thando, Zethu and Thulani at the back.

"I cant believe he got bail." Phepsile mutters looking out the window. "A thousand rand even, for all the hell he has put us through, what's a 1000 rand?"

"Welcome to South Africa's justice system." Ndumi answers.

"This was just a bail hearing. The trial hasn't begun, only then will justice be served." Nomcebo tells them. Ndumi chuckles.

"Justice? Mgazini doesnt take on a case unless he knows he will win. And you saw how confident he was in there. This will be nothing more than a circus. He will rip Thando and Zethu to shreds."

"A little positivity would be nice." Phepsile snarled.

"I'm just being honest. Winning this will be like climbing mount Everest in a bikini and heels." Ndumi expressed before sticking her earphones in.

They drove back to Thando's place and went into the house. The others get in and there's a bit of disbelief among all of them. They sit in silence for about ten minutes before Thando stands up and looks around the room.

"I'm going to cook. Who is hungry?" She asks.

"No nana, sit down, your uncle will go buy food." Nomcebo tells her. She sits down again and joins the silence.

"Who wants to eat what?" Elias asks.

"Just get a bit of everything." Nomcebo answers.

"Okay then, Thulani

Advertisement

let's go." The two men stand up and leave.

"I'll go take a nap." Zethu announces and stands up.

"Not before you drink your medication. Take an apple or banana then take your meds." Thando orders. Zethu goes to the kitchen and comes back with a banana and a glass of water. She sits down and eats the banana.

"Is there a chance for us to win this?" Zethu asks while gulping down her pills.

"Of course there is. We will win this." Nomcebo assures her.

Ndumi looks at them and rolls her eyes.

"Okay then. I'm going to sleep." Zethu mumbles and leaves the room. As soon as she disappears into the bedroom Ndumi sits up.

"Not to be negative Nancy or anything, but how sure are you that you want to put her through the torture of a trial. Mgazini

is shark and he doesn't lose. Are you sure she can handle that?" She questions.

"A very pertinent question." Thulsile says announcing her presence.

"What are you doing here Thulsile?" Nomcebo asks her. She throws a piece of paper on the table. "Yin le? (What's this?)"

"Those, my sister, are lie detector test results. Jerome took those while in jail. He passed. Now who is lying?" She announces looking at her daughters. Nomcebo stands up and pins herself between her nieces and her sister.

"Why is it so hard for you to believe your children? What do they have to gain from doing all of this? Tell me sis wami. These are your children, why is it so hard to believe them? Their pain means that little to you?" Thulsile swallows and crosses her hands on her chest. "You know what, maybe I know where you're coming from. You hate yourself for failing to see the filth that was going on in your own house that now you think turning a blind eye to it will automatically make it go away. It won't, I can assure you of that. You have a monster in your house and the sooner you come to terms with it the better. Now, if you are not here to listen to your children, please leave. Go home to your rapist husband."

"Nomcebo!"

"Hamba Thulsile." Nomcebo ordered pointing to the door. Thulsile huffed and walked out. "I swear the day she vomits whatever muti Jerome fed her, I hope it's not too late."



In town, Elias and Thulani are driving around buying food. They drive out of town and park on the side of the road. Before long a black Mercedes pulls up across the road. A man gets out, crosses the road and gets in the backseat of the car.

"Gentlemen!" He says looking from one to the other.

"Nyoniyezwe!" Elias replies. Thulani nods his head and stays silent.

"Ngtjeleni ke madoda, nginbhadalela ini kanti. (Tell me gentlemen, why do I pay you.)" The man asks. The two men keep quiet. "Ngilalele. (I'm listening.)" He urges.

"Eish, sizamile Somahhashi, sizamile kepha sihlulekile. (We tried. We really tried but we failed.)" Elias answers.

"Sizamile ngempela, kepha besingeke sikhone kungena ngekhati endlini sibone kutsi kwentekalani. Natsi besitsi uphephile uma asekhaya. (We really tried, but we couldn't get

in the house and see what was going on. We also thought she was safe inside her home.)" Thulani says, echoing Elias's sentiments.

The man sits forward and rest his elbows on the front seat chairs. He looks from Thulani to Elias.

"You had one job gentlemen, just one. Watch over her and make sure she is safe. Wena Thulani, when you left Phongola and came here, you had strict instructions. How come none if you were able to see what was happening in that house?" He questions.

"We really didnt know. And no one had any idea what was happening. If we'd known you know we would have sorted all this out a long time ago." Thulani tells him.

"Yes." Elias agrees. "And we can still do something now. He is out on bail, it will be easy to get to him." The man laughs.

"A 1000 rand bail? That's a joke." He says.

"I tried to get a friend of mine who is a judge to not grant him bail, but he wasn't the one heading up the hearing." Elias tells him. The man takes out his phone and looks at it for a while before putting it back in his pocket.

"Don't worry yourselves gentlemen. Since nihlulekile kwenza lento ebenithunywe yona. Sengzozbambela mina mathupha.



Good day gentlemen. (Since you failed to do what you were sent to do, I'll do this one myself.)" He says and gets out of the car. He gets in his car and drives off.

"What do you think he is up to?" Thulani asks.

"I dont know. But whatever it is, Jerome will feel like he is in hell. And for once, I wish I could feel sorry for him. But he deserves everything that's coming his way." Elias replied then started the car and they drove back to Thando's place.

**At the Nkosi home, Jerome just came back home with his brothers Daniel and Mfankhona. His lawyer Mgazini follows them into the house. Nomthandazo and Dumsile are in the kitchen preparing refreshments when Thulsile pulls up after them. She sits in the car for a few minutes trying to digest her sister's words.**

It's been just ten minutes since she left Thando's place and Nomcebo's words keep ringing in her ear. What if he really is guilty? What if he really did what he is being accused of? All the what ifs keep ringing in her head. She takes out her phone and calls Dr Nduli. He picks up after the third ring.

"Nurse Nkosi. Is everything okay?" He asks. She swallows hearing his voice.

"Doctor, uhmm.... everything is fine. I have a couple of questions, do you have time?"

"Of course. What do you need to know?" She takes a deep breath trying to utter the words she didn't think she'd ever have to.

"When you did tests on Zethu, what exactly did you find? I know I didn't ask before but I really want to know." She tells him.

"Everything is in her file. Didn't you see it?"

"Not really. I was more worried about her waking up I didnt bother looking at the file." She answers.

"Okay. Well, like i said before. She's lucky her sister got to her in time. Besides the infection that she had there were signs of forced penetration inside and outside her private parts. We ended up doing a rape kit. The police have everything." She closes her eyes and sighs blinking away her tears.

"Thank you doctor."

"Are you sure you're okay Nurse Nkosi?"

"I'm fine doctor. Thank you for your time?" She hangs up and buries her head on the steering wheel.

She lifts her head up when she hears a knock on the window. She wipes her tears and rolls down the window.

"Are you okay Mrs Nkosi?" Mgazini asks through the window.

"I'm fine." Thulsile answers getting out of the car. She closes the door and looks at the lawyer, he seems competent enough but its his trust in his abilities that made her contact him. She's read enough about him to know he is very passionate about his job and he fights to win.

"Ntshangase, can I ask you something? Do you think my husband is guilty?"

"It doesn't matter what I think Mrs Nkosi, my job is to defend

your husband?"

"I know that. I just want to know if he is guilty?" Mgazini frowns and puts his hands inside his pockets.

"Where is all this coming from? I thought you contacted me because you believe your husband is innocent."

"I did. But I need to know I'm not making a mistake and protecting a man who hurt my children." She mutters.

"I understand. But that's why we have courts, only a judge can determine if he is guilty or not. My job is to convince the judge of your husband's innocence, that's what you pay me for. If he is guilty, it's not for me to pass judgement." He tells her.

"I understand."

"Anyways, let me get going. I have a lot of work to do. I'll update you about everything." He tells her before getting into his car and driving off.

She takes a few deep breaths before walking into the house. She finds the siblings chatting and laughing, celebrating their brother's release. She walks past them and goes to the bedroom. Jerome follows her. He finds her standing by the window looking outside and he wraps his arms around her. She jumps when she feels his arms wrap around her.

"LaMakhanya, kwentenjani? Watfuka tanya nje. (What's wrong? Why are you scared?)" He asks taking a step back from

her. She forces a smile onto her face and turns to look at her husband.

"Hhay, ngyacabanga nje. (I'm just thinking.)" She answers.

"Ucabangani? (What are you thinking about?)"

"Konkhe nje. Ngyacabanga nje kutsi kumosheke kuphi. Kumbe ngimi lenghlulekile kukhulisa labantfwana kungako benta lentfo lebayentako. (Everything. I'm just wondering where things went wrong. Maybe I failed to raise the kids right that's why they are doing what they are doing.)" He smiles and puts his hands on her shoulders and brings her in for a hug.

"Khululeka sthandwa sam, konkhe kutawlunga. Bantfwana batawabona emaphutsa abo babuye ekhaya. Ungatikhatsati kakhulu. (Relax my love. Everything will be okay. The kids will see their mistakes and they will come home. Dont worry too much.)" She nods her head and pulls back from him wondering how he can be so relaxed about this. A person who has been accused of a serious crime like rape would be doing their best to prove their innocence, but Jerome seems relaxed

Advertisement

it's like he knows something no one else knows.

"I hear you. Let me get ready for work. I'm working night shift today." She tells him.

"Okay, my brothers and I will go check on the shop. You know those boys probably didn't even order stock. I'll see you before you leave." He kisses her forehead and walks out of the bedroom.

Thulsile plops herself on the bed. When she hears the front door close and the sounds of her husband and his brothers slowly fading away she gets up and goes out of her bedroom. She hears Nomthandazo and Dumsile chatting in the lounge. She goes to Zethu's bedroom and gets in. Her bed has been stripped off of the sheets and covers, its sitting there with a stain of blood that Thando tried to clean up. She looks around the room that is now void of any life and wonders how Jerome got to the kids when she was right here. She sits on the bed looking at the bloody spot on the bed.

"She looks around the room one last time before getting off the bed and walking out. She goes to Phepsile's room and walks in. If it wasnt for Nomthandazo using it the past few days it would be dusty. She stands by the door and looks around trying to find a clue, a hint, anything at all to put her mind at ease but nothing. The door opens and Nomthandazo walks in. She's shocked to find Thulsile inside the bedroom she uses.

"Skoni. Kwentenjani? Ufunani lana? (Sister-in-law. What's going

on? What are you doing in here?)" Thulsile sighs.

"I was looking for my charger. I thought maybe you took it."

"Oh no. I didnt take it. Look in the lounge."

"Okay. Thanks." She walk out of the room leaving confused.

She gets ready for work and an hour later she pulls up to the hospital. Her first stop is checking Zethu's file. She takes her phone and takes pictures of all that is written there. When she is done she does her rounds.

"Nurse Nkosi, you have a patient in ward 13." Another nurse tells her while she is having tea in the cafeteria.

"I'm on my tea break, get another nurse to attend to them."  
She argues.

"I tried. He asked for you specifically." The nurse says and walks away. Thulsile gulps down her tea and walks to the ward. She gets in and finds a man sitting on an empty bed with his back to her and his head bowed. She walks around to stand in front of him.

"Bhuti, sawubona, ngingakusita ngan? (Hello. How can I help you?)" He lifts his head up and she takes a couple of steps back.

"You! What are you doing here?" He smiles and looks at her from head to toe.

"Still as beautiful as the last time I saw you." He tells her.

"What do you want?" She asks with her arms crossed over her beating heart.

"I want what's mine. I want my child." She nervously chuckles.

"You have a child? Congratulations." He shakes his head, gets off the bed and closes the gap between them. She tightens her crossed arms on her chest hoping he doesn't see the galloping of her heart.

"Lalela ke sisi. (Listen.) You took my child from me and now there is a case against your husband for raping my child. Now, I've stayed away, hoping somewhere somehow you'll come back to your senses and bring me my child. Instead you put her in the same house with a man who sees nothing wrong with little children. Since you failed to protect our child, I've made a decision." He commands. His voice is calm but his presence and his words send shivers down her spine.

"What do you mean? What decision have you made?" She stutters.

"You'll find out soon enough Thulsile. But do me one favour though, make sure that jerk ass you call a husband has his policies are up to date. You might need to cash them in sooner than you thought." He remarks before walking out. Thulsile slowly lets out the breath she's been holding in since she saw the face she didnt think she'd ever see again. She takes a seat



on the bed he was sitting on trying to calm her beating heart down.

It's been so long since she last saw him but she still remembers what he is capable of. And the fact that he knows about their child means he has had his eye on them for a while. She takes out her phone and calls Jerome. He doesn't pick up. She calls again and he doesn't pick up again. She decides to call his sister.

"Skoni, what's up?" Nomthandazo grumbled into the phone.

"Can you please give Jerome the phone."

"What?"

"Give Jerome the phone Nomthandazo. He is not picking up his phone. It's urgent."

"Maybe he doesn't want to talk to you." Nomthandazo argues.

"Nomthandazo, just hand him the phone."

"Fine." There's shuffling on the other end before Jerome's voice is heard.

"What's going on?" He asks.

"I need you to do me a favour." She begins. "Pack your bags and drive to Daniel's house, stay there until you have to come back for your trial."

"What? Why?"

"Please just do what I'm asking." She begs.

"Not until you tell me what's going on?" He shouted. Thulsile

closed her eyes and took a couple of deep breaths trying to think of a lie. As much as she fears for his life, she's not ready for him to die before he pays for his sins. Death will be too easy for him. If he is guilty then he needs to live long enough to face the shame of his actions.

"Listen to me. There are rumors that a mob is being put together. They might show up there tonight or early in the morning. Please just go before anything bad happens."

"Okay but this could be just a rumour." Jerome argues.

"Are you willing to risk it Jerome? Will you believe it when they have a tire around your neck and petrol poured all over you?"

"Okay okay. We will go. We will come pick you up."

"No. You go. Its you they are looking for. Just go and I'll try to make them see that you're innocent." She lies. He smiles, happy that his wife is on his corner.

"Okay ke Sthandwa sam. I'll go." She hangs up the phone and sighs. Hoping that she is not too late.

**'Father Rapes his daughters, granted R1000 Bail.'**

**The headline reads. Thando has been looking at it for a while now. She should have gone home by now but she's been stuck in class looking at the headline and browsing through social media, and for some reason their case is trending on twitter. People are calling for the death sentence to come back, others are asking why the first child kept quiet. Instead of focusing on those on her side she keeps reading and digesting the posts saying if she had spoken up sooner they wouldn't be here. It doesn't help that she's carried that guilt for a long time now. But to read it in posts of people who don't know her or have ever walked in her shoes. Right now all she wants to do is get in bed and shut the world out.**

The school is quiet, kids have gone home and few teachers remain. She gets her bags and packs all her stuff. She locks the test papers away in her drawer before walking out of the class. She locks the door and slowly walks down to the gate. A car honks behind her before it pulls up next to her. It's Miss Gule. She wonders how long she's been sitting around here waiting for her to leave.

"Thando, need a lift?" She shouts rolling down her window.

Thando smiles and bends down to be level with her.

"No thanks. I need the walk. I have a lot to think about."

Thando answers hoping it will get through to Miss Gule but she's adamant .

"Hhay ntfombi, langa lishisa so? Hhay girl gibela sambe. (Girl, it's so hot thought? Get in, let's go.)" Miss Gule insists. Thando sighs thinking about the five minutes drive and the constant yapping from her colleague and figures she'd rather face the scorching sun.

"Honestly, it's fine. Someone is picking me up." Thando tells her.

"Who?"

"My sister. We have to go somewhere. Let me get going."

Thando leaves her there and stands by the gate. Miss Gule drives out. As soon as Miss Gule disappears Thando starts walking home.

Miss Gule was right, the sun is scorching hot. And right now she regrets not taking the lift. Her thoughts keep her occupied though. She heard rumours her father left. No one has seen him at the shop for the past couple of days. His bakkie is apparently parked at the house and it hasn't gone anywhere for the past few days. A part of her expected him to run but another part of hum was hopeful that he would stay and face his charges, but its clear the man is too much of a coward to

face his crimes and pay for them.

A few steps down and a black Mercedes pulls up next to her. She sighs and prepares to face whoever this person is with a smile on her face. The man rolls down the window.

"Sawubona." His croaky deep voice gets her attention. She turns to look at him and he has a smile on his face. He looks older, probably in his late forties or early fifties. He is a shade darker than she is and he has a few grey hairs on his head. He has on a pitch black suit with a white shirt underneath. No tie in sight but his arm is draped in a shiny gold watch. It's clear the man is rich, but what is he doing in this little dusty place because he stands out like a sore thumb. Even his car is too fancy to belong to anyone here. Yes some have money and they drive nice cars, but not this one.

"Yebo sawubona." Thando answers mentally studying the man. His smile hasn't left his face.

"Asambe ngyokbeka lapho uyakhona. (Let me drop you off.)" He says revealing his pearly whites. For an old man he seems to take care of himself very well.

"Cha, ngyabonga. I'll walk. (No thank you.)" She answers as politely as she can.

"Come on, ilanga liyashisa, futhi umunt'omuhle ofana nawe

akmeli ngabe ushiswa yilanga kanje. (The sun is hot, plus a beautiful person like you should not be walking in the sun like this.)" He tells her. As if the universe is conspiring against her she feels the sun's rays dig deeper into her scalp. She sighs and opens the car door and gets in, the scent of his perfume fills her nostrils as soon as she closes the door.

"Thank you." She says holding her bags close to her. She looks around the car mentally trying to find a way to escape should anything happen. Her pepper spray is ready for anything. The man starts the car and drives off.

"Mesuliweynyembezi Ngubane. But everyone calls me Mesuli." He tells her extending his hand towards her for a handshake. She takes it and his handshake is firm but soft. An oxymoron.

"Noluthando Nkosi. Everyone calls me Thando." She answers. "Nice to meet you Thando. Do you by any chance happen to be Thulsile Makhanya's daughter?" He asks, his eyes glued on the road. He is driving slow. Too slow. He pretends he cant feel Thando's eyes boring into the side of his face. Not many people refer to her mother with her maiden surname. It's either Mrs Nkosi, Make Nkosi or Nurse Nkosi so this is surprising for her.

"Yes

Advertisement

"I'm her daughter. How do you know her?" A quick smile appears and disappears on his face but Thando has been staring at him since she asked the question so she sees it. "I know your mum from her nursing college days. She was my friend." He turns to look at her and their eyes meet. For some reason his deep brown eyes draw her in and it's comforting. She quickly pulls her eyes away, this is not how a stranger is supposed to make her feel.

"So you're a nurse too?" He laughs. His laugh is contagious and it brings a smile to her face.

"What do you think?" He teases.

"You don't look like a nurse." She tells him. And then a thought crosses her mind. "Are you a reporter?" He chuckles.

"No. Not even close. I'm a businessman. And you?"

"Teacher."

"Mhmm. That's good." He says and takes a turn towards Thando's place, which sends her antenna's up. How does he know where she stays?

"How do you know where I live?" She asks as soon as he parks the car in front of Babe Ngcobo's place.

"Relax, I'm not stalking you. I saw you in the morning when you were going to work." She doesn't fully believe him. Another thought crosses her mind.

"Did my father send you?" She asks, her heart rate slowly rising.

"No. of course not. I don't even know who your father is." He says. She gathers her stuff and opens the door.

"Thank you for the lift." She gets off the car and rushes into her place. She gets in the house and locks the door then pushes the curtain aside peeking out, watching the car until the man drives away.

"And now?" Phepsile asks coming from the bedroom. "Who are you looking at? Is anyone fighting?" She adds running to the window to peek. Thando takes a seat on the couch. "Phepsile looks around and sees nothing interesting before turning to Thando and seeing the flushed look on her face. "What's going on?"

"Nothing. Maybe I'm just overreacting." Thando murmurs. Phepsile takes a seat next to her and takes her shaking hands into hers.

"What happened?" She sighs and closes her eyes.

"I got a lift from someone. He said he knows mama from her nursing college days. But then he knew where I stay, I didn't need to tell him. I don't know. I just got scared thinking maybe papa sent him to intimidate me. But maybe it was just a lift and I should stop overreacting." She opens her eyes and shakes her head.



"You're not overreacting. Its okay to be cautious. For all we know papa ran away like the coward that he is and left his goons behind." They look at each other and bursts out laughing.

"Okay maybe I am being dramatic. I mean the man is driving an expensive car and he had on an expensive watch. His perfume is still stuck in my clothes." Thando says, a little more relaxed than she was a minute ago.

"I was wondering when you started wearing expensive perfume cause I didnt see it in your bedroom."

"Were you going through my stuff?"

"Heck yeah. What's the point of having a big sister if I cant rummage through your things and steal some." Phepsile says pretending to be serious.

"You do realise you and I are the same size now? I can steal your clothes too." Phepsile laughs and stands up.

"You're gaining your weight back, so it wont help. Let me start cooking."

"Where are Zethu and Ndumi?"

"They went to town. They should be back soon." Phepsile says and goes to the kitchen.

Thando gets up from the couch and takes her things to the bedroom. She empties her bag on the bed and the newspaper

falls out with the test scripts. She takes it and looks at the headline again before tossing the paper to the side. She takes her phone and searches for Mesuli. A lot of stories pop up. Business mostly, but there are a couple of stories accusing him of crimes, but they all end the same, no evidence. But none of them tell her why he is here. She decides to ask the one person who can get her answers. He picks up after a couple of rings.

"LaNkosi. Unjani? (How are you?)" He says as soon as he picks up the phone. He sounds like he is eating.

"Hey. Are you busy?"

"Not really. Just having a late lunch. What's up?"

"I need a favour. I need your help looking up someone."

"Okay. Just say tell me the name and I'll get on it."

"Mesuliweynyembezi Ngubane." She hears Thulani coughing rapidly on the other end like he just had something go down the wrong pipe. "Are you okay?" She asks after the coughing has died down.

"I'm fine. I think. Why do you want to know about this person?"

"Nothing much, I just need to know if he is one of papa's goons." He laughs. That is not the reaction she was expecting.

"Thando, I doubt your father has goons. If he did, do you think it would be someone like Mesuli?" She frowns, she didnt tell him that's what everyone calls him apparently so how does Thulani know?

"How do you know his nickname is Mesuli?" She questions.  
"Uhm.... I'm looking at him on google. Anyways let me get to work. I'll tell you if I find anything on him." He answers and hangs up. She looks at the phone and shakes her head. Well atleast Thulani is handling things so she can relax and start marking her test scripts.



As soon as Mesuli drops Thando off he drives to Thulsile's house. He parks the car behind her Yaris before going to the house. He knocks a couple of times before the door swings open and Nomthandazo stands there like she's been struck with lightning.

"Sawubona sisi." She keeps quiet but looks at Mesuli from head to toe. He waves his hand in front of her and only then does she get out of her little trance.

"Oh, Sawubona." She answers with a big smile plastered on her face, but for some reason Mesuli is disgusted.

"Ukhona Thulsile? (Is Thulsile home?)" He asks walking into the

house uninvited.

"Who are you?" She asks with her face turned from fascination to curiosity.

"An old friend. Is she here?" He answers looking around the house.

"THULSILE!" Nomthandazo screams. Thulsile comes in wearing a gown like she just got out of the shower. Her steps falter when she sees Mesuli.

"You have a guest." Nomthandazo tells her.

"Thanks. What are you doing here?" He looks at her and smiles before turning to Nomthandazo.

"Do you mind?"

"I do."

"Skoni, can you please go check on the shop." Thulsile begs her. She clicks her to God and walks out mumbling something under her breath.

"Nice house." Mesuli says as he throws himself on the couch.

"What are you doing here?"

"I came to check how far you are with your policies? Is everything up to date already? My men are ready to send your husband to meet his maker." Her yes bulge out in surprise.

"What are you talking about?" She mumbles.

"Did you think I wouldn't get to him just because he is in

Barborton. You know better than that Thulsile." Small droplets of sweat start forming on her forehead.

"Please don't do anything to him. If he is guilty let the court deal with him."

"If? If Thulsile? If?" He stands up and walks towards her. She takes a couple of steps back before she makes contact with the wall. "Ypu really dont believe them don't you?"

"I dont know what to believe?" She stutters.

"You know, I know of some mothers who would kill for their children and then there's you, I'm not sure what to call you." He walks to the door and opens it. "By the way, I met my daughter today. She's beautiful. She looks like my mum."

"Please leave her alone." She begs.

"I did that once look where that put us. Not again. She's my child. Like I said. Get your things in order."

"Mesuli please. Death will be too easy for him." He laughs.

"Oh trust me. Death wont come easy to him. I'll make sure of it." He walks out leaving her tongue tied.

**He's been holed up in this dark place for hours now. At least that's what he thinks. But it's just been a little over two hours. This is not where he thought he'd end up when he left his brother's house to take a walk to the shop. All he wanted were some fat cakes and slap chips, but now he is here.**

A van pulled up next to him when he was walking down the street, a bag was thrown over his face and zip ties pulled his hands and feet together before he was roughly thrown in the back of the van kicking and screaming. If he didnt have the bag over his eyes he would have seen people passing by like he didnt exist. The community heard about his arrest and his subsequent appearance here, they were scared, then their fear turned into anger. Mothers are worried about their children and community representatives have been told he needs to leave, they dont want him here. So seeing him being hauled into a van with his hands and feet tied seemed more like an answered prayer than a kidnapping.

The van drove through the streets of Baberton with him begging and pleading for his life.

"Please let me go. I'll give you anything you want. I have money." He said as two men looked at him in disgust. He couldnt see their faces but they hated him. They might be

criminals in their own right but their criminality tends to draw a line at rape. And right now, he is their biggest enemy.

Thirty minutes later, although it felt like a lifetime to him the car came to a halt. He heard the doors being yanked open before he was dragged out of the car with his feet and he plopped down on what felt like gravel. He felt the tiny stones and pebbles making their mark in his body and he whined in pain.

"Stop being a little bitch." One of the man said.

"Please let me go. I dont know what I did but I have money, I can pay you." He begged. His pleas were met with laughter and jokes.

"You think your money will get you out of this? Either you're stupid or you really think highly of yourself. Let's get him in." The man said. Two others held his feet and dragged him through the gravel screaming as the stones cut through his skin.

A trail of blood began as they dragged him through the tiles. They got to the room and tossed him on the corner like a sack of potatoes. He heard footsteps slowly drifting away before a door closed and keys turned. He was locked in and they didnt even bother to take off the bag over his face.

It feels like it's been hours of darkness when the door opens again and someone walks in dragging a chair behind him. The chair dragging stops and so do the footsteps. Another set of footsteps comes closer and closer until they stop in front of him. The bag is pulled away and a light shines in his eyes. He blinks rapidly trying to adjust his eyes back to the light.

Eventually his eyes catch up and he looks around the room. All he can see are two figures, one is standing next to him and the other is sitting on a chair twirling a glass of whiskey around his hand.

Jerome drags himself to the wall and sits up.

"You look scared." The man sitting down says.

"What do you want from me?"

"Your life!" Jerome feels drops of sweat forming on his forehead. Fear grips his entire body. He's never been in a situation like this before.

"I can give you money. I have lots of it." He tells them. The man look at each other and burst out laughing, he is confused, isnt money the reason people get kidnapped? He wonders.

"Money. I have money too." The man says. "If I want money I work for it. The same way if I want pussy I find people my own age and not children!" *So that's what this is about. Finally it makes sense. The man is trying to punish me for what I did.*



Jerome thinks to himself. He looks at the man and wonders if he can truly explain himself.

He sighs, there's no point in explaining. No one would understand. It's not his fault things happened the way they did. He couldn't help himself when he saw her tiny perky boobs staring back at him everytime she bent down to give him a cup of tea. No one will understand how her fresh thighs screamed at him for attention under her mini skirts and shorts. Yes she was eleven or twelve but it's not his fault she grew up too fast. He tried, even God is his witness, he really tried to resist the temptation. But Thando didn't make it easy on him. What with all the short skirts she wore, especially her netball outfit.

He never missed any of her games, he was the perfect father, every game he was there cheering her on. He'd scream her name the loudest when she had the ball. He drooled everytime she jumped and her skirt went up. All he wanted to do was touch her. Just once, he just wanted to touch her and feel if her thighs were as soft on the touch as they were to the eye. That's all he wanted to do.

He got his chance one evening when his wife was working the night shift. He was alone in the house with the kids. The three youngest girls were fast asleep and Thando was busy with her

maths homework. She needed help with an equation and she came to him. He pulled her down and sat her on his lap. Her pyjamas pulled up and his eyes went down to her thighs. He put his hand on one thigh and he was right. Her thighs were just as soft as he had imagined. By the time she got off him he was trying his best to hide his hard on.

She went to sleep that night oblivious to what was happening right under her roof. Her safety zone was about to become hell. He got his feel of her that night when he snuck into her room. Even though he could see the fear in her eyes, he had one goal in mind, to have a feel of her before the boys turned her into a community bicycle. She felt good. Tight, but good. He got addicted to the tightness, and slowly he moved down the line till he got to the last one. He had fun, he enjoyed himself but now he was about to pay for it.

"Do you regret it? Hurting your own children. Do you regret it?" The man asked dragging the chair slowly closer to Jerome. "I mean, I have a son and two daughters, I would kill anyone who ever laid a hand on any of them. How did you do it? See your kids and get turned on. How does it work?" See, he knew he wouldnt understand. But one thing doenst make sense to him. Why would the man care what happens in his house?

"Why do you care?" Jerome asks. "Its my house my children. Why do you care?"

"Three of those girls are yours, one of them is mine. My name is Mesuli, you don't know me, well now you do. But 26 years ago I met your wife when she was a college student studying nursing. I dont know where you were at the time but me and her got together. She found out she was pregnant and she panicked and ran back home to you. I guess you two got together and did the deed and eight months later Noluthando was born." Mesuli says. Jerome clenches his jaw, fear replaced by anger. *My wife has never cheated on me. This man is lying.* He thinks. *There is no way Thulsile cheated on me, and then pinned a baby on me.*

"If that is true why did it take you so long to come for her? You're lying." He hisses between clenched teeth. "And besides, my wife would never cheat on me. Thirty years we've been together and not once did she ever look at another man."

Mesuli laughs and gulps down his whiskey.

"You see, she didnt just look at another man she got on top of one, under one, in front of one, literally all the directions you could think off."

"If that was true then why didn't you come for the child? I dont believe you."

"Well, seeing as we are talking now, I'll tell you why. I found out

she was married, now, I'm a man and I will always respect another man's house. But that didnt stop me from putting measures in place to make sure Thando was safe. I missed just one place, her home. And that's why you got the opportunity to rape my child because I wasn't there to protect her. I can't change the past, but I'll make sure you regret every moment of pleasure you found in my child. I will make sure you beg and plead the same way she did." Fear creeps back into Jerome. The man in front of him looks serious. He can see the fire burning in his eyes and he knows it doentst look good for him.

"Just kill me and get it over with." Jerome begs. Mesuli smiles. "Death is far from you. You will beg for if, plead for it and just when you think it's in your grasp, I'll bring you back to life and we will start all over again." Drops of perspiration slowly drop down Jerome's face with every word Mesuli says. Fear fills every inch of his body, it's hot outside but he feels cold, shivers run down his spine. "Let's get to work." Mesuli tells his acquaintance. He stands up from the chair and stands next to it. His acquaintance goes to the door and calls someone else in.

The two men return and hold a crying Jerome up. They untie his hands and feet, undress him and leave him naked. Mesuli turns the chair around and the man drape Jerome over the back of the chair with his head hanging on the front. They tie his hands

to the front legs of the chair and tie his legs to the back of the chair. Chains are hooked on the wall and tied to the chairs legs preventing Jerome from moving around.

"What are you going to do with me?" He asks between sobs.

"Bring them in." Mesuli tells his man. One of the men goes to the door and opens it, he calls someone then stands aside as four men walk in. They look scary. They have tattoos and scars all over their bodies. These are not men you'd want to meet in a dark alleyway.

"Please dont do this." Jerome begs.

"Listen, these are my friends, They've just been released from Sun City. Well more like they released themselves but that's beside the point. Now, thay haven't had a woman in a long long long time. They need a bit of practice you know before they go home to their wives and girlfriends, that's if they still have them. So they are going to practice on you."

"No. Please. I'm begging you dont do this? Please." Jerome begs as tears and sweat merge on his face. "Please man. I'll do anything you want. I'll disappear, anything. Please dont do this."

"Have fun boys." Mesuli walks out of the room with his men behind him. As soon as they close the door they hear Jerome scream and begging for the men to stop. But the grunting of the men is just as loud.

"Iyarasa le one. (He's making noise.) Mvale umlomo Cobra. (Shut him up.)" One of the man shouts. And before long Jerome's screams are replaced by muffles.

"What do you think they used to shut him up?" Mesuli's man asks.

"Probably a dick." The other one answers and they burst out laughing. "So how long do we keep them there?"

"As long as it takes. Just make sure he doesnt die. I still have a lot planned for him." He answers before walking away as Jerome's muffled screams fade away.

**It's been a full seven days. Seven days of men walking in and out of the room, ramming themselves into him over and over and over again. His voice is hoarse from all the screaming, or is it from different dicks being shoved down his throat. He is not sure anymore. Right now all he knows is that his butthole is red and swollen. Its open and no matter how hard he tries to hold poop in it doesn't help. He's had a few incidents of him unintentionally reliving himself right on the sponge he's been sleeping on.**

His pride has been knocked down ten notches. Mesuli was right, he's been begging for them to kill him but all they do is laugh at him. He has seen women in porn movies with different men, sometimes up to ten and maybe more, and not once did he ever think he'd be in the same boat one day, except for him, it's not voluntary. The first day it was four men, the second day it was six different men and on the third day another set of different men showed up. The pattern went on and on till last night. He's been sitting on the corner in a fetal position with a blanket wrapped around him, he's been silently sobbing since he woke up this morning.

The door opens and Mesuli walks in with Cobra behind him. As soon as he steps into the room he covers his nose.

"Sies man. Umdala kanje uyazinyela. (Old as you are you shit on yourself.) Nhlobon yendoda le? (What kind of man is this?)" Jerome's eyes are pinned on the floor. "Cobra, bring him a bucket so he can bath." Cobra laughs and walks out.

Mesuli walks up to Jerome and looks down at him.

"Now do you understand the pain and trauma you put those girls through? Or do you need me to get more guys to come show you?" Jerome's eyes shoot up begging and pleading.

"Please, I know what I did was wrong. I know that now. Please just let me go. I promise I wont tell anyone I was here." Mesuli laughs.

"Here where? As if anyone would believe you. Anyways. Here is what's going to happen. You'll call your lawyer, tell him you want to confess your sins. You'll tell the community what you did and why you did it. And when that is done, maybe, just maybe I'll think about killing you." Jerome quickly shrinks back into his shell.

Is he ready to face the consequences of his actions? The community, how will they look at him if he confesses. It's bad enough he has been tortured the whole of this week

he cant afford to face his children as well and the community. He'd rather die before degrading himself any further than he's been degraded. Mesuli holds out a phone to him. He looks at



the phone before looking up at him.

"You might as well kill me and get it over with." Mesuli puts the phone back in his pocket just as cobra walks back into the room with a 25 litre bucket.

"Okay then. But I won't kill you. I still have a few more friends who'd like a taste of that ass. Take a bath. My guys don't eat shit. When they get here they need to find you clean like a baby. Just like you like them." Cobra picks up the bucket of water and pours the ice cold water all over him leaving him shivering.

"I'll get more water." Cobra says walking out.

"Your option to call your lawyer expires the moment Cobra walks back in here. Are you sure you don't want to call him?" Mesuli asks Jerome whose body is shivering with his teeth chattering. "Tick tock ndoda iskhathi syahamba. (Time is going.)" Cobra walks in with two more buckets of water. "Times up. Have fun cobra. Make sure the men are here to feast tonight." He Pat's Cobra on the shoulder before walking out.

"Sukuma ndoda, angeke ngkugeze ngathi uyangane encane. Sukuma ugeze. Ngkuphathele insipho. (Stand up man. I won't bath you like a small child. Stand up and bath. I brought you soap.)" Cobra tells him. The past few days he's tried to bring himself to own up to his mistakes. But his pride won't let him.

Sure it's been knocked down a few notches but it's still there. Especially now that he knows not only has he been forced to raise another man's child all these years, that same man is now torturing him.

He slowly tries to stand but he is struggling, especially with the pain he is in. The cold water is not helping. He stumbles to the bucket and lathers a cloth with soap. He washes himself and rinses the soap of his body. He looks at the bucket full of water and a thought runs through his mind. All he has to do is bury his head in the water and it will be over. He kneels there contemplating his next move.

"Don't even think about it." Cobra snaps behind him bringing him back. "Death is too far from you my friend. And you're not going to take the easy way out." He sighs and continues bathing. When he is done Cobra throws a fresh blanket to him. He sits in the corner as a woman walks in and cleans the room. She brings in a new sponge for him to sit on and a takeaway with pap and some braaied wors. He opens the takeaway and sees the wors. Cobra laughs seeing the look on his face.

"Yidla inyama ndoda. (Eat the meat.)" Cobra says laughing as he walks out and locks the room.

## THANDO

"Thando. Someone is here to see you." Phepsile says bursting into the bedroom. Thando looks up from the test papers she is marking and looks at her sister.

"Ngbani? (Who is it?)" Phepsile shrugs her shoulders and closes the door behind her.

"I don't know. But he is hot. You know those old sexy man. What do they call them again, silver foxes. He is one of those." She says with a mischievous smile on her face. Thando wonders who it could be. None of the old people she knows can even be classified as silver foxes. Let alone sexy. *Except for one.* Her brain reminds her. She quickly gets up from the bed and looks at her sister with a mixture of shock and fear in her eyes.

"Is he wearing a suit?" Phepsile nods her head. "Is he driving a Mercedes?" A frown masks Phepsile's face.

"I dont know. I didnt see his car. He just rocked up at the door. He is in the lounge." Phepsile announces. Thando heaves out a sigh trying to not let the thoughts running through her mind consume her.

"Okay. I'll go see him." She pulls her cardigan close and walks out with Phepsile following behind her. When she gets to the lounge her suspicions are confirmed. It is him. He is sitting on

the couch scrolling through his phone. The couch seems too small for his frame.

"Hi." He looks up and smiles when he sees her.

"Sawubona."

"I'll make some tea." Phepsile announces and disappears into the kitchen. Thando pulls up a chair and takes a seat.

"What are you doing here?"

"Well. I wanted to check on you. How are you?"

"I'm fine."

"That's good. How are you holding up with your father missing?" She opens her mouth trying to formulate an answer but she fails. Her father's disappearance is worrying but this man's sudden appearance in her life is more worrying. Especially when he keeps asking about Jerome. It looks like he is fishing for information.

"I dont meant to be rude or anything but why do you keep asking about my father?" He clears his throat and sits up.

Phepsile places a tray on the coffee table with tea.

"Uhm, okay. I know how it looks with me showing up here unannounced. But I genuinely just wanted to check up on you."

Thando crosses her arms on her chest. Not sure if she believes this man. Zethu and Ndumi come running into the house and quickly lock the door behind them. They stand there panting and trying to catch their breath. Zethu keeps peeking through the window.

"What's going on with you? What's wrong?" Thando asks as panic washes over her.

"Mfankhona and Daniel are coming this side. I think they are coming here." Ndumi says still trying to catch her breath.

"Maybe they are just passing by."

"I doubt it. They look angry and ready for a fight. Mfankhona even has his knobkerrie." Zethu whispers fear raging through her. "What if they are coming here to hurt us."

"They won't hurt you." Mesuli says drawing attention from Ndumi and Zethu. Ndumi looks at Thando silently asking who this is.

Before Thando can do any introductions a loud knock scares the shit out of them. They huddle together against the wall while Mesuli walks to the door.

"Dont open the door." Thando whispers to him but he ignores her. He opens the door and the two men rush in.

"Ungbani kewena? (Who are you?)" Mfankhona asks, carefully scrutinizing him from top to bottom.

"Just a friend. Can we help you?"

"Suk'endleleni. (Move out the way.)" Daniel says and tries to push Mesuli away but he doesnt budge. Instead Daniel's thin klutzy frame is pushed back. "Suka endleleni." Daniel adds trying so hard to be intimidating but fails dismally.

"I asked you a question. How can we help you?" Mfankhona

ignores him and tries to walk around him.

"Noluthando, where is my brother?" He asks looking at the girls.

"How should we know? He is your brother." Ndumi answers.

"You think this is a game. My brother has been missing for the past week now. Someone said they saw him being taken in a black van. So which one of your men took him?"

"We don't know. And if they really did take him, I hope they throw him in the deepest river and let him be eaten by crocodiles." Thando shouts.

"Anina dankie nine bantfwana nine. (You are ungrateful children.) After everything my brother has done for you this is the thanks he gets. First you try and have him arrested on false charges and now you're trying to kill him. What do you want from him? His life insurance money?" Daniel shouts back.

Neighbors come out of their houses and watch the commotion happening as insults and accusations are thrown around like frisbees. Mesuli takes out his gun and cocks it. He shoots up at the ceiling sending people scattering around. Thando and the girls quickly run to the bedroom while the two brothers hurdle together by the corner shaking in their boots.

"Listen to me carefully ngoba angeke ngize ngiphinde ngiyisho lento engzoyisho manje. (Because I won't repeat what I'm about to say now.) Your brother is a rapist and the sooner you

get that through your head the better. Your brother is paying for his sins, and soon the community will know what kind of monster he is. And if you, or anyone else for that matter bothers the girls again, I will make sure the two of you not only suffer the same fate as your brother but you will curse the day you set your eyes on me. Now. I'm going to give you two minutes to get to wherever you live, I'm going to drive out in two minutes and if I find you along the way I am going to put a bullet in your legs. Are we clear?"

"What did you do to our brother?" Mfankhona whispers.

"120 seconds. Time is running out. RUN." Mfankhona and Daniel quickly stumble out of the house and run down the street like two crazy people.

Mesuli closes the door and takes a deep breath.

"They are gone. You can come out now." He shouts. Thando walks out to the lounge alone. "Where are the others?"

"Who are you?" Thando asks looking at the man in front of her. Sure he has possibly saved their lives, but now she's more curious than ever to know who he is and why he is here. A few minutes ago she could have sworn he was one of her dad's friends, but now she's not sure what to think. Thulani might not have found anything on him, but it's clear there is more to this man than meets the eye. But what does he have to hide?

**NONDUMISO**

**"Get in the car Nondumiso." He snaps. His gruff smooth voice rising. She stops and looks at him. The huge Range Rover Sport seemingly out of place in the dusty road. "Get in." She sighs and opens the door and gets in. She's too angry to look at him. She keeps her eyes glued on the dusty road in front of her. Even though the car is not moving, being here is the last place she'd like to be. He stares at her, neither one of them willing to cave in and speak first. Its one of the things she hates about him, he is stubborn, but so is she.**

Her phone rings, breaking the awkward silence. She looks at the screen and sees Bokang's name flashing on the screen. She can't talk to him right now though. Mgazini stares at her almost daring her to answer the call. She feels his eyes bore into the side of her face. She looks at the phone until it stops ringing.

"Why dont you answer him? You want him to worry?" The petty side of her mentally punches the air in victory. She won, he spoke first, Ndumi

1- Mgazini 0, she thinks mentally writing the score.

"What do you want from me?" She turns her body to face him. He sits with his back on the car door looking at her. A small



smile curves the side of his lips. He is a good looking man that's for sure. He has a full head of hair and a beard that gives away his faith but also decent enough for it to be professional. Very few people know about his faith, no, he is not hiding it, he has worked so hard in his career that he finds that his reputation precedes him. His faith is the last thing people notice or pay attention to and he prefers it that way.

"You look nice." His eyes dart down to her denim clad thighs and back up again to her face making her a bit uncomfortable.

"That's not what I asked."

"Where is your father. I've been trying to get hold of him for almost two weeks now and he seems to have gone MIA. Do you know where he is?" His face has transformed into the caring Mgazini she used to know and love. One thing he will do is dedicate himself to his clients, guilty or not. And right now a part of her heart breaks at the concern that's all over his face, for her father, the same man who made her life a living hell.

"He is your client. I should be asking you where he is." He sighs and looks at his phone like he is waiting for an important call before putting it back on his lap face down.

"His trial is starting in about a week." He tells her.

"That was fast."

"Well it's an easy case. It's a he said she said and those are easy

to dispute." He said nonchalantly, completely oblivious to the hurricane that was slowly waking up inside her.

"Easy to dispute? Are you for real right now? Could you be anymore insensitive?" She snaps at him.

"Look. I know this is hard on your family and you have every right to be upset, but I'm just doing my job."

"Your job is to dispute facts, I get it, you're a hotshot defence lawyer and your job is to make sure your clients win no matter what. I understand that. But tell me something, how do you dispute years and years of rape? How do you dispute the pain and trauma that man has caused? Do you know Zethu will never be able to have kids because of what he did? Do you know she puts on a brave face all day pretending everything is okay and then sobs on her pillow when she thinks we are all asleep and cant hear her?"

"Nondumiso!"

"How are you going to dispute my father sneaking into my room when I was ten years old just so he can jerk off on my underwear? How are you going to dispute my father sticking his dick inside my eleven years old vagina? How are you going to dispute the puddles of blood he left everytime he was done with me? How are you going to dispute the endless nights I spent in the bathroom scrubbing myself till I was bloody? How are you going to dispute that? Tell me?" She snaps at him, tears

gushing down her face. For the first time in her adult life she'd admitted to herself what she was afraid to.

Growing up and knowing what her father, Nondumiso had refused to open her mouth and admit that she too was a victim. She didn't want to give the man power over her and if that meant shoving everything to the back of her mind and pretending like it never happened then so be it. But hearing Mgazini speak about her experience like it was some minuscule thing that didn't mean a thing had finally broken down the walls she'd built up around her. For the first time in a long time she wanted people to know the kind of monster Jerome is. But first she had to admit it to herself before anyone else.

"Nondumiso!" Mgazini whispers and tightens his hand around her arm, preventing her from getting out of the car.

"Please just let me go." She pleads, her tears refusing to take a break.

"Not until we talk about this." She tries to open the door but he locks it.

"Just open the door Mgazini."

"Not until we talk about this." He repeats. "Are you telling me your father raped you too?"

"Why do you care. Just do your job and get him out. He won't be the first rapist to get out and he sure as hell won't be the

last."

"I am trying to help here Nondumiso."

"Help who? Jerome? Then help him and leave me out of it." He sighs.

"I know this is my job but I care about you." She chuckles and wipes her tears.

"You mean the same way you cared about me when you lied to me? Ntshangase, you and I both know the only thing you care about is yourself. If you cared about me you would have told me the truth about your wife from the get go. But no, you just liked the idea of stringing me along for your own benefit." He takes a couple of deep breaths trying to calm himself down. He knew this wouldn't be as easy, Nondumiso is just as stubborn as he is

if not more. But he needs her to know he didnt take this case for the money. He didn't take it because he thinks Jerome is innocent or that he can save him from prison.

"Firstly, Nombuso is not my wife, she was my girlfriend. We broke up soon after she found out about you."

"Congratulations. Do you need a medal?"

"Nondumiso....." They are disturbed by his ringing phone. As much as he wants to finish what he has started this is a call he cant ignore. "Hello." He listens attentively to the person on the other end without disturbing them. After about 2 minutes he

cuts the call. "I have to go. Let me drop you off."

"No thanks." She tries opening the door and it opens. She gets out and walks down the street till she gets to the house. She finds Zethu and Phepsile in the lounge watching TV. She says nothing and continues on to the bedroom.

Her phone rings again just as she walks into the bedroom.

Bokang's name pops up. She sighs and lets it go to voicemail again. She throws herself on the bed, if there is one thing she's mastered in this life, it's pretending. She pretends to be fine all the time, she puts on a brave face and goes through life like she owns it. But sometimes, just once in a while life reminds her that she's no different to her sisters even though she tries her best to not put herself in the same category as them.

For the longest time she's seen Thando as weak, why would she stay knowing what was going on in their home. She could have left when she had the chance, two distinctions and a scholarship knocking at her door, she could have taken that opportunity and ran with it. Instead she chose to stay, study through distance learning and coming home every night to the same hell she's been in since she was a child. As far as Nondumiso is concerned, that's the weakest thing Thando could do.

Phepsile on the other hand, she's closest to her because they both did what Thando couldn't. They left and never looked back. She was waiting patiently for Zethu to join them, instead she'd dragged them back home to face a past they thought was dead and buried. But maybe this is what she needed, a chance to face her past and come to terms with it, before she can fully move on with her life.



He's been driving like a maniac for the past three and half hours since he got that call. He still has a hard time believing what his PA said but the pictures she sent are proof enough. All that's left now is for him to see it with his own eyes.

Thirty minutes later he drives into his office building. His partner calls him just as he parks the car.

"I'm in the parking lot Hlongwane." He says as soon as he picks up the phone. He opens the door and rushes out. He finds Hlongwane waiting for him at the entrance of the building clearly in a panic.

"Dude, where have you been?" Hlongwane asks with his hands on his waist.

"Mpumalanga. I told you this morning. What happened? Is he really here?" He questions as they walk into the building.

"You have no idea. Someone dropped him off here naked and shaking." They get into the lift and head up to the office.

"So no one saw who dropped him off?"

"No. And the crazy part, he refuses for us to call an ambulance."

"Is it that bad?" Hlongwane shakes his head.

"Bad is an understatement." They get to the office and the moment Mgazini opens the door he is met by a stench of something rotten. His PA stands by the corner like a mannequin refusing to come any closer.

Mgazini walks into the office with his fingers pinching his nose shut. He looks around and sees the windows are open. But that doesn't seem to be helping in anyway. Jerome lays on the couch with a throw covering him up. His eyes are closed like he is sleeping.

"Jerome!" His eyes quickly shoot open and he tries to sit up but the pain is unbearable. A part of him knows he should have listened a week ago when Mesuli told him to confess his sins, but his pride wouldn't let him. "What happened to you? Who did this?" Jerome sits there shaking, his eyes stuck on the floor.

"Let me call an ambulance. We need to get you to a hospital right now." He shakes his head and blinks away the tears from his eyes.

"No, please. I don't want to go to a hospital. Just take me to the police station. I'll tell the police everything and they can lock me up." He says with his voice hoarse and breaking.

"Your trial is starting in a few days. We should prepare for it."

"No, please. I don't want a trial. I want to confess. Please just help me, I want to pay for my crimes and go to jail. And please make sure I'm put in solitary confinement. Please." He begs leaving the two men confused.

"A psychiatric evaluation can save you from this. I don't think this man is fit to stand trial." Hlongwane whispers to Mgazini.

Mgazini looks at the man in front of him and remembers everything Ndumi said. The lawyer in him knows he could win this trial with just the scene in front of him. A psychiatrist evaluation would put an end to this trial. But the man in him is more than happy to throw him to the wolves and let them devour him. It's not like they haven't started already. But now his mind is racing, wondering who did this to Jerome and what they stand to benefit from his confession?

He pulls Hlongwane out of the office.



"So what are you thinking?" Hlongwane asks.

"I'll get the investigating officer on the line."

"You're going to let him go to jail? A mental asylum would be perfect for him." Hlongwane counters. He, just like Mgazini is in the business of winning and not confessions.

"It's what the man wants. Besides, it's clear whoever did this to him can get to him anywhere. That's why he is so desperate to be in solitary confinement."

"So you are...."

"Giving him what he wants, most definitely. But I need to find out who did this to him and why?"

"And who are you going to bill for that?"

"My curiosity."

**He is not the man he was a month ago. A lot has changed. His suit is hanging on his frail body, his eyes are shallow and he has bags under his eyes. For those that know him, shock is written all over their faces. The man who walked into a packed courtroom a few weeks ago with a smile on his face and a wink for his daughters seems to have disappeared. In his place stands a weak, frightened man who is about to come face to face with his sins.**

The judge walks in and takes a seat as silence engulfs the courtroom. When all the introductions have been made the judge speaks.

"It is my understanding that the accused has changed his plea and he wishes to make a statement. Is that true?" Mgazini stands up.

"That is true my Lady. My client seems to have had a change of heart and he wishes to make a statement to the court."

"Okay then. Does the prosecution have an objection?"

Samkeliso stands up and faces the judge.

"The prosecution has no objection my lady."

"Right. Your accused can make his statement."

Jerome stands up and holds on to the panels in front of him to steady himself up.

"Sanibonani." He begins. "I would like to apologize to my family. More importantly my children." He turns around to look at his daughters. His eyes go an inch higher and he comes face to face with Mesuli's cold stare. He sighs and turns back to the judge.

"We are waiting Mr Nkosi." The judge says.

"I.. I wanted to say I'm sorry to my children for all that I did to them."

"Elaborate Mr Nkosi. I dont have all day." The judge urges.

"I'm sorry. They were right, I am guilty. I did rape my children." The court is filled with noise as people Bay for his blood.

"Akashiswe. (Let's burn him.)" Someone shouts and the rest of the people agree. The judge has a hard time trying to calm the people down. Jerome's heart is beating out of control. A part of him wishes he would have done this sooner. He should have owned up to his mistakes sooner, the community would have beat him up and probably tied a tyre around his neck and set him alight. That would have been better than what he is going through right now. The embarrassment, the shame and the fear of what Mesuli will do if he doesnt do this.

After some time and the judge threatening to empty the courtroom the crowd quietens down.

"Continue Mr Nkosi. Start from the beginning." Jerome takes a deep breath and closes his eyes. He faces forward with his eyes closed and continues.

"It started when Thando was eleven or twelve, I don't remember. She came home wearing her short netball skirt. She was growing, her breasts were growing. I couldn't help myself. I would watch her play or sit on the sofa with her thighs out I would be turned on. One night when her mother was working I went into her room and I snuck under the covers and ran my hands on her thighs. She woke up scared. But I told her not to be afraid, I raped her even when she was crying begging me to stop. I told her that if she told anyone I would kill her sisters in front of her. That scared her to silence." With every word he speaks the tension in the courtroom gets thicker and thicker. The man are baying for his blood and women are crying.

Thando and her sisters are sitting behind their father, tears streaming down their faces listening to the man they used to look at as their protector finally confess to being the one who broke them beyond repair. Thulsile sits on the other side, Jerome's words slowly penetrating her mind. When he started talking she was hurt, but now she has anger rising inside of her.

"Continue Mr Nkosi, we are waiting." The judge tells him.

"I kept on doing it all the time when her mother wasn't home.

When she was 13 she fell pregnant, I was afraid people would find out she was carrying my child so I took her to a clinic in Barberton and forced her to have an abortion. When she was fifteen I moved to Nondumiso. It became easier with her. I'd gotten away with it for so long it became second nature. With a few threats here and there I was able to instill enough fear in her to make sure she never tells anyone. Thando noticed what I was doing to her sister so she started sleeping with all of them in her room. She'd lock the door, especially when their mother was there and I wouldn't be able to get to them. But I always made a plan. Phepsile and Zethu were also growing. While she was protecting Nondumiso I moved on to Phepsile. And when she saw that she also tried to protect her. But she couldn't be everywhere all the time. Not with school and exams drawing near. Everytime she had to attend extra classes I would have my chance. I don't know what got over me, I became greedy and I couldn't stop." He wipes his tears, his eyes still shut, his mind trying to shut the many voices of the people in the courtroom.

"When Nondumiso left for school I thought she'd tell someone. I stopped for a while waiting for the police to knock on my door, but they never came. And when I realised Nondumiso was too afraid to tell anyone I was happy. I started again from where I left off. It became a bit easier for Thando to protect her

sister's, she took them with her everywhere she went. Whether she went to town or to take a walk she'd take them with her. She tried so hard to protect her sister's but she was no match for me. I always found a way to get to them."

"Where was their mother in all of this?" The judge questions, anger all over her face.

"She was working, or at church. She didnt spend much time at home

Advertisement

and when she was there she was always tired, which worked for me. I always had time to do what I wanted to do."

"And your other daughter, Zethu? What about her?" The judge questions.

"I started with her a few days after I came back from Barberton with Phepsile. I took her there to have an abortion too, a few days after that she was still bleeding. Instead of waiting for her to get better I moved on to Zethu. Zethu was a risk. She used to be loud and full of life. But when I started molesting her she changed. She became quiet. I was afraid someone would notice the change in her but no one did. Everyone just put it down to her hitting puberty." He keeps quiet and takes a deep breath. He opens his eyes and sees the anger on the judges face. A part of him wants to turn back and look at his family, but fear stops him.

"The incident that put your daughter in hospital, was that your doing too?" The judge asks.

"Yes. She found out she was pregnant. I didn't notice anything until she was about five months. Taking her to hospital would have been risky so I got some abortion pills from an old friend of mine. She refused to take them though. She said its time people knew what kind of monster I am. I panicked when i saw her diary and what she'd written there. When she was sleeping I took the diary and burnt it. The next morning I made her some breakfast. Thando was at school giving some extra classes. I put the pills in her food then left it on the table. I told her Thando had left it for her so she wouldn't suspect a thing. The pills took longer than expected to work, but when they finally did she was bleeding out of control. I was afraid of what would happen if she woke up and told anyone what happened so I let her bleed. When Thando came home i tried to lie hoping she would leave her alone but she didn't. She went to her bedroom and found her bleeding so she called her mother and told her to send an ambulance."

"So you were hoping your daughter would die?" The judge asks. Jerome bows his head in shame and nods his head.

"I'm sorry. I'm really sorry." The judge sighs and gathers up her files.

"I think we've heard enough. Mr Nkosi you will be remanded back into police custody. The police will take you into their custody and you will be back here in a week for your sentencing. In the meantime, the court will appoint a therapist for the girls. Court adjourned." The judge stands up and walks out as the police officers drag Jerome out of the courtroom, trying hard to protect him from the bottles of water and things being thrown at him.

Outside the courtroom people are waiting for the car that's transporting Jerome. As soon as they see it they surround it, pushing and shoving it from every side that it shakes. Jerome sits at the back, fear gripping every bone in his body. He knows what will happen if these doors open and the people get their hands on him. Lucky for him the police are able to drive through the crowd and get him away.

The girls watch the commotion from the side, with Elias and Nomcebo next to them. Mesuli stands a few feet away watching the girls. He goes back in the courtroom and finds Thulsile sitting in the same spot she's been sitting on since she came in here. He takes a seat behind her.

"Are you happy now?" She doesn't answer him. Her eyes are stuck to the front. Mesuli can't see her face. He can't see the



rage that's brewing inside her. Her phone beeps. She takes the phone out of her bag and looks at it before she stands up ready to leave. "Where are you going?"

"Not now Mesuli. Please." She says and walks out. She gets outside and finds the crowd still angry. She quickly walks to her car and drives off.

She gets to the police station she parks the car and sends a text to someone. The person walks out and gets in the car.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" The man asks.

"I need him to look me in the eye and tell me why Jobe. He could have had anyone, anyone at all but he chose children, my children. I dont need to know what he did I want to know why." She answers.

"Okay. Let's go." They get out of the car and walk into the police station. Jobe leads her to the cells. They find him in a cell sitting by himself. Jobe opens the cell, Jerome's head shoots up just as Thulsile walks in. When the cell is locked again behind her he gets up.

"Mkami. (My wife.)"

"Why?"

"Thulsile!"

"Why Jerome? Answer me that. Why?"

"I'm sorry."

"All my children. You hurt them in ways no human being ever will. You were supposed to protect them, you were supposed to love them. Take care of them. But all you did was hurt them. You took their innocence, you stripped them of their innocence bit by bit until there was nothing left. You even wanted Zethu to die just so you could hide your evil ways. I pray you rot in hell for this." Jobe opens the door for her.

"When were you going to tell me about Thando not being my child?" He asks stopping Thulsile in her tracks. She turns around to look at him in surprise. He wasn't supposed to know that. But a part of her is glad he knows.

"Would it have made any difference? Would it have spared her the pain of what you put her through?" He keeps quiet. "I didn't think so. Right now, the only thing I regret is not staying with her father, I know he wouldn't have done what you did. He would have been a great father to her. I chose you over him and that is something I'll have to live with for the rest of my life. Not even the blood of Jesus can cleanse me from that guilt. But you, I hope the devil deals with you." She walks out and Jobe locks the cell before they walk away failing to notice Mesuli and Thulani hiding in the corner. As soon as they are out of sight the two men come out and walk towards the cell.

"Jerry, phase one is done. Now on to phase two." Mesuli says,

his voice sending shivers down Jerome's back.

"You said all I had to do was confess and pay for my crime. I've done that. We are done." Mesuli and Thulani laugh.

"It will only be over when I say it is. Until then, my friend here will make sure you have friends to keep you company. I'll see you around."

**THANDO**

**This is not how she's supposed to feel. The truth is out there. Jerome admitted to every thing, the burden on her shoulder's should have been eased by now, but it's still there. Still heavy. On the one hand the truth being out there is a good thing, but on the other hand it's not. The pity stares that she keeps getting, especially from her students is not what she wants. Her students aren't the same people they were a few weeks ago, even the one's who are known to be troublemakers have been behaving themselves in her presence. It feels weird for her.**

She's slowly drifting into a pit of darkness she's tried so hard to escape from. When Jerome started his shenanigans she fell into that dark hole, but when her sister's needed protection she fought tooth and nail claw her way out of that dark pit. She tried to protect them, even though she sees herself as a failure but she knows she tried. And now that everyone knows the truth she is slowly drifting back into that dark hole.

She's been curled up on her bed for the past jour now. Good thing its Saturday and she doesn't need to be at work. That alone is enough reason for her to be under the covers the

whole day. A knock comes through before Zethu walks in with a tray of food. It's nothing fancy, just a bowl of soft porridge with rama, milk and peanut butter with a glass of juice on the side. None of her sister's know why she likes that combination but they've stopped teasing her about it.

Zethu sits on the bed and pulls the cover back.

"Wake up. I brought you breakfast." The smell of peanut butter is enough to wake her up. She sits up and places the tray on her lap.

"You woke up in a good mood. What's going on?" She asks her sister, a spoonful of porridge already on it's way to her mouth.

"Its not me actually. I'm just a delivery girl. Ndumi made that for you." She stops chewing and looks at Zethu who has a grin on her face.

"Relax, she didnt put poison." Thando continues eating. "You two need to make peace now. It's over. Papa is going to pay for his sins. Mum probably still thinks this whole thing is a nightmare, we have no one else but each other now. We have to make peace." Thando sighs and rests her head on the headboard.

"You know I've never had issues with anyone. I just want to put all this behind me and move on with my life. Whatever is left of it."

"I understand that. And we need to move on together."

Remember when I was in hospital? You said we'd get through this together. Now is the time for us to hold hands and move on side by side."

"And when did you get so smart?" Zethu sighs.

"I almost died. And just a few days ago I found out my own father wanted me dead just so he can hide his evil ways. You saved me. If you hadn't walked in when you did I would be dead by now. And he'd be out there, probably moved out to the community and found someone else to victimize. I also know I'm the weakest link between us but I want to be strong. I want to live. I want to move on, find love and have kids maybe." Thando turns to her sister, her heart galloping in her chest.

"You want kids?" Zethu nods her head, her lips curved up in a smile.

"Yep. Relax, I know I'll never carry my own kids but there are plenty of kids around who need love." She says making Thando relax. But then the smile leaves her face the same way it appeared. A cloud of darkness covers her eyes.

"What's wrong?"

"Do you want kids?" She asks turning to her big sister.

"No." Thando answers without hesitation. "I dont think my life is conducive for a child. I cant bring a child into this darkness."

"I guess." Zethu sighs.

Phepsile pokes her head in the door.

"We have a guest." She whispers.

"Who?" Thando whispers back making Phepsile smile.

"Come see." She closes the door and leaves. Zethu and Thando look at each other before jumping off the bed and walking to the lounge. They find Thulani sitting on the couch.

"Thulani? What are you doing here?" Thulani stands up and looks at Thando. His warm smile filling his face up. He is out of his usual police uniform today. He is wearing a pair of black jeans ripped on the knees, a white long sleeve tshirt and a pair of white nike airforce. He looks good.

"Actually I wanted to take you girls out to Badplass just to relax and have some fun and forget about everything for a while."

"We will go and get ready." Phepsile says and drags her sister's away leaving Thando standing there.

"So

did you really come here to do that or you just needed them out of the way?" Thando asks with her arms crossed on her chest. Thulani laughs and sits back down on the couch.

"I did. And you're running out of time. We need to leave soon." He tells her. She frowns and turns to the bedroom. She finds her sister's with clothes all over the room.

"I didnt bring a swimsuit." Phepsile says with her hands on her waist. "Zethu, borrow me a swimsuit."

"Eh, with those humongous hips." The girls burst out laughing and Phepsile rolls her eyes.

"I'm sure Thulani wont mind us going past town to get some swimsuits. I also need one." Thando tells her sister and she relaxes. They get dressed and pack all they will need in their bags. They walk out ready to leave.

"We are ready." The girls say. Their mood has changed from what it was when they woke up.

"Okay then. Let's go." Thulani stands up and opens the door only to find Jerome's siblings standing there. Daniel has his fist up ready to knock. They walk into the house ignoring the fact that the girls were on their way out.

"Kukhona lapho niya khona? (Are you going somewhere?)"

Daniel asks looking at their bags.

"Yes. What can we do for you?" Thando questions as the others sit down on the couch.

"Hlalan phansi sikhulume. (Sit down so we can talk.)" Dumsile says.

"Njengoba bemgshilo aunty, sisendleleni. (Just like I said. We are on our way out.)" Thando insists but it seems the four siblings arent ready to go just yet.



"You know what, you'll find us in the car." Ndumi announces taking their bags and walking out. Thulani hands her the car keys and Phepsile Zethu follow her out.

"Bayaphi ke laba? (Where are they going?)" Nomathemba shouts after them. They ignore her even when she calls their names.

"Indzelelo yiningi laykhaya. (The disrespect is real around here.)" Dumsile adds crossing her arms on her chest and sitting back on the couch. Thando pulls up a chair and sits down while Thulani stands by the table, his arms deep in his pockets, his legs crossed and his gun sitting pretty on his back, ready for anything.

"So, sinsita ngani ke boNkosi? (How can we help you?)" Mfankhona sits forward resting his elbows on his knees. His grey pants pulling up to reveal his mismatched socks.

"Have you gone to see your father in prison?" He asks. Thando bursts out laughing, earning herself nasty stares from her aunts uncles.

"Wow, for a moment there I thought you were serious, but clearly I was wrong. Anyways let's start again. What can I do for you?" She hisses, her rage slowly rising inside her.

"He is in hospital. The doctor's say he has been raped." Thando

claps her hands as the words trail off her uncles tongue.

"And here I was doubting the justice system in this country. But look at God. Karma has everyone's address afterall."

"This isn't funny Noluthando." Dumsile wheezes ready to stand up but her sister holds her back.

"You're right. It wasn't funny either when he pinned me on the bed and shoved his dick inside me breaking my hymen and making me bleed on the bed. It wasn't funny when he pinned me on the wall in the bathroom and stuck his fingers inside me. It wasn't funny....."

"Okay that's enough." Daniel shouts. "This is not about you. Jerome, the man who raised you is in hospital fighting for his life."

"You're unbelievable you know that. He stood in front of everyone and admitted to not just raping his daughters but leaving one of them to bleed to death and yet you're here acting like he is a saint. What the hell is wrong with you?"

Thando screams at them.

"Do not talk to us like that. We are still your elders."

Mfankhona reminds her.

"Wow." She mutters and stands up.

"He made a mistake. And this is something we should have discussed as a family, hhayi kutsi uhambe uyosgcunula tidvwaba embikwebantfu. (Not for you to go and air our dirty

laundry.)" Daniel yelled. Thando chuckles and walks to the door. She holds the door open and looks at the grown men and women sitting on her couch defending the man who ruined her life.

"I hope and pray none of your children ever have to go through what me and my sisters went through. I pray they never have to come to you and tell you that they have been violated. I pray they never have to see the vile and sick human beings you are to stand here and put my pain, my sisters pain down to a mistake." She says, tears gushing down her face.

"He wants to see you, all of you." Dumsile says standing up from the couch. Thando wipes her tears and smiles.

"Please leave. And never, ever set foot in my house again. I will pray for you. I'm not sure if God will hear me but I'll pray for you."

"Noluthando!"

"LEAVE!" Thando shouts and the four siblings follow each other out. Dumsile turns to look at Thando.

"Thando."

"Hamba aunty. (Go.)" They follow each other out. Thando bangs the door behind them before Thulani pulls her to him and engulfs her in a hug.

**It gets easier. It hurts less and less with time. That's what her sister has been trying to convince her off the past few days. But it doesn't feel like it to her. The guilt of what her kids went through is eating her up, the shame she feels for having failed to protect them is even worse. She keeps questioning herself on why she wasn't there for them, why she didn't see when the changes happened, why she hadn't paid close attention to them. But she also knows no matter how many times she stays in the house she will have to go out and face reality eventually.**

She's been trying to ignore the banging on her front door but the person seems relentless. They've gone around the house and they even knocked on her bedroom window. She thought she'd stay in bed and ignore whoever it is but the banging is starting to irritate her. She gets off her bed and puts her gown on before dragging herself to the front door.

As soon as she opens the door her in-laws push their way in. She stands there and watches them say something's but her mind is too preoccupied to even perceive what's happening. She drags herself to the couch and silently watches her husband's siblings fighting for something. Dumsile drags her out of her thoughts and brings her to the present.

"Have you heard anything we just said?" She asks looking at her brother's wife. Thulsile looks around the room and sees bulging eyes staring back at her. She sighs.

"What's going on?" They look at her like she just lost her damn mind. They've been shouting and screaming the past two minutes but it seems she's heard nothing.

"Thulsile, where is your head at?" Mfankhona asks hitting his finger on the side of his head.

"Just tell me what you want Mfankhona." The siblings look at each other shocked. She never calls them by their names. The sisters maybe but never the brothers.

"Thuli, your husband is in hospital. Doctor's say he was raped in prison." A smile forms on her face.

"Karma is a bitch isnt it?" She says close to laughing. Maybe this day will be better than the past few ones after all. She thinks to herself.

"Are you listening to yourself right now Thulsile? Your husband is being tortured in that prison. He needs to come home as soon as possible. He hasnt even been sentenced yet, imagine what will happen once he is sentenced and sent to prison with hardcore criminals." Daniel says. Thuli chuckles wondering how these people's brains work, Jerome is a hardcore criminal. No sane person can do what he did and expect to get away with it.

But then again he has been getting away with it for a while now.

"Let's be honest with each other shall we." She begins. "None of you are here because you care about your brother, the only reason you're defending his bullshit is because you know when he goes to prison, so does the money he sends you every month." The siblings gasp staring at her.

"How dare you?" Nomathemba hisses.

"You know it's true." Thulsile fires back. "Tell me NomT, who is going to pay for your daughter's university fees with Jerome in prison? You? Your drunkard husband? I dont think so. So I understand you wanting him out, none of you have been smart enough to work for anything because big brother always provided. And now that his actions have caught up with him you're trembling, and you'll do anything to 'save him'. But we all know you just want to save yourselves."

"First your daughters disrected us and now you? Its quite clear where they get their nasty attitude from." Mfankhona sneers, his nose crinkled.

"If I were you I'd be home right now checking on your kids. Ask your daughter's if Jerome ever touched them inappropriately or not. If he can do this to his own kids I wonder what he did to yours when you were not looking." Dumsile claps her hands

before standing up and looking down at Thuli.

"It's obvious what's happening here, you and your nasty ass daughters teamed up to try and destroy my brother. The whole time you pretended you care about him and wanting him out of prison was just pretence. Now you're showing your true colors."

"If you say so. Do me a favor and leave my house. And you're wrong, I didn't pretend to believe him, I was hoping he was a decent man. I turned on my daughters and chose to believe him, until he opened his mouth and admitted how evil he is. So excuse me if I choose to celebrate him getting to experience what he put my kids through. He deserves everything that's happening to him. Now leave my house and don't ever come back here to tell me about that son of a bitch again." She stands up and points them to the door. "Please leave." The siblings stand up and follow each other to the door. Mfankhona turns to her.

"I hope you don't regret this because my brother will appeal this." Thulsile rolls her eyes.

"Kube awphumanga nge recess eskolweni ngabe uyati kutsi iconfession means uyalivuma licala. Akuna appeal itawenteka la. (If you hadn't left school at recess you'd know that a confession is an admission of guilt. There won't be an appeal." Mfankhona clicks his tongue and walks out. Thulsile sinks back

onto the couch, hearing about Jerome's suffering has made her mood go from 0 to 50. The only thing right now that would get her to a hundred would be her apologizing to her kids. But fear of rejection keeps her glued in the same spot.

## **NONDUMISO**

**Their trip to Badplass was cut short thanks to her aunts and uncles. They ended up having a mini picnic inside the house since Thando was too upset to go. The others have already gone to bed. Her insomnia has taken over, even though she wants to sleep, she cant. She's decided to go back to Joburg in the next couple of days**

### **Advertisement**

**her stay here is over. Work beckons. She's used up all her leave days.**

Her phone vibrates on the couch and she picks it up. Mgazini Ntshangase is calling her. Again. She's been avoiding his calls. As much as their break up wasn't the most amicable, she cant help how she feels around him. He's probably the only men she's ever been with and gave 80 percent of herself to. Of



course she kept her past where it belonged, in her past. But she still gave more to the relationship than she's given to any other. Bokang has been distant lately, it's like when he found out about her past he didn't know how to handle it. Not even a single line or word offering her comfort and a promise to love her despite her scars. She's hurt alright. But it's not something she didn't expect. People always change when they find out something traumatic about someone.

"It's late." She says as soon as she picks up the phone. She hears him sigh before he gulps down something.

"How are you?" He asks sounding calmer than usual.

"I'm fine."

"I'll be in Mpumalanga in a couple of days to finalize your father's case. I'd like to see you."

"I won't be here. I'm going back to Joburg in a couple of days." She tells him, although her mouth is saying one thing and her body is saying something else. Of all her sisters, once she was free from her father's grasp, sex became her escape when it came to dealing with her issues. A huge contrast to what most people would expect from a rape victim but for her it worked, Mgazini on the other hand didn't just fuck her to oblivion, although he had his moments, he was gentle with her and her body remembers that.

"That's perfect. We can drive back together. Please say yes."  
***What do you have to lose? It's not like Bokang is offering to come get you since he brought you here.*** Her conscience taunts her.

"Fine. I'll see you in a couple of days."

"Perfect. Now go to sleep MaNkosi, it's late." He tells her before hanging up the phone. A smile creeps onto her face at the word of endearment. If it hadn't been for Mgazini hiding his girlfriend at the time their relationship would have worked. They are polar opposites of each other but they seemed perfect for each other.

The bedroom door opens and Thando walks out. She makes her way to the kitchen and gets a glass of water. She's about to go back when Ndumi stops her. She looks at her sister who pat's the couch next to her as an invite for Thando to join her. Thando is hesitant, but she sits anyway. Ndumi rests her one leg on the couch so she can face her sister.

"You don't have to say anything but I want to say I'm sorry. I know I've said it before but I'm truly sorry. For the longest time I blamed you for not speaking up, but I allowed my anger to cloud me so much that I failed to see that you did your best to protect us even though you didn't have to. I think a part of me knows I blamed you because it was easier for my conscience, I

kept quiet too, I should have said something but I didnt. And blaming you seemed easier than looking in the mirror and admitting I failed too. I'm sorry I wasnt here to help you carry a burden you should have never carried to begin with."

"Ndumi...."

"Please let me finish. You're my big sister, and you've fulfilled that role better than I did to Phepsile and Zethu. I ran, like the coward that I am I ran and never looked back when I should have stayed and fought with you. If I had stayed then maybe we, together would have protected Phepsile and Zethu. So I'm sorry. For letting you fight on your own. But you've won. Jerome is going to pay for his crimes, he is already paying, it's time for you to breathe and allow us to carry our own burdens now. Its time for Thando to heal and be selfish with herself. We will be Okay." She wipes the tears rolling down her sister's cheeks. "Its time to breathe siswam. (My sister.)"

Thando draws close to her and brings her in for a hug. Partly relieved and partly surprised at Ndumi's words.

"I dont blame you for leaving. I'm glad you did. It's you choosing to never look back that hurt. A little hello would have been nice every once in a while but I understand that we might have gone through the same thing but we have different coping mechanisms. And I'm happy education was yours. I'm happy you came back and I'm happy we won this together. Now we

can move on together." Ndumi brings her pinky up making Thando laugh. Pinky promises used to be their thing when they were kids. They link their pinkies together and kiss their little fingers before bursting out laughing.

"From now on, we do everything together." She says.

"Deal." Thando answers. "Let me go to sleep. You should do the same." She gets up and takes her water to the bedroom leaving Ndumi with her less clouded and jumbled up thoughts. When the clock hits midnight she looks at it for a while before silently saying "happy birthday to me."

**"THANDO! Yima phela, wase ugijima kangaka, mani phela. (Stop. You're walking too fast. Stop.)" You'd think by now she would have got the message but Dumsile seems determined to speak to Thando. She's been calling out for her for the past five minutes, even with Thando ignoring her she is still relentless. Thando keeps walking as fast as she can hoping to get home but Dumsile's constant shouting is drawing unnecessary attention to her.**

Her steps slow down until her aunt catches up with her. She stops and looks at her panting next to her.

"Hhay uyagijima bo. (You're fast.)" She says trying to catch her breath.

"Ufunani aunty? (What do you want?)" Thando asks impatiently.

"Waze wabaluhlata bo. (You're so rude.)" She looks at her expecting an answer but she gets none. "Hhay kulungile. Uya nini kuyobona uyihlo? (Fine. When are you going to see your father?)"

"Aunty, ugmisele loko nje? Nayi ke imphendvulo, angiyi. Konkhe lolokwenteka kuye uyaku desevert. (Is that why you stopped me? Here's my answer, I'm not going. Everything that's happening to him is what he deserves.)"

She walks away leaving her aunt spewing insults and profanities for the world to hear. When she gets home she finds the house empty. Phepsile and Ndumi are going back to Joburg, they've been preparing for their trip since yesterday. They won't even wait for the sentence to happen. Thando takes a seat on the couch. A part of her is tempted to face her father and ask him questions, yes he confessed and admitted to everything but she still needs answers.

She changes her clothes. The dress she's wearing won't do when she goes to him. She puts on a pair of Jean's and a tshirt. She grabs her sweater and her handbag and leaves. She leaves the door unlocked for her sisters when they come back. As soon as she gets outside the gate a taxi pulls up. She stops it and gets in. The drive to the hospital seems long. Her heart is beating out of control, common sense says she must turn back and go home but the broken child inside her needs answers. Answers she knows she can't get anywhere else except from the lips of Jerome Nkosi.

The taxi pulls up to the hospital and she's the last one to get out. She watches as the other patients walk into the hospital. *You're doing the right thing. This is the only way to get closure.* Her conscience tells her. She takes one step forward at a time until she finds herself in front of the receptionist. She stands in

line waiting her turn.

"Next." The woman shouts not even looking up. Thando steps forward and stands in front of the nurse.

"Sawubona. I'm looking for a patient." The woman looks up and immediately her face goes from annoyed to pity. For a moment Thando is confused by the change in her facial appearance, but as soon as she says her name, Thando's heart sinks to her stomach. Of course she knows her. Everyone knows her now. And like everyone else, she's not sure how to react to her. Somehow people walk on eggshells around her now, they fear saying the wrong thing but some dont know what to say, and this nurse seems to be one of them.

"Can I see my father?"

"Go down the hallway, third door on your right." She tells her with her eyes still glued to Thando. Thando nods her head and walks away. When she gets to her dad's room she finds a police officer seating outside the ward reading a newspaper. He looks up when he hears her getting closer.

"Can I help you?" He asks looking at her from head to toe.

"Sawubona, I'm here to see my father."

"And who is your father?"

"Jerome Nkosi." The man stands up and immediately his height intimidates Thando.

"Oh. You're the one who put him in here." He looks at her, his eyes piercing and mocking. "So ufunani lana? (What do you want?)"

"I need to talk to him."

"Mhmmm. Okay. Ngena. (Go in.)" Thando walks in with the man's eyes scanning her. She says a silent prayer for the oversized denim and sweater.

Her heart gallops all over her chest when she walks into the room. Jerome is laying on his side facing the window. Thando takes a few slow steps till she's standing behind him. She's slowly doubting coming here. But there's no going back now. She has to face her demons, and her biggest one is sleeping right in front of her. He feels her presence and turns around to look at her.

"Noluthando." She steps back when he reaches his hand out to touch her. He looks worse than when she last saw him in court. He has bruises all over his face. His eye is swollen and closed, he has a cut on his forehead, his cheek is covered in a bandage with some blood seeping through. "You came." A creepy smile forms on his face.

"Who did this to you?" He pulls himself up despite the pain he is feeling.

"Its nothing. Don't worry about it."



"I'm not. But I do have something to say to you."

"It's okay, I forgive you." Thando laughs. This is not what she was expecting. Forgiveness? How does he forgive her?

"Forgive me for what?"

"For everything. I know deep down in your heart you know I did nothing wrong. I shouldn't be here. So I forgive you." His confidence in the words coming out of his mouth is baffling for Thando. Does he really believe he is innocent in all this?

"You're unbelievable you know that? Do you really believe you're innocent? After all that you put us through you don't believe you deserve to be here? Something is wrong with you."

"Nothing is wrong with me." He hisses, his eyes filled with anger. "What we did is the same thing you do with all the boys you sleep with. So now it's a problem when we do it? You're hypocrites." What boys? Thando wonders. She's never had a boyfriend, let alone sleep with anyone, her first and only sexual encounter was in the hands of her father, a person meant to protect her. And now here he is thinking what he was doing was normal.

"I'm glad they beat the shit out of you. You deserve worse than this. And I hope someone rapes you till you bleed and cry the same way we cried when you tortured us. You deserve all the hell that's coming your way. No sane father would do this to his

children and not even feel remorse. You deserve to be hung."  
He laughs. A mocking sarcastic laugh.

"You ungrateful stupid child. I took care of you

Advertisement

provided for you. You're teacher and it's all my money. The least you could do was pay me for it."

"By sleeping with your children? You're a parent, it was and always has been your responsibility to take care of your children."

"You are so fucken naive. Let me tell you something. You, I'll never feel bad for what I did to you. Not after what your father did to me. Now all those nights when you squirmed and cried claiming to be in pain, it was all worth it." Thando stands there with her mouth wide open. Shock, pain and regret running through her soul. All she wanted was closure, but now she's got more questions than answers.

"What do you mean what my father did to you? You are my father." She whispers, her voice filled with pain and tears running down her face. He laughs, throwing his head back.

"Ask your mother." He says then turns back around and faces the window. Thando, feeling overwhelmed and confused slowly steps back till her back hits the wall. She wipes her tears and walks to the door. She turns back one last time to look at the

man she used to look up to, now she can't look at him without feeling disgusted.

She walks out and quickly walks down the passage without looking back, even with the guard calling out to her. When she gets to reception she finds the nurses huddled together. Their whispers stop when they see her. She walks past them and heads out of the hospital gate. She stands under a tree waiting for a taxi to come by, one thing still ringing in her head. If Jerome is not her father like he said then who is he? On one hand she is happy that she might not be biologically related to her rapist, but on the other she wonders who her father could be, and why he couldn't protect her from the monster she lived with.

A taxi pulls up and she gets in with one destination in mind. Her mother's house. The taxi drops her off and she quickly goes inside. It doesn't look like anyone is home. She knocks and gets no reply. The curtains are drawn but her mother's car is parked outside. Just when she is about to turn back and leave the curtain moves and she sees her mother peeking out. The curtain closes again and the door opens.

"Thando. What are you doing here?" Her mum asks standing in the doorway with her gown on. Thando wonders why her

mother would be wearing her gown this late. It's late afternoon and from the looks of it she looks like she hasn't left the house.

"Can I come in?"

"Uhm, yeah, sure." Thulsile opens the burglar door and stands aside allowing Thando to go in. She looks around the dark house and wonders what is going on. The thick curtains are preventing the light from coming in and the closed windows have caused the house to be stuffy.

"Are you Okay?" Her mum asks. She turns around to face her.

"I should be asking you that. The curtains are drawn, windows are closed and you're wearing your gown at 4:30 in the afternoon. What's going on with you?" Thulsile looks away, embarrassment washing over her. She goes to the window and pulls the curtains apart before opening the windows. She turns back to the daughter trying to hide her feelings.

"I'm fine Thando. Why are you here? Are your sisters okay?"

She takes a seat on the dining table chair. Thando takes the seat across from her.

"Who is my father?"

"What?"

"Who is my father? Jerome said my father did something to him which is why he doesn't feel guilty about what he did to me.

Who is my father?"

"You went to see him?"

"I needed answers. Instead I got more questions. And he seems proud of what he did. How did you stay all these years with a sadistic narcissistic person like him?" Thulsile heaves a huge sigh and runs her hands on her face before crossing them on the table.

"He wasn't like this. The man I fell in love with. The man I chose over....." She breathes out again trying to fill her lungs with air. She knew this day would come but she didn't think it come so soon. But then again twenty five years isn't soon enough. "The man I married was protective, loving and kind. I chose him over Mesuli because he was stable, I thought he would be the perfect person to raise a family with." She tells her.

"I don't understand how Mesuli is involved in all this. Start from the beginning because I'm confused right now."

"I need tea." Thulsile gets up and goes to the kitchen. She turns the kettle on and brews her cup of coffee. She makes a cup of hot chocolate for Thando. She puts the two cups down on the table.

"I'm not going anywhere without the answers I'm looking for." Thando tells her. Thulsile takes a sip of her tea then carefully places the cup on the table.

"I met Jerome when I was in my mid teens. He was handsome

and kind. I was determined to finish school and become a nurse so he would help me with my school work. When I passed Standard 10 I applied to nursing school and I was accepted. Unfortunately i couldnt go because I found out I was pregnant with your brother. I had to stay home and raise him. Jerome and I got married soon after I found out and everything was going well. He promised me I'd go to nursing school when Sabelo was three, mum had agreed to watch him for me, but when he turned three your father..... Jerome changed his mind. I applied behind his back and I was accepted. A few months after that Sabelo was hit by a car in town. I took him there because I needed to do some paperwork before I go to school. He was admitted to hospital for months which meant I couldn't go to school. He died and again I was forced to stay home and mourn him. Jerome blamed me for it. I decided to reapply to nursing school just to get away from him. I was accepted again and this time I was determined to go. Our marriage was on rocky grounds so I left. I met Mesuli, he was dangerous and a risk taker. He was fearless and I loved that. But when I found out I was pregnant with you all that he was became a con and not a pro. I didn't want to raise you while simultaneously dodging bullets. Besides you the only thing I got out of that time was my degree. I came back home and fixed things with Jerome. I chose him over Mesuli because I thought he would make a great father. He was a great dad to Sabelo so why not. If

I knew then that I was leading you into a lions den I would have stayed with Mesuli. And that is something that gnaws at my spirit every day. I failed you. I thought I was protecting you but I failed you. I wont ask for your forgiveness because I dont deserve it. But I'm truly sorry Noluthando, I'm really sorry I failed to protect you and your sisters. I am truly sorry."

Thando sits there and watches her mother sobbing. She wants to feel sorry for her but knowing that Mesuli is her father makes her question everything about her life. Her identity, her past even her future. But the one thing she is certain of is that her mother's tears haven't moved a single muscle inside her, she knows it will take more than salty water emitting from tear ducts for her to forgive and forget. She gets off the chair and walks out with her mum's sobs following behind her.

**ZETHU**

**Today officially mark's 30 days before her birthday. Even though she's been claiming to be 18 for a while now, in 30 days her ID will also say the same thing. She's excited but scared at the same time. A few months ago she was looking forward to turning 18. Her new age would give her ownership over her own life, even the government would deem her an adult old enough to make her choices, she had plans to leave the same way Phepsile and Ndumi did. She'd leave and never come back. But now she has no reason to run.**

Catching up on school work has been a bit of a struggle. She went from being unconscious for 2 months to having to deal with a court case that had more speed bumps than a suburban road. And now with exams looming, she's trying to catch up as fast as she can. Thando told her she could write next year but she refused. And now she's having a hard time, but like she always tells herself, if she could survive being molested by her father for all these years then she can survive an exam.

She gets home after school and finds a woman standing by the door. Thando is still at school, Phepsile and Ndumi are gone so why would she be here?



"Hi. Can I help you?" The woman smiles and extends her hand out to her for a handshake.

"Hi. I'm Dr Gugu Sithole. Your court appointed Therapist."

Zethu takes her hand and shakes it.

"Ok. What are you doing here?" She opens the door and walks in with her new guest behind her.

"Uhm, well I've been trying to set up an appointment to see you and your sisters but I haven't got a reply. You must be Zethu right?"

"Yeah. You can sit down." Zethu grabs a chair while Gugu takes the couch.

"How are you holding up since your father confessed?" Gugu asks taking out her journal and putting it on her lap.

"The session has started already?" Zethu questions looking at the woman who is already comfortable on the couch.

"Yes. Unless you'd like to get out of the uniform then I'll wait."

The smile on her face coupled with the look of determination on her eyes tells Zethu all she needs to know. This woman is not going anywhere anytime soon.

"Actually I would like to take off my uniform." Gugu nods giving Zethu the go ahead.

When she gets to the bedroom Zethu takes her phone out of her pocket and calls her sister.

"Zethu? Uright?" Thando asks as soon as she picks up the phone.

"Yeah, the therapist is here." She whispers.

"Why?" Thando is not as surprised as Zethu thought she would be. The therapist has been calling her trying to make appointments but she's been brushing her aside. In her mind she doesn't need therapy. But maybe Zethu does. And maybe this will be good for her.

"She says she's here for a session. Should I tell her to wait for you?"

"No. Go ahead. I'll catch up with you. I'm almost done here anyway."

"Okay. Hurry up." She hangs up the phone and takes off her uniform. She puts on some yoga pants and an oversized tshirt and walks back to the lounge. Gugu is still on the couch going through her documents.

"Can I get you anything?" Zethu politely asks.

"Just water please." She goes to the kitchen and returns with two glasses of water. She puts both of them on the coffee table and then takes a seat. "Thank you. Can we start now." Zethu nods her head and clasps her hands together on her lap wishing she'd worn her oversized sweater instead of the tshirt. At least she'd be able to hide her hands in it.

"So Zethu, tell me about yourself." Zethu stares at Gugu wondering why she would ask her that and not get straight to the point. She's not here to know what Zethu likes and dislikes. She's here to psycho analyse her and see if her whole ordeal has turned her into a crazy person.

"Aren't you supposed to be asking about my rape?"

"We will get there eventually. Let's start with something easy. Tell me who Zethu is." Zethu looks over Gugu's head at the window behind her. She also has no idea who Gugu is. Her childhood started out great, but somewhere along the line when puberty hit she lost herself, she lost the woman she was growing up to become. In her place is a broken child still stuck in that bathroom where her father first became inappropriate with her.

"Honestly, I don't know who Zethu is." She answers. She's almost surprised how easy it is to not feel nervous or judged by the woman sitting in front of her. It could be her calm aura that makes her relax or her eyes that draws you in and almost see deep into your soul. Either way, she's glad Gugu is easy to talk to. Talking to her sisters is not the same as talking to a stranger. Talking to her sisters is like preaching to the choir, they know what she's been through because they have lived it too. A stranger on the other hand will come with pity

Advertisement

buy another will listen with no judgment, the problem comes with figuring out who is who.

"Okay, tell me what's your favourite color."

"It used to be pink, but now pink just reminds me of my pink hello kitty towel my father used to wipe himself when he was done molesting me for the first time. It reminds me of the pink sheets he used to stain with his sperm when he was done with me." Gugu scribbles things on her journal as Zethu speaks.

"Sorry, that's not what you asked."

"Don't do that. Don't apologize for saying what's on your mind. I'm here to listen to what you have to say not what I want to hear. Your words are more important than my questions. Ok." Zethu sighs and nods her head. "Good. Now tell me, since you don't like pink now, what color do you gravitate towards the most?"

"Black. It's dark, it's not easy to see when it's stained and it's, it's just a calm colour."

"Do you think it represents anything about you?"

"Everything. Until recently no one knew I was damaged, it was easy to hide everything behind a smile and pretend like the world is pitch perfect."

"Are you Okay with people knowing what happened to you?"

Zethu sighs and takes a drink of her water then puts the glass

back.

"I thought I would be. But I hate the pitying looks people constantly give me. I liked it better when people saw me as just another girl and not the girl who was molested by her father."

"Do you regret coming forward?" She closes her eyes and heaves out a deep sigh.

"Not really. I'm glad everything is out there. But I don't like the way people have been staring at me. It's like I'm some fragile glass that people are afraid will break if they say the wrong thing."

"I can understand that. Do you talk to your sisters about what happened?" She shrugs her shoulders and plays with her phone.

"Sometimes. But it's difficult to be honest because you also have to take someone else's feelings into consideration. Although I can talk to Thando."

"Thando is the oldest right?"

"Yes. She's overprotective. She has a tendency to put herself last and everyone else first. Sometimes I think she forgets that she exists too."

"And how does it make you feel seeing her do that?"

"Bad. I feel like if she didn't feel the need to protect us she would probably be far with her life."

"In what way exactly?"

"Career wise, her love life, I know she didn't want to be a teacher but she did it just so she could stay close to home and protect us. And I'm sure by now she would have met someone to love her, although I think Thulani would be it but we'll see how that goes."

The door opens and Thando walks in. She's surprised to find Gugu still here. She was hoping she'd be gone by the time she gets back. She looks at her sister and sees her red eyes, no tears but she can tell she's been holding back her tears. It might be too soon to tell but she's hopeful Therapy will work. "Sanbonani." She greets and places her bag on the floor. Gugu stands up and extends her hand for a handshake. Thando takes it then stands next to her sister.

"Gugu Sithole. I'm your therapist."

"I figured. Zethu told me you're here."

"Would you like to join us?"

"No thanks. I'm good. But you two can continue your session. I'll be in the bedroom." She walks away before Gugu can say anything else.

Thando locks herself in the bedroom till she hears Zethu walking out Gugu. Only then does she get off the bed and go back to the lounge. She takes out meat from the fridge and puts it in the sink. Zethu comes back and sits down on the

table.

"How was your session?" Thando asks and sits down. Zethu shrugs her shoulders and scrolls down her phone.

"It was okay I guess. Gugu seems nice."

"Mhm. I see. Will you see her again?"

"Maybe. It was kind of nice talking to someone with zero pity or judgement. You can talk to her too you know. She's free."

Thando laughs and stands up.

"I'm sure she is. But I'm not ready yet." She pulls out a glass from the cupboard and pours herself some juice then sits back down. "Besides. I'm still trying to process what mum said about Jerome not being my father."

"Inwish I was you. I'd give anything to not have that man's DNA running through my veins."

"That's the only good thing that's come out of this. And to think the whole time I thought Mesuli was one of Jerome's cronies."

She takes a sip of her juice. "Speaking of mum, are you going to see her?"

"Nope. I'm not ready yet. I know she's trying but I'm not ready."

"Understandable. I have some good news." She takes out an envelope from her pocket and hands it to Zethu. "What's this?"

"Read." Zethu opens the letter. Her mouth drops when she sees the content of the letter. "This is an acceptance letter."

"I know right. And the good news is I also got mine. I'm going

back to school to actually study medicine like I always wanted."

"But I didn't apply to any college or university. I was in a coma remember so how did this happen?"

"I applied on your behalf. After seeing you almost bleed to death I realized life is too short. I know before I had to put my dream aside and study teaching for the sake of staying here and protect you guys but I failed at that and there's nothing I can do about it but I can still put me first." Zethu laughs and Thando looks at her confusion all over her face.

"You do realise this sort of defeats the purpose of that. You'll still be your usual overprotective self even in Gauteng."

"Maybe. But at least there I'll know Jerome will never bother you again. I'll sleep better at night."

"Okay. But how did you know I'd wake up? What if I didn't wake up?" Thando shrugs her shoulders and stands up.

"Litsemba alibulali sis wami. (Hope doesn't kill.)" Zethu stands up and follows her sister to the sink and wraps her arms around her waist, and rests her head on her back.

"Thank you. You're the best sister in the whole entire universe." Thando turns around and looks at her sister.

"To new beginnings right?"

"New beginnings." They hook their pinkie fingers together, marking their promise to leaving the past behind and starting over. On a clean slate.



**NONDUMISO**

**"Your boyfriend is here." Phepsile says walking into Ndumi's room. Ndumi looks at her watch. It's too early for Bokang to be here.**

**"He is early. He's usually here just before 8." Ndumi puts on her shoes and turns to her sister. "How do I look?" Phepsile looks at her sister's outfit. It's just a pair of purple tailored pants, a white shirt and a pair of black stilettos.**

**"You look the same way you look everyday. Professional and boring. Besides, why are you so concerned about how you look today? Is it because Mgazini is here." Ndumi stops brushing her hair and turns back to her.**

**"What did you say about Mgazini?" Her heart begins to race.**

**"He is here. What did you think I meant when I said your boyfriend is here?"**

**"I thought you meant Bokang." She whispers hoping their uninvited guest won't over hear their conversation.**

**"You do know Bokang always comes to your room if he gets here early. Why would I have to tell you about him?" Phepsile leaves her sister panicking.**

Ndumi walks out after her sister and goes to the lounge. And sure enough Mgazini is sitting on the couch like he owns the

place. His one leg is over his knee and he has a newspaper in his hand. Ndumi's panic slowly simmers down as her mind takes her back to the moment when she first met him. She was just a clueless 18 year old who'd moved to the big city to further her education. She met him a few weeks after her arrival. He was a guest in her law class. Her lecturer had invited him for that day. Of course all the first years were swooning over him. She was determined to pass her classes and get what she came here for before even thinking about boys, so when all the girls were day dreaming about Mgazini being in their beds she was busy taking notes. Even though she was trying hard to focus on her school work, she somehow drew his attention.

Mgazini was used to girls throwing themselves at him, but for some reason, like all typical males, the one girl who didnt give a rat's ass about him was the one who caught his attention. After the class he found Ndumi sitting in the school lawn busy with her notes. Again he was drawn to her. He decided to properly introduce himself.

"Hi." Ndumi looked up at the man blocking the sun from her. Even though it was scorching hot, she sat under the sun a lot, being the lightest among her siblings made people question her identity, she was bullied for her light skin so sitting under the sun she thought she'd get darker and then no one would

question her. She was used to it, but no matter how many hours she spent under the sun she was still light and she hated it.

"Can I help you?" She asked him, annoyance filling her voice.

"Its too hot to be under the sun don't you think?"

"Why do you care?"

"You're going to burn yourself. Besides, I hear sitting under the sun for too long can cause skin cancer. So why are you torturing yourself?" Ndumi sighed when she realised he wasnt about to let things go.

"If I move will you leave me alone?"

"Maybe." She gathered her notes and got up. She walked to a tree that had just been left vacant by a group of students and she sat under it. But Mgazini was still right there.

"Happy now?"

"Yep. Do you need help with those notes?"

"No. I'm fine thank you. Besides, don't you have a high profile case you need to attend to?" Mgazini's lips turned up to form a smile, so she wasnt clueless about him afterall. He thought. He sat down next to her.

"The case was postponed. The judge had an emergency and the prosecutor asked for the case to be postponed. Its nice to know you did your research on me." He said with a smirk on his face.

He was handsome, no one could deny that. His confidence added to his charm. He was dearly respected in his profession.

"What is it that you want from me exactly?"

"Why do you want to be a lawyer?"

"Why do you care?"

"I dont. I'm just curious. The way you're so focused on your work makes me think there is something pushing you to be this focused. I've seen enough people who seem determined to be lawyers and when they see the work that goes into it they give up. But you dont seem like the giving up type." Ndumi chuckled and closed her books.

"You've spoken to me for just a few minutes and you think you know me? You're really sure of yourself but dont think you know other people just because they intrigue you." She got up and with her books in her hand and her bag on her back. "It was nice to meet you Advocate Ntshangase." She left him sitting there hoping that would be the last time he spoke to her. But she was wrong. Just a few days later he was back in her class teaching. And of course his focus never left her.

When she'd left home she forced herself to push her experience to the back of her head. The anger she had for her father helped her keep her vulnerability in check. She didnt want anyone to know or even get a sniff of her brokenness. In her head she left the girl who was molested by her father back

home. Getting into a relationship with Mgazini was more of a test for her. She wanted to see how far she could go without her past catching up to her. She wanted to see how it would feel like to be normal, even if it was fake.

Their relationship lasted for four years without any hiccups or problems. She was, happy, somewhat with him. He helped her with her schoolwork and he didnt dig deep into her life. He never understood why she never went home when all the other students did but he never pushed her to tell him. He just took whatever she told him and figured when she was good and ready she would tell him. When Phepsile joined her in Joburg and found out about her relationship with Mgazini her past seemed to dig it's way out of the grave she thought she'd carefully covered. Finding out about his other girlfriend was the perfect excuse for her to dump him. She couldnt afford for him to see the real her, the broken her. So

Advertisement

even though in her heart she knew she loved him, she chose to let him go.

Everything was fine for her, she continued with her studies, graduated and continued on to do her LLB. Seeing Mgazini stand up in court in defense of the same man who had hurt her

and broke her scared her, she'd been doing her research trying to make sure her father was prosecuted. When she was done with her LLB and then her articles, she was hoping to get a job in the NPA, she wanted to be the one to prosecute her father and bring him face to face with justice. But Thando had beaten her to it when she opened a case against him. On the one hand she was happy her father was getting what he deserved. On the other, she wished she was the one to hammer the last nail into his coffin. Even though she didnt get what she was hoping for, she did come face to face with a past she was hoping would remain there, in the past. But it didnt, right now it was sitting in her couch.

"Mgazini. What are you doing here?" She asks him. He folds the paper and looks at her.

"I came to give you a lift to work." He tells her.

"I dont need one. My boyfriend is coming to pick me up."

"Well I got here first so I get first dibs. Are you ready to go?" He always was pushy and stubborn. And she knows he wont leave. She goes back to her room and picks up her phone. She texts Bokang telling him not to come pick her up. She gets her bags and walks out to the lounge.

"You look nice." Mgazini says standing up.

"Thanks. Can we go." She opens the door and walks out with

Mgazini behind her. "How did you get up here?" She asks him while they wait for the lift to come up.

"I have my ways." The lift opens and they get in. She's sure 'his ways' include a few hundred rands in the pockets of the security guards. "I hear your father will be given life behind bars."

"No thanks to you." He sighs and turns to look at her.

"I was just doing my job." The lift opens and Ndumi walks out. They get into his car and he drives out of the complex. "They drive to the Legal Aid offices where Ndumi works in silence. He parks the car in front of the building. She turns and looks at him.

"Why are you here Mgazini? Seriously. Why are you here? Your client is going to jail so there is no need for you to be here." She tells him.

"I'm not here for that. I am here because I want you back." She laughs. "I'm serious Nondumiso. I love you. I know I made a mistake letting you go the first time, I figured it was my punishment for hurting you, but I've been, lonely, without you. I miss you."

"Cute. But you have a girlfriend and I have a boyfriend."

"Had. Past tense." He takes her hand and holds it. "Now I know why you were so closed off when it came to certain things and I fully understand. I also understand that you need time to deal

with everything and I won't push you to do anything. But I just have one request. Please talk to the therapist the court appointed." She pulls her hand away from his and looks ahead at the building in front of her.

"I don't need a therapist, I'm fine. I have to go." She opens the door and gets out of the car. She walks into the building without looking back.

She gets to her desk and sits down with her head buried in her hands, until someone taps her on the shoulder. She lifts her head up and turns around to find the office gossip Masego.

"My offer still stands." Masego tells her.

"And my refusal still stands thank you very much." She crosses her arms on her chest looking at the middle aged woman in front of her.

"Ndumi. You need the cleansing. You and your siblings. This whole thing that happened to you is not normal." She says dragging a chair and sitting down.

"I thought rape is normal in this country."

"Yes but in your case, it's not. Your father molested you." She whispers as if the others in the office don't know anything. "I mean he literally started from your older sister, came down to you and then your younger siblings. That's not normal. Plus I heard he made you guys get abortions. You need to name



those kids and free their spirits." Ndumi sighs and turns away from the yapping Masego. She switches on her computer. She takes her headsets from her bag and puts them in her ear before blasting her music on high, silencing the noise from Masego.

She might be a nosey loud colleague but Ndumi wonders if she might be right. Maybe a cleansing will do them good. And who knows, it might just be what she needs to move on with her life. Maybe, just maybe it could put her mind at ease and help her forget her past. Just maybe.

**PHEPSILE**

**She's been nervous about going back to school. Online classes have been her safety zone, but now she needs to face the world whether she likes it or not. She stands in front of the mirror looking at herself. She's decent enough for a first day. Jean's, a tshirt and sneakers. Hair, well she has none, she made sure to cut it all off when she came back to Joburg.**

Her phone rings and she picks up. It's a recorded message from the security telling her she has a guest. She presses the designated 1 allowing the person to come up. A few minutes later a knock on the door drags her away from the mirror. She goes to the front door and opens it. She finds a man with a bouquet of white Rose's in his hand.

"Hello." She greets the man wondering who the flowers belong to. Ndumi is already at work so if they were hers they would have been delivered there.

"Hi. Phepsile Nkosi?" The man questions.

"Yes."

"Please sign for me here." He hands her a clipboard with some documents. She signs and hands it back to him. He hands her the flowers and leaves. She closes the door and puts the

flowers on the table. She takes the card out and opens it.

'Hey, I hope you're doing okay. I know the past few weeks have been hard on you. You're a strong woman and I know you'll get through this. And if you need to talk, I'm just a phonecall away.

Clint.'

She throws the card on the table and takes in the scent of the flowers. They are beautiful and they smell great. Clint is the only person in her class who has reached out to her. Not even her friends Zola and Khanyi have said anything. The only thing they've said is the standard Hello and nothing much. She's not that close with Clint, but anytime there is a group project in class they seem to gravitate towards each other. They always end up in the same group. And if it's a two people project somehow they end up together. Phepsile doesn't mind though, Clint is smart, and they haven't failed a project yet.

She takes her phone and dials Clint's number. She looks at it but decides against calling him. Maybe he will be in class today. She puts the phone back in her pocket and goes back to her room. She gathers up her things and leaves.

Walking into campus is nerve wrecking. Even with her head

down and her headsets in her ear she can still feel the stares. She keeps going till she gets to her lecture room. She's a bit early. She gets in and finds a seat right in the middle of the room. The few people who are in room are already whispering amongst each other. She keeps her head down and powers on her laptop.

Students start trickling in bit by bit until the class is almost full. She feels someone taking a seat next to her. She decides to keep her head down and focus on why she is here. But it seems her new neighbor has other ideas.

"Hey." She lifts her head up and sees Clints smiling face. A nervous smile but it makes her happy that atleast one person in here is not whispering about her.

"Hey." She smiles back at him. "Thank you for the flowers. They are beautiful." Clint's smile widens revealing his pearly whites.

"I'm glad you liked them. I wasn't sure if you'd like them."

"Well I do. They are beautiful." The lecturer walks in with Khanyi and Zola behind him. They quickly rush to their seats. Zola turns back and looks around the room, her eyes land on Phepsile. She gives her a weak smile accompanied by an even weaker wave before turning back to the front.

After the class she sits still as the other students file out. Clint

sits next to her and watches everyone leave.

"You do know class is over right?" Phepsile asks him while she packs away her things. He takes out a file from his bag and hands it to her.

"Here." She takes the file and opens it. Its notes from the classes she missed.

"Clint."

"Don't say anything. I figured you might need those. Exams are coming and you'll need them to study." She throws herself at him and gives him a hug. It's not the usual awkward hugs they usually share. It's one filled with gratitude.

"Thank you." She whispers to him before pulling out of the hug.

"Anytime. Anyways I have to get going. Do you need a lift to your place?" Clint asks packing his own bag.

"We have another class in a couple of hours. Where are you going?" She asks jokingly. He laughs and stands up.

"I'm sure I'll be back by then. I have some things to take care off. I'll see you later. Maybe. I dont know. We will see. Bye." He jogs down the stairs and walks out the door leaving Phepsile alone.

She gets up after packing her things and walks out of the lecture hall. She goes to the cafeteria and buys herself a sandwich and some juice. She takes a seat on the benches outside the cafeteria. When she looks up Zola and Khanyi take a

seat across from her.

"Hi." She says since the two girls don't seem to be in a hurry to say anything.

"Hi." Zola answers. "So how are you?"

"I'm fine."

"Come on. We know you're not fine." Khanyi adds.

"What do you mean?" Phepsile asks, curiosity getting the better of her. She hasn't had a proper conversation with her friends. Sure their friendship has never been something she placed at the top of her priority list. Zola and Khanyi are all about partying and blessers. They've tried to get her to come with them for the longest time but she refuses every time. She did try to go with them, thinking she could forget about her ordeal, instead she'd cringe everytime a man put his hands on her. Her skin would crawl and her hair would stand up. After a few tries of wanting to be normal and being like other girls she gave up.

She became the boring friend, but they kept her around because of her baking. She'd bake everytime she felt down she'd bake. And since they shared a room at res she'd share with them. And when she moved in with Ndumi she'd be the one they go to when they were too drunk to go back to res. They always knew her door was always open for them. Ndumi didn't care much about who she brought to the apartment, as

long as they didn't touch her stuff and her alcohol.

"What do you mean I'm not fine Khanyi?" Phepsile probes.

"I'm just saying, with everything that happened

Advertisement

it makes sense why you're the way you are."

"And how am I exactly Khanyi?" Phepsile asks crossing her arms on her chest and sitting back on the bench.

"Hhay man Phepsile nawe you know yourself. You get jumpy when a man looks at you let alone touch you. But now it makes sense. Having sex with your father for all these years. I understand why you wouldnt want another man."

"Khanysile!" Zola shouts.

"What? I'm just saying. He must have been good for her to not want any other men." Phepsile chuckles and stands up.

"Wow, Khanysile. Wow." She picks up her sandwich and juice and puts it in her bag.

"What? You know I'm right. I mean no sane person would stay for what, five, six years being raped by someone and not saying anything. You must have enjoyed it. And it's okay. It's weird cause it's your father but its Okay." Phepsile looks at her tears burning the back of her eyes. Zola sits there just as shocked. Phepsile leaves them and goes back to her apartment.

She wonders if there is any truth to what Khanyi said. A part of her knows there is no truth to what her 'friend' said but the little voice in her head still wonders. When she was sixteen she remembers her father coming into her room. She remembers his touch and all the things he did to her. And she also remembers having an orgasm. Could that be what Khanyi was talking about? Could she be right?

Ndumi comes back from work to find her sister curled up on the couch with the TV on. Her eyes are wide open but she doesn't seem to be looking at the TV in front of her. She sits down next to her and shakes her a bit.

"Phepsile, are you okay?" Phepsile looks up to her sister and finds her concerned eyes. Tears well up in her eyes. She tries to blink them away but they overpower her and run down her face. Ndumi remembers today was her first day back at school. "What happened at school?" She asks and wipes away her sister's tears. Phepsile tells her everything that happened. Ndumi's jaws clench in anger. "Look, whatever that idiot girl said to you is not true."

"What if it is? I did have an orgasm once, doesn't that mean something?" She asks between sobs.



"Phepsile, listen to me. Just because you had an orgasm doesn't mean you wanted it. That was just a natural thing that the body does. It doesn't mean you wanted it and it sure as hell doesn't mean you enjoyed it. We were raped, it doesn't matter what happened when those rapes occurred it doesn't mean you wanted it. That stupid friend of yours needs a punch in the face."

"So I'm not crazy? I didn't do anything wrong?"

"Of course not. Jerome is the one who should be feeling shame not you. You can't allow yourself to feel guilty for something the body does naturally. It doesn't mean you wanted it and it sure as hell doesn't mean you enjoyed it." Someone knocks on the door. Ndumi gets up and opens to find Clint standing there.

"Clint? What are you doing here? Do you guys have a project?"

"No. Phepsi missed our afternoon class so I just wanted to make sure she's okay."

"Oh okay. Come on in. She's in the lounge. I'll go change." Clint goes to the lounge. Phepsile is surprised to see him here.

"What are you doing here?" She asks him. He takes a seat on the couch next to her.

"I wanted to check if you're okay. Tshepo told me what happened with Khanyi. And she's busy telling anyone and everyone who cares to listen that twisted story of hers."

"Do you believe her?"

"Of course not. No one enjoys being raped. Just because you were silent about it doesn't mean you enjoyed it. Khanyi needs a reality check. Anyways." He takes out a slab of chocolate from his pocket and hands it to her.

"You know if you carry on like this I might just get used to being spoiled." He laughs.

"It's just chocolate. Anyways I'm glad you're okay. And me and a few of the other students decided to report Khanyi to the Dean for harassment."

"You can't do that. She'll lose her bursary." Phepsile says, her voice in a panic.

"She should have thought about that before she started those malicious rumours. Anyways I have to get going. I'll see you tomorrow at school right?" He asks standing up.

"Why are you being nice to me?" He chuckles.

"I'm always nice."

"Yeah, 'professionally', never like this." He sits back down.

"Well, you're a nice person, you've always been nice to me. Besides that, my sister was also raped. It might not have been as extreme a case as yours but rape is rape either way."

"So you feel pity for me?" Phepsile asks not sure how to feel about his sudden caring. He has always been nice yes, but today he's being overly nice.

"No. I admire your strength. You and your sisters didnt allow this to define you. You continue to focus on yourselves and healing. I wish my sister had half the strength that you do, maybe she would have never killed herself." He tells her rubbing his hands together.

"I'm sorry." He fakes a smile and looks up at her.

"Don't be. Just dont allow the likes of Khanyi to torment you for something you had no control over. I'll see you at school tomorrow." He gives her and hug and leaves.

"I like him. He'd make a great boyfriend." Ndumi says walking back into the lounge.

"Stop being dramatic. He is just a friend."

"A good friend. Anyways I spoke to Thando about the cleansing. She said she will speak to her mother about it and see what we can do."

"So now you're all for it?"

"I have nothing to lose. And you have nothing to lose by dating Clint. He is a cute Mlungu. (White boy.)" Phepsile rolls her eyes.

"Go and cook. Today is your turn."

"We will be Okay you know." Ndumi tells her. Phepsile nods her head as her sister squeezes her head. Maybe she does need the therapy afterall. She thinks to herself.

**THANDO**

**She's been waiting at the gate for the past 10 minutes now. As soon as he called and said he was coming to see her she got off the couch and went to the gate to wait for him. She has so many questions for him, she needs answers, she's heard her mothers side of the story and now it's his turn.**

She sees the car driving down the gravel road. The sun hits its body making it glimmer under its rays. He pulls up in front of the gate and brings the car to a halting stop. She waits for him to get out of the car but he seems to be waiting for her to get in. No one is willing to budge, even after honking the car she still stays still. Eventually he realizes she's not getting in the car so he opens the door and gets out.

"You're so stubborn you know that." He tells her as he stands and leans on the car with his arms crossed on his chest.

"Sometimes. Where have you been?" A smirk crosses his face.

"You missed me?" He asks trying hard to hold in his joy. He loves her. Even from a distance he has always loved her. She is his first born. Seeing her, especially now after all the drama with Jerome has died down makes him happy. He decided to stay away again because he wasn't sure how she would be

towards him. He wants to have a relationship with her, and his biggest fear is that she will tell him to fuck off. But he is hopeful. Getting her number from Thulani and calling her was a long shot, and he is happy she agreed to see him.

"I have questions only you can answer. Let's go inside." She turns and walks back to her house. He follows her, now scared of the questions that might follow. He wonders if he will have the answers she seeks, or will he just send her deeper into confusion. He gets in the house and takes a seat. "Would you like something to drink?"

"Just water please." He answers. He is nervous, which is a foreign concept to him. He never gets nervous. Not even with a gun pointed to his face, he always keeps his cool. But this is different.

In front of him sits a child he believed he was protecting by staying away from her. He believed he was doing what's best for her. She deserved to have a stable home, and he knew he couldn't give that to her. She comes back and puts the glass down on the coffee table.

"Thank you." He takes a sip and places the glass back in its place.

"When did you know I was your child?" She asks. In her head

she has a number of questions lined up, there's a lot she wants to ask him. The past few days have been an eye opener for her. Even though she hasn't met with the therapist she's slowly allowing herself to grieve her childhood. She's been slowly letting go of the blame and the shame she thought this would bring. Old as she is she is only now slowly accepting that this wasn't her fault. And now she's choosing to embark on a journey of healing. Her first stop is getting the answers she's been looking for.

"I knew before you were born. I was happy when I found out your mother was pregnant. I wanted to do right by her, I wanted to marry her but she refused. Instead she came back here and rekindled her relationship with Jerome. As hurt as I was I understood her reasons. Jerome seemed more stable and he had direction. Me, I was making ends meet any which way I could. I figured you'd have a better life with Jerome than I could offer." He tells her rubbing his hands together.

"Knowing what you know now, do you regret that decision?"

"With every fiber of my being. I wish I could have fought harder for you. I would give anything right now to go back in time and fix my mistake. Even if I wouldn't have raised you physically myself I know your grandmother would have taken care of you. Thando, you have no idea how many times I've stayed up at night beating myself up for not protecting you. I failed to be the

father that you needed and I'm truly sorry."

Thando stares at the man in front of her. Her father. The word father no longer holds the same weight it used to hold in her life. But a little part of her heart is open to allowing Mesuli to change her mind.

"Is she still alive?" He looks up from his hands and sees her soft brown eyes, they are a little softer than when he came here. And it makes him happy. Maybe there is hope after all.

"She is. And she wants to meet you." He has a slight smile on his face. His mother has been nagging him for years to give her grandkids. The fact that he never wanted to get married never sat right with her. But eventually she made peace with it. But she never stopped nagging him for a grandchild. And when he finally told her about Thando and all that she'd gone through, she got angry at him. So angry she hasn't spoken to him in a week. All she wants is to see her grandchild. Even with seven other grandkids between his siblings, Thando is the first grandchild.

"Does she know?" Even though she won't say it out loud he knows exactly what she's asking.

"Yes she knows. She's also angry at me for not protecting you."

"And your wife?" He chuckles and lifts his left hand up.

"I don't have one."

"Why?"

"Well, I thought your mother would be my wife. I guess I never wanted to even try after that. I loved your mother so much I knew it would be unfair for me to bring another woman into my life and not fully give them my heart."

"So you've been celibate for twenty five years?" Her questions comes more from skepticism than anything else. He is a handsome man, successful judging by his dress code and the car he drives, no woman can resist that. He laughs and sits back on the couch with his one leg perched on top of the other.

"Not entirely. I am human and I have needs." She wants to continue asking questions but she reminds herself that inspite of his absence the man is her father, so questions into his sex life are just weird.

"So you have other kids?"

"Nope. Just you." He says it so casually, as if it's a normal thing to say to him. But to her it sends tingles all over her body, he is her father. That's the only blessing that has come out of this whole mess. Her finding the truth and finding out who she is.

"You never wanted kids?"

"I did. But with the work I do I didnt want to have another child I'd have to give up to protect. It seemed easier to just not have them." She nods her head. "Listen. I know it might be early but



I'd like you to meet my family. But for now I'd like to introduce you to my mother." Her lips curve into a smile. Her maternal grandmother had died while she was still young so she never knew her, Jerome's mother never liked her mother so she didn't like her kids either. Even when she died to her it was just another death. Maybe this is her second chance at having a father and a grandmother.

"I'd like that." His eyes bulge out in surprise. He was waiting for her to say no or to ask for more time.

"How about now?" He asks standing up and holding his hand out to her.

"Now?" To say she is shocked would be an understatement. She thought she had more time to prepare herself.

"Yes. She's at the guest house. If you're not ready it's Okay

Advertisement

you can meet her some other time." He says sounding a bit disappointed.

"No it's okay. We can go." She stands up and clears the table. She figures this old woman traveled all the way here to see her, she might as well. After all they say there is no time like the present.

The drive to the guesthouse is quiet. Quite surprising really considering how hard her heart is beating. They drive into the guesthouse and park. Mesuli turns to her.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" She nods her head and opens the car door. Mesuli follows her lead and gets out. He leads her up to the room his mother is in. He opens the door and walks in, he holds the door and waits for her to come in. As soon as she is inside the door softly closes behind him.

"Mesuli, is that you?" A voice asks from what seems to be the bathroom.

"Yebo ma, yimi. (Its me.)" He answers. He leads her to a small chair on the other side of the room. She sits down, her hands are shaking. "Relax, she doesn't bite." Mesuli teases. The bathroom door opens and an elderly woman walks out. She doesn't look like someone's grandmother, her head is covered in a black head wrap. She's wearing a yellow embroidered A line dress that's cinched at the waist. A small black belt and a pair of black kitten heels finish her look. Her face is made up better than some people. *Including me.* Thando thinks to herself.

The woman walks over to Thando with her hands on over her mouth and tears glistening in her eyes. Thando stands up and looks at her. Up close she can finally confirm what she saw

when the woman walked out of the bathroom. She looks like an older version of herself. She has the same soft brown eyes that Thando has, her smile is just the same and her nose looks exactly like hers. The woman takes Thando's hands and turns them over. She looks at the palms going over the lines in her hand.

"Ngubane  
Mbomvu,  
Somahhashi  
Nyoniyezwe  
Nomafu, Myaluza,  
Ngcukumane,  
Zikode elimhlophe,  
Matomela,  
Nzombane, Ngogozabantu,  
Nomasikisiki, nyon'esindwa isisila sayo,  
Ndoda kaNyamazane,  
KaSodlelezi esadl'amabele amhlophe sawashiya nenkehlane,  
Ngcingcw'ephuza kwezid'iziziba,  
Uma ingaphuza kwezimfushane umlomo ungabuya nodaka,  
Vathu oluphezulu ngoba oluphansi olwabafokazane,  
Nina baseMabovini okwakhala inkomo kwakhala imbuzi kwasha imizi,  
Nomaphikwane!!!"

She looks up at Thando with tears running down her face.

"I'm so happy to see you." She says before cupping Thando's cheeks in her hands and kissing her on the lips and her forehead. "And you look just like me." She adds. Thando smiles. "I'm happy to see you too."

"So there's no need for introductions right?" Mesuli asks. His mother looks at him before rolling her eyes and looking back at Thando.

"Welcoming home Sthandwa sam. Now you have to meet the rest of the family and we have to have a welcome ceremony for you." Her grandmother says pulling her down to sit. "My name is Nomalanga Dube. And I am your grandmother. I can't believe I have a granddaughter who is tall as me and looks just like me."

"Noluthando Nkosi." Her grandmother frowns for a slight second before she relaxes her face again.

"We need to change that soon. You're a Ngubane. You've spent all these years without knowing your roots. Its time for you to come back home."

Her heart is full. When she woke up this morning she didnt think her day would go this way. Her grandmother is talkative, but somehow that makes her happy. Even when Mesuli parks

the car in front of her mothers house, her heart is still jumping for joy.

"Are you sure you want me to leave you here? I dont mind taking you back to your place." Mesuli asks looking out the window.

"I'll be fine. Thank you for today." His eyes dart back to her with a little glimmer in them.

"Anytime. You have my number. If you need anything just call me. Okay." Thando nods her head and gets out of the car.

She opens the gate and walks in. When she looks back Mesuli is still parked there. She knocks on the door. It takes a while for her mother to open.

"Thando. What are you doing here so late." Her mother asks pulling her gown close and tying the knot on her front.

"We need to talk." She tells her. Her mother stands aside allowing her to walk in. Thulsile sees the car parked in front of her gate and wonders what's going on. She gets in and closes the door behind her.

"Is everything okay?" She asks her daughter who is now sitting on the couch.

"Take a seat. We have a lot to talk about."

**THANDO**

**"For a while I thought staying away from you would ease the pain and help me forget. I thought if I bury things in the the back of my mind then I'd be okay, but the truth is I won't forget. I wont wake up and magically be better. I need answers from you." Thulsile looks at her daughter, her heart beating uncontrollably. She's been hoping for this, a chance for her to apologize and make things right with her children.**

She takes a seat on the couch, burying her shaky hands under her armpits.

"What do you want to know?" Her voice is not as confident as it usually is. Pain, regret and loss have been constant feelings in her life recently. On the one hand she's mourning the death of a marriage she thought would have lasted a lifetime, she's mourning the distance that's widening between her and her children and she's mourning the man she thought she knew.

"Did you know what he was doing?" Thulsile's eyes quickly rise to meet her own daughter's cold stare. "Did you have an idea, or a clue, or something to show that something was amiss in this house and you ignored it?" Thando adds.

"Of course not. Nothing happened that would have made me

aware of what was going on." She answers defensively. She wrecks her mind trying to think of what she could have missed.

Her mind takes her back to ten or eleven years ago. She'd been working the whole day, from six in the morning she was on her feet. There was an accident close to the local primary school, a taxi driven by a drunk driver swerved and hit a bunch of kids who were standing at the bus stop for their transport. Six kids died that day and the rest of them were rushed to the hospital, injured, some more than others. She was an hour away from knocking off, but due to the number of kids being brought in she had to stay and help out. By the time she knocked off at eight in the evening all she wanted to do was get in her bed and sleep.

By the time she got home the girls were already asleep. She took a bath and went straight to bed. In the middle of the night she was woken up by the sounds of someone crying. But the cries seemed to be coming from far away and all she could hear were the echoes of those cries. She tried to not pay attention to them but they were persistent. She reached out to her husband's side to ask him if he could hear what was going on but he wasn't there. She got off the bed and went out of her room to see where the cries were coming from. She saw her husband coming out of Phepsile's room. He was shocked to see

her up that late.

"Sthandwa sam, why are you up, go back to sleep." He said as he quietly closed the bedroom door behind him and walked over to her. His voice was laced with fear and shock. He wasn't expecting her to wake up in the middle of the night. She rarely ever did, so seeing her up at that hour was a shock to him.

"I heard someone crying. Are the kids Okay?" He turned to look back at the door he just closed before turning back to his wife with a fake smile decorating his face.

"Uhm, yeah the kids are fine."

"So what were you doing in Phepsile's room?" His eyes popped out, surprised at the question. He was in a panic. He looked at a vase sitting steadily on a small table close to the lounge. In his head he was ready to use that vase to hide his dirty little secret.

"Jerome?" His eyes quickly darted back from the vase and he looked at his wife, a lie slowly forming in his mind.

"Oh yeah, Phepsile was having a nightmare. I just went to check on her." He told her silently hoping she would believe him.

"Okay

Advertisement

let me go check on her." She said trying to walk past him but he blocked her way.



"Dali, relax, she is fine now. Plus I'm sure you're just as tired. Go back to sleep. Our kids are fine." The smile on her face was the only confirmation he needed to know that she believed him. He let out a slow deep breath when she held his hand and they went back to their bedroom.

"You know the kids are lucky to have such an attentive father like you. And I'm blessed to have you Nkosi." He gave her a perk on the cheek before tucking her into bed. As sleep slowly claimed her again she heard him heave out a sigh of relief.

Until that moment she'd completely forgotten about that night. But now, in retrospect she realizes maybe that was a clue that she'd chosen to ignore. She didn't have a reason to doubt him, he was an attentive father who knew everything there was to know about his children. He was a great father, greater than most men she'd come across or heard women complain about. In her world she was more than just lucky, she was blessed.

More and more memories start flooding into her mind, time and time again, bit by bit, memories streak in that should have been enough clues, instead she chose to ignore because the idea of her husband hurting their children never crossed her mind. She remembers when Ndumi was 13 and acting up. She became rebellious and she fought a lot at school. She'd beat up anyone and everyone who rubbed her up the wrong way. Every

week Thulsile remembers being called to school meetings or parents confronting her either at home or at work because Ndumi had beaten up one of their children. That behaviour was put down to puberty. ***Her body was changing and her hormones were going haywire and she didn't know how to channel them the right way.*** She'd defended her in front of the principal after being called in for what seemed like the hundredth time because some kid was bleeding with a broken nose thanks to Nondumiso.

***I should have known then.*** She thinks to herself. ***How could I have missed the signs?*** She wonders. She gets off the couch and kneels in front of Thando. She takes her daughter's hands into her shaky ones.

"Thando. I might have missed the signs, I might have let my idea of who Jerome was overcloud my judgement and made me believe he was this perfect man, so much so it became even harder for me to believe you when you spoke up. But I promise you, if I had known, if I had paid a little more attention, I would have fought for you. I would have protected you. I would have done everything in my power to make sure you're protected." She tells her as tears flow down her freshly washed face.

"But you didn't believe me when I did speak. How would you have protected us then if you couldn't protect us now? You

refused to believe us even when each of us told you what that man did. How were you going to believe us then?" Thando asks. Thulise pulls herself up and sits back on the couch.

"I think maybe I was afraid of having to face reality. For the longest time I prided myself in having a husband who was so peaceful and so kind, I thought I'd hit the jackpot. I thought he'd become a better man after we separated and I was happy. I was so happy I didnt even feel bad about Mesuli. But now I realise I was living in my own fantasy world. Everything that happened the past few weeks brought me back down to earth. And I must admit it's not nice having to face reality." She wipes her tears and stares up at her daughter. "You, you're a better person than I'll ever be Noluthando. You did something I failed to do and ill always be grateful for that."

Thando stares at her mother, listening to her say the things she's saying now puts her heart at ease. She doesnt blame her for what happened, but she wishes her mother would have paid more attention.

"I met my grandmother today." A line forms between her eyebrows as she stares intently at her daughter. "Mesuli's mother. Apparently I look like her."

"Oh." Thulsile's eyes go up as she heaves a deep sigh. "How is she?" A smile masks Thando's face. For the first time in a long

time Thulsile sees a glimmer of happiness in her daughters face.

"She's amazing. Stylish and she looks young for her age."

"That's nice. I'm happy for you."

"Thanks. Ndumi said something about us having a cleansing ceremony. Apparently we need to get rid of the dark cloud that's hanging over us, thanks to Jerome."

"Thando you dont have a dark cloud hanging over you. Jerome is the one who should have a dark cloud hanging over him."

"I know. But we need to free ourselves from everything and that includes letting go of the spirits of those babies. So we have to have the ceremony." Thuli nods her head.

"I'll speak to Elias. I'm sorry you even have to go through this Thando. Ngyacolisa mntfwanami. (I'm sorry my child.)" Thando stands up preparing to leave.

"I should get going. I'll call Ndumi and tell her we will have the ceremony next weekend."

"I'll start preparing for it." Thuli says walking Thando out.

She watches as her daughter walk out into the dark night. A part of her is hoping this will be a new start for her children and hopefully for her too.

**The girls are back together again. Their mother's house is buzzing with relatives and community members. The whispers and side eyes are still there but they've chosen to focus on the matter at hand. Their cleansing. They woke up this morning and did the cleansing. They named the children who were never given a chance to set foot in the world. When everything was done they came back to the house and laid together in Ndumi's old bedroom.**

Ndumi wakes up an hour after their nap. This ceremony has brought more than cleansing for her, clarity has been a major breakthrough. Of all her siblings she was the angriest. But now she seems to be slowly getting out of the dark hole she's been so comfortable in. She takes her phone and quietly gets out of the bed. She walks out to the backyard. She sits down on a bench under the mango tree. She dials Bokang's number. It rings for a while before a woman's voice greets her.

"Can I speak to Bokang please." She asks as calmly as she could, surprising herself too.

"He is busy." The girl says and hangs up. Ndumi chuckles and calls again. This time Bokang picks up.

"Hey, baby." He says nervously. He is expecting her to blow a gasket, he knows how angry she can get and what she can do

when she's angry. "Its not what you think." He adds, not sure who needs more convincing, him or her.

"I really dont care right now Bokang. I wanted to tell you that it's over between us. I think we should go our separate ways." She tells him so calmly she pinches herself to be sure this isn't a dream.

"What are you talking about?" Bokang asks. "I just told you its not what you think. That girl is nothing to me, she's Jabu's girlfriend."

"Its not about that. I think this relationship has reached its end."

"But why? We were fine before you left so what's going on? Is it someone else?"

"No. It's no one else. Remember when I first came back home and my dads rape case was all of the news, you ghosted me. For days on end i couldnt get a hold of you. Something that's never happened before. The only time you came back was when you needed money for rent because God alone knows where you spent your salary. If it weren't for that you would have ghosted me forever because I figured you can't be with someone who is a victim of rape."

"That's not true. I love you. And you know that."

"Bokang, I'm done. It doesnt matter anymore I just need to start my life over again without the baggage. I need my peace."

She hears him breathe in and out for a while before he speaks.

"Listen to me Nondumiso, you will not break up with me. Not today. You're not the one who started this relationship I did. So if anyone will end it, it will be me. Now, when you get back here we are going to sit down and talk about this properly like adults. Are we clear?" He hisses sending shivers down her spine. As angry as she can get it doesn't compare to Bokang's anger. When they first met Ndumi was fresh out of a relationship with Mgazini. The signs were there, the red flags were bright as daylight, but for her it was better than what she'd been through. Mgazini was great, but Bokang was different, there is a danger about him that she finds endearing, well found. He knew what buttons to press, but he didn't dig deep, he didn't want to know her deep dark secrets unlike Mgazini. She looked that

Advertisement

she could put up a front and be anything she wanted to be without her walls being broken. But when he was angry, when she upset him in anyway she felt it.

She was comfortable in the chaos, she felt loved and wanted. Unlike her father, he'd apologize each time she woke up with a blue eye because of him. He would drag her to the pits of hell

one moment and cuddle her the next. On the outside their relationship was perfect, but recently she's come to the realization that she deserves better.

She hangs up the phone and sighs. She opens her gallery and looks at the pictures of her bruised face and body. She sends them to him with a little reminder that he still has a pending case with the police. That should be enough to get him off her back, for now.

"Are you Okay?" Thando asks taking a seat on the bench next to her.

"I just broke up with my boyfriend." Ndumi tells her. "Well I did but he says it's not happening." She adds and chuckles.

"What does he mean when he says its not happening?"

"Nothing. Let's go help out with dishing up." She says and stands up. Thando holds her back and she sits back down on the bench.

"What's going on?" Ndumi sighs and opens her phones gallery. She hands the phone to Thando who looks at the pictures, shock sending her jaw to the floor. "He did this to you?" Ndumi nods her head. Thando stands up with the phone and quickly walks to the front of the house with Ndumi behind her trying to catch up. She sees Thulani standing with Elias outside the gate. She hurries to them while Ndumi tries to stop her.



"Hey, is everything okay?" Thulani asks seeing the sisters walking up to her. Thando holds up the phone to his face but Ndumi quickly grabs it away from her. Elias and Thulani stand there not sure how to react.

"Please dont do this." Ndumi begs her sister.

"Ndumi, this needs the police. You cant allow him to get away with that." Thando insists.

"What is going on?" Elias asks standing between the two girls.

"It's nothing malume, we will fix it." Ndumi tells him.

"Do I look like a child?" Elias asks looking at Ndumi. She shakes her head. Elias holds out his hand for the phone. "Let me see."

"Malume."

"Letsa Ndumi. (Bring.)" She hands the phone to him. With each picture he looks at of his niece with a split lip or bruised eye.

"Who did this to you? Is it that boyfriend of yours?" Ndumi sighs and nods her head.

He takes out his phone from his pocket and sends a text to someone then puts the phone back in his pocket as a black car pulls up behind them. Mesuli steps out of the car and walks over to them.

"Why does it look like I'm disturbing an important meeting." He says looking around.

"It's nothing important. We'll go get you food." Thando says and walks away. Ndumi follows her. She catches up with her in the kitchen.

"You didn't have to do that." She tells her sister. Thando stops what she is doing and looks at her sister.

"Nondumiso, we just had a cleansing. Things like Bokang need to stay in your past. And if he is going to threaten you then we need to make sure you're safe."

"Thando I don't need you to protect me. I'll be fine."

"Nondumiso, I know you can protect yourself, but I also know that I won't stop worrying about you when you go back knowing that Bokang might do something to you. You've taken the first step by breaking up with him. Now to free yourself fully from him you need to make sure he pays for all those blue eyes. You need to start your life on a clean slate."

"I know that and I will do that. But now that Malume Elias is involved, what do you think he will do to him?"

"Whatever it takes. As long as he never touches a hair on your head again." Ndumi throws herself at her sister and gives her a warm embrace.

"Thank you for being so protective." She tells her then pulls away from her. "But it's time you start taking care of you. You've done the best you can for us, now it's time for you to take care of Thando. Starting with serving your father food."

"I don't remember telling you that Mesuli is my father."

"Mum did. Last night after you went to sleep she sat us down and told us everything." Thando rolls her eyes and takes the food out to Mesuli and Elias.

"Thank you." They say in unison. She leaves them and goes back to the house to get another plate. She goes to the car where Thulani is sitting and hands her the plate of food. She gets in on the passenger side and watches him eat.

"If I choke it will be your fault." Thulani says and Thando laughs.

"I want to tell you something." She tells him. He stops chewing and looks at her.

"What?"

"Relax, it's good news. I am moving to Joburg next year. I've decided to go back to school to actually study medicine like I wanted when I was little."

"That's a brave move."

"Scary too. But I need to do this. Jerome is not here anymore so we can breathe and just live our lives."

"I am happy for you. I don't know anyone who deserves this more than you. You're strong and fearless, and I am lucky to have known you." Thando laughs and takes a piece of meat from his plate.

"You make it sound like I'm dying." He laughs.

"I know. But I am also quitting the force. I've decided to go back home too."

"Why? You love being a police officer." Thulani throws his head back laughing.

"I actually hate it. I was there because I was hired to protect someone." He tells her, a little smile on his face.

"Who?"

"A special someone. Maybe one day you will know her. For now you need to focus on your journey. So what about your mum, is everything okay between you two?" He asks her.

"We'll be fine, eventually. For now we are civil but I don't think we will ever fully be back to having a strong mother daughter bond. That bridge is burnt. The only thing we can do is build a new bridge, not as steady but it will have to do." She says.

"I'm proud of you. You really are one incredible person Noluthando." She shrugs her shoulders and gets out of the car.

"Can we talk?" Thulsile asks her daughter. Thando nods her head and follows her to the bedroom. Thulsile closes the door behind her and sits on the bed. She takes out an envelope from her side table and hands it to Thando.

Thando takes the envelope and opens it.

"What's this?" She asks her mother.

"Its details to a bank account with all the money you will need for school." Thando stares at her mother. "Zethu told me you're

going back to school. Although I've had that since I sold the shop. That's your share. I know it might not cover the full years you'll be there but I have some policies that will be maturing soon so I will add that and it should be Okay." She adds. Thando sits down next to her mother.

"You dont have to do this. I'm sure my savings will cover some of the costs plus I can get a job."

"Consider it a Thank you for all the things you've done for your sisters that I should have done. Thank you for doing all that you did for them. I am truly grateful."

**3 MONTHS LATER**

**"What do you have in this luggage? I swear there is a dead body in here." Ndumi complains dragging Thando's luggage out to the car. Today is officially their last day Elukwatini. Thando resigned from her teaching job weeks before the matric examinations started. She's ready to start a new chapter in her life. And the universe seems to be in alignment with all she wants.**

**"Stop being dramatic, it's just shoes." She answers laughing. Ndumi rolls her eyes and drags the luggage out to the car.**

Thando stands in the middle of the now empty lounge. This was her first official place as an independent 25 years old. This was home for the past few months, her escape and now she can safely look back at it as her beginning.

"Thando hurry up." Zethu shouts from the gate. She's anxious to go. Even though her matric results are not out yet she's still excited to go to Joburg. Thando walks out of the houses and locks it before handing the keys over to Babe Ngcobo.

"Nihambe kahle Thando. Nginfisela lokuhle kodvwa. (Have a safe journey. I wish you all the best.)" Babe Ngcobo says and gives Thando a hug.

"Siyabonga babe. Nani nisale kahle. (Thank you. Stay well.)" She walks up to her sister's who are impatiently waiting in the car. Mesuli sent them a car big enough for their luggage and comfortable for the long trip. He even added a driver to take care of the driving while they relax.

"You are so slow. Joburg is far. We will get there late." Zethu complains. Ndumi and Phepsile laugh at her as she gets in the car leaving them standing outside.

"Drama queen." Ndumi says.

"Lastborn tendencies." Phepsile adds.

"Leave the child alone. She wants to see big city lights. Anyways can we go past mum's to say goodbye." Thando asks.

"We said our goodbyes already." Ndumi says. Their relationship with their mother has progressed at a different pace for each of them.

Ndumi says she's forgiven her, but her actions say something different. If it were up to her she would spend less time in the same room with her. But Thando has been preaching peace and reconciliation. Phepsile is also not sure about the peace that Thando keeps preaching. But she's trying for her sake. Zethu is floating around with no care in the 'peace'. She is still angry at her mother for not believing them and no matter how many times she meets the therapist the one thing she can't seem to

crack is finding it in her heart to forgive.

Thando, if it were up to her they would put everything behind them and move on with their lives. But she also understands her sister's stand point in all this. So all she's asked of them is to be civil and respectful. Everything else they can work out at their own pace and time.

They pull up to their mothers house just as she drives in from her late night shift. She parks her car and gets out. She looks at the car parked outside. She smiles when she sees her daughters alighting from the car. As happy as she gets seeing them come home she's also cautious not to push too hard.

The girls get close and greet her. She invites them into the house. While Ndumi, Phepsile and Zethu fight over the remote, Thando joins her mother in the kitchen making refreshments.

"Bengitsi senhambile mine. (I thought you'd left already.)"

Thulsile says.

"I wanted to talk to you before we leave." Thando tells her.

"I'm listening."

"The money that you sent us, I know you sold the shop and cashed in a lot of your investments. You sold Jerome's car and instead of keeping the money you distributed it amongst us.



Are you planning something?" Thulsile stops pouring the juice and looks at her daughter.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean are you planning on hurting yourself?" Thulsile laughs.

"Realx Noluthando. I'm not going to kill myself. I just figured you'd need the money for school and whatever else you might need."

"What about your pension? You're not even close to being a pensioner so why would you give away your money just like that?" Thulsile sighs and comes close to her daughter. She takes Thando's hands.

"Thando, I promise you I'm not going to do anything stupid. Besides, most of the investments I cashed out were not mine. They were Jerome's. It's not like he will be needing money anytime soon. I'm not going to starve just because I gave you the money. And just to be clear, I'm not giving away the money, you all deserve it." Thando nods her head, still unsure of her mother's plans but at that moment she decides to trust her mother. Afterall she's way past the point of letting other people's issues be her own.

They head back to the lounge and have a mini going away party with just the five of them. After their mini celebration the girls leave. Thando whispers something to the driver before getting

in the car.

"What was that about?" Ndumi asks and buckles herself in.

"Just one last stop we need to make." Thando tells her before putting her headphones in her ear and blasting some music.

An hour and a half later they pull up to the Baberton Prison where Jerome was transferred to after being given a life sentence two months ago.

"What are we doing here?" Ndumi asks. Phepsile leans in from the backseat.

"Yeah what are we doing here?" Phepsile whispers not wanting to wake Zethu up.

"Just one last pit stop before we go. I'll be right back." Thando says.

"Eh, what do you mean you'll be back. I'm coming with you." Ndumi tells her unbuckling herself.

"Me too." Phepsile adds. Zethu hears the commotion and wakes up as well.

"What's going on?" She asks wiping her eyes.

"Go back to sleep." Phepsile tells her. Zethu looks around and sees where they are.

"What are we doing here?" She asks.

"You can stay in the car, we will be back." Thando says.

"Nope. I'm coming with." She gets out of the car and follows her sisters into the prison.

They are searched before being let in. Thanks to Mesuli's connections they are let into a private room.

"This is a bad idea." Zethu whispers, holding her arms close to her chest. The prison is cold and every sound they hear sends them closer to each other. Jerome walks in with shackles on his ankles and his wrists. The guard walks out leaving him standing by the door.

"You came to see your handiwork. Must be nice." He takes a seat and looks up at the girls. Thando sighs and sits down.

"You look better than the last time I saw you. Mesuli must be slacking." Jerome's face quickly changes from smug to angry.

"What the fuck do you want from me?" He asks.

"Nothing." Thando answers. "I dont want anything from you. I actually came here to tell you that inspite of everything that you did to us, the hurt, the pain, the shame you kept us buried under we are still here. Still standing. And there is nothing you can do about it. While you're held up in here, we will be living our lives. Sure, we will always have the burden of what you did hanging over us, but you're the one the world sees as a monster." Jerome stands up ready to go as anger seeps out of his pores.

"Hlala phansi Jerome. (Sit down.)" Ndumi orders. Jerome's eyes go flying to her, fury emanating from the deepest parts of his soul. He has never been disrespected before, he was a well respected and known man. But now he is in here, even his own children talk to him any which way they want. "Hlala phansi. (Sit down.)" Ndumi insists. Jerome let's out a sardonic laugh. "Soyedzelela Nondumiso. (You're disrespectful.)" He tells her. "Mine? (Me?) I'm not the one who is locked up and bound by shackles like a monster. You're the one who shits in front of your cellmate and you're the one who has to take a dick in your ass every night like a little girl." She chuckles and walks around her father, she stands in front of him and spits at his feet. "Is it fun for you? Mhmm? Is it Jerome? Being bent over a steel bed and having some dirty ugly men ram his dick inside you while all the other prisoners listen to you crying like a little girl. Now you know what it feels like, now you know how hurt we were by what you did. It's a pity your egotistical mind refuses to admit it. Next time you get bent over like a common prostitute, remember this. You didnt break us. You didnt win. And today, today we take our lives back from you. Inspite of everything, we will win." She takes a long deep breath. She's wanted to say something to him, anything, and today she got that chance. It might not be everything she had practiced in her head but it's enough to free her from all the anger she's been holding up.

Jerome turns to Phepsile and Zethu, his eyes red with anger.

"And you, what do you have to say?" He asks them.

"I didn't die." Zethu utters. "I know you wanted me dead but I'm here. Alive and well. You failed." Phepsile holds her sister's hand. "That will always be the one thing you will always know brought you to this. That one silly mistake led to you being here. And every day you will always remember that." Jerome sits back down on the chair. The sounds of the shackles as he lifts his hands up to wipe the sweat from his face.

"It must feel weird knowing your destruction came from the same children you chose to victimize. It doesn't matter though, we came to see you in your new home. I pray every day you see are reminded that you are nothing more than a monster."

Phepsile says.

"We would love to stay and keep you company but our lives are outside these walls. I hope you suffer Jerome, for the rest of your miserable life." Thando says standing up. The girls walk out leaving Jerome sitting in the chair, blinking away tears.

"That was intense." Ndumi says as soon as they walk out of the prison.

"Yeah. On the bright side, it's time for us to start our lives. Free from Jerome and all he comes with." Thando says.

"To new beginnings." Ndumi says.

"To new beginnings." The girls say in unison.

**ZETHU**

**"I'm bored." Zethu says walking out of the bedroom she shares with Thando. They've been in Joburg for a week now. Adjusting has not been easy. Atleast for her. Thando seems to have pretty well. She enjoys taking walks around the complex, and lately she's taken up journaling. Its helped her let go of the past. Not fully but every day she gets better. Their therapist has transferred them to another therapist in Joburg. And their first session with her is next week.**

"Let's go for a walk." Thando suggests closing her laptop. Zethu sits down next to her.

"How about we go to the mall. I need a new phone." She says excitedly.

"You have a phone Zethu." Thando reminds her.

"I know. But it's old. Plus I need an iphone."

"Didnt we agree to buy you an iphone when you get your results?" Zethu rolls her eyes and lays back on the couch.

"Then I'll have two. I can always use the money mum gave me."

"Zethu, that money is supposed to help you with school. What's going to happen if you misuse the money?" Thando asks her.

"I wont. How can I with you here to guide me?" The door opens and Phepsile walks in from school. She throws herself on the

other couch looking drained.

"Whoever said we have to go to school needs a bullet in the head." She says.

"That bad huh?" Thando asks her.

"You have no idea. I feel sorry for you starting school in your old age." Phepsile says making Zethu laugh. Thando takes a cushion and throws it at Phepsile.

"I'm not old. I'll be turning 26 soon."

"Speaking of birthdays, what are you doing vele for your 26th birthday?" Thando sighs. She's never really celebrated her birthday. She's never felt like there was anything worth celebrating.

This year is different though. There is a lot to celebrate. Jerome is out of their lives, she's reunited with her sisters and she's found her biological father. It seems the heavens are in a good mood lately so maybe there is a lot to celebrate this year.

"I was talking to Mesuli and he says they've been thinking of having welcoming ceremony for me on my birthday. So I was thinking of taking him up on his offer. And I also want to change my surname to Ngubane." She tells them. The shock of what she just said renders the two silent. They dont know how to react.

Zethu seems to be the most confused. Thando has been more than a sister to her, she's her best friend, her protector, the one person she knows she can count on. She wonders what this will mean to their relationship. Could this be the end for them? She wonders.

She leaves Phepsile and Thando talking in the lounge and goes to the bedroom. She takes her phone and call their old therapist Gugu. She picks up after a few rings.

"Hey Zethu. How are you?"

"Hey. Can I talk to you, if you're not too busy."

"No. I have time what's up." Zethu tells her what is bothering her. "So how does all that make you feel?" Gugu asks her.

"I don't know. I'm happy for her, she doesn't just get to be a part of a real family but she gets a father she can be proud of. But what if she doesn't see me as her sister anymore? I don't want to lose her." She says wiping away a tear.

"I don't think that's possible. You know Thando better, do you think she'd just let you go just because her surname has changed?" Zethu sighs.

"No."

"Then why are you worried? Thando has sacrificed so much to protect you and be by your side. I don't think that's going to



change anytime soon." Zethu takes a deep breath.

Maybe she did overreact. And Gugu might be right, Thando has given up a lot to protect her and her sisters so why would she change now. She says her goodbyes to Gugu. She gets off the bed and stands in front of the mirror. She wipes away her tears and walks back to the lounge. Phepsile and Thando are not here. She decides to start cooking dinner. Just as she puts the pot on the stove there is a knock on the door. She opens the door and Bokang comes budging into the house. He doesn't look like the Bokang she knows. Ndumi and Thando didn't tell her or Phepsile about the abuse. But him pushing her aside and budging in raises a few red flags in her.

"Where's your sister?" He asks looking around the room. She knows they broke up but she doesn't know why? He goes to the bedrooms calling out Ndumi's name but he gets no response. He comes back to the kitchen and gawks at Zethu. She sees the anger in his eyes, she's alone in the house. Fear creeps in. She opens the drawer and takes out a butcher knife.

"Where is she?" Bokang questions.

"She's at work. Why are you here anyway. As far as I know the two of you broke up. Are you stalking her?" Zethu asks him. He laughs and takes a few steps towards her. She takes steps backwards and tightens her hold on the knife. "I think you

should leave. You can come back when Ndumi is here." She says with her heart threatening to jump out of her chest.

She hits the cabinet with her back and comes to a stop. Bokang stealthily advances towards her. His jaws are clenched and his hands are balled into fists. There is anger emanating from every pore in his body. He needs an outlet

when he came here, he had one target, Nondumiso, but now he figures her sister will do.

"I'm not going anywhere. Not until I make that whore of a woman you call a sister pay for what he did to me. Did she think sending those thugs would help her? Getting me fired from my job? She doesn't know me." He hisses and puts his hands on the counter, on either side of Zethu.

"If you dont leave I am going to call the police." He chuckles and gets his face close to hers, so close she can feel his breath on her face. Her heart wont stop racing. Her mind reminds her of all the time she'd feel her fathers hot, musty breath on her each time he raped her. She tries to do the breathing exercises Gugu taught her. She breathes in and out, in and out while Bokang says something her mind cant take in.

"Please leave." She begs him. He laughs and holds her jaw in his

hand. She lifts her right hand and sets the knife on his arm then pulls away leaving him screaming with a gash in his hand. She quickly runs to the other side of the island as Bokang looks at his bleeding arm. He looks up at her, getting angrier and angrier. He advances towards her but she runs to the bedroom. She hears his heavy footsteps behind her. She gets into the bedroom and closes the door behind her. Bokang gets to her before she can lock the door and pushes. No matter how hard she tries to lock the door she fails. Bokang is stronger than her. Even with a bleeding arm he overpowers her. She lets go of the door and he stumbles into the bedroom. When he tries to balance his footing and advance towards her she lands a heavy punch on his temple. He stumbles back and falls onto the floor and passes out.

Zethu kicks his foot but he doesn't wake up. She tiptoes up to his upper body. She feels his neck for a pulse and finds it. It's faint, but it's there. She quickly gets out the bedroom and locks the door. She hurries to the kitchen and picks up her phone. Just then Phepsile and Thando walk in laughing. Thando is the first one to see the blood. She swiftly moves towards her sister.

"Zethu, what happened? Are you Okay?" Thando asks, her voice panicking.

"It's not my blood."

"Then whose blood is it?" Phepsile asks her. Zethu figures she can show them more than she can explain right now. She leads them to the bedroom, they gasp at the drops of blood as they walk to the bedroom. Zethu opens the door and the two gasp when they see Bokang laying on the floor.

"Is he dead?" Phepsile asks.

"No. Last time I checked he had a pulse." Zethu tells her.

"Phepsile, call the cops and an ambulance. Zethu call Ndumi and tell her to bring Mgazini. We might need a lawyer for this.

“What if he is dead?” Zethu asks pacing up and down. It’s been over an hour since they called the police and the ambulance. Neither of them have arrived. Ndumi and Mgazini come rushing into the house exactly an hour after Zethu called them as per Thando’s instruction. They’ve tied a t-shirt around the gash on Bokangs arm. He is still breathing, although unconscious, a pulse is still there.

“What happened? Where is he?” Mgazini asks. Thando leads him to the bedroom. He is still in the same position he was in ten minutes ago. He leans down and checks for his pulse. It’s still there. “Have you called the police?”

“We did, just before we called you.” Mgazini stands up and looks at Thando.

“That was an hour ago.” He says. Thando nods her head. He takes out his phone and calls again. He doesn’t get through.

“Keep calling. We should all try calling until they get here. If anything happens there should be proof that we called both the police and the ambulance and they took their sweet time.”

Mgazini commands. They all get onto their phones calling the police and the ambulance at the same time.

“Do you think he will die?” Ndumi asks Mgazini. They’ve been standing a few feet away from the others. Zethu is beside herself with fear and worry. If Bokang dies she might just ho to

jail.

“I hope not. Let me call someone.” He dials a number on his phone and waits. The person answers. He walks to the bedroom to be away from the others.

“Ntshangase.” The man answers. Mgazini puts the phone on loudspeaker before checking Bokangs pulse again.

“Commissioner. I have a problem.” The man laughs.

“You always have a problem mgazi, what is it this time?”

“I have a client. She has a protection order against her ex. Today the same man came to her house while she wasn’t home. He found her little sister, he tried to intimidate her. She ended up defending herself by cutting him on the arm. He chased her into the bedroom and tried to probably rape her. If she hadn’t punched him God alone knows.” He tells him.

“Okay, so is he still there, did the police apprehend him for violating the protection order?” The commissioner asks.

“That’s the thing. He is still here laying unconscious. I think when she punched him, add the alcohol he seems to have been drinking plus the bleeding wound, he is still unconscious. Police and the ambulance were called over an hour ago and they are still not here. Now if this man dies here, you will not charge my client with any crime.”

“Relax, I’ll send the police and an ambulance there. Send me the location.”

“Good. But if they are not here in fifteen minutes I’m calling

Rosa. I'm sure she'd like to run the story of a man laying in his own pool of blood with no cops or ambulance in sight and an eighteen years old distraught girl."

"Don't try to intimidate me Ntshangase."

"You call it intimidation, I call it motivation." The commissioner laughs.

"You need Jesus wena. Anyways let's do golf next week."

"Sure. You'll let me know. Send your man bra before this becomes something it shouldn't be."

"They are already on their way. Sharp." He hangs up and heads back to the lounge where the girls are huddled together on the couch.

"The police are on the way. And the ambulance too." Mgazini tells them.

"But we've been calling the cops. The last time we called they said they had no cars." Ndumi says.

"I called the commissioner. He is sending them over." As if on cue, they hear the sirens slowly getting closer. Their apartment block is just a few feet away from the gate so they can hear when the police are at the gate. Phepsile speeds down the few flights of stairs and heads to the gate. She finds the security still questioning them.

"Please let them in, we have an emergency, please." She begs. The security sees the panic and fear in her eyes so they open

the gates and let the police and ambulance in. She leads them to the lift and they go up to the apartment. "He is in the bedroom." She tells the Paramedics. Mgazini shows them to where Bokang is and returns back to the lounge where some of the officers are already questioning the girls.

"So tell me what happened here?" One officer asks. Zethu calmly explains everything to the officer even though deep inside she is nervous as hell.

"So you opened the door for him and invited him into the house?" The officer asks.

"Which part of 'he budged in' gave you the impression that he was invited?" Mgazini asks the officer.

"I'm just trying to get the full picture chief. Let me do my job." The officer arrogantly answers.

"Do your job properly and you'll have nothing to worry about." Mgazini fires back.

"So why did you have a protection order against the man?"

"He was abusive. He threatened me when I broke up with him. So I got a protection order." Ndumi answers.

"So let me get this straight

Advertisement



you had a protection order against him?” The officer says pointing at Ndumi. “And you stabbed him?” He points at Zethu. “How do I know that you didn’t plan any of this? For all I know you invited the poor man here just to kill him.”

“Usudakiwe manje. (You’re drunk now.)” Mgazini tells him.

“Why would any of them invite a man who made their sisters life a living hell and then stab him?”

“For that very reason. He probably came here to make peace and instead got a knife stuck in him.” The officer argues.

“Typical. A woman calls for help and instead of helping her you’re accusing her of something else. What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“I’m just trying to get to the bottom of this. I have to ask all questions to get my answers.”

“Well you’re done questioning my clients. The only thing you should be doing is asking that man why he was here to begin with.”

The paramedics push Bokang out on a stretcher.

“Will he be okay?” Mgazini asks them.

“He will be Okay. The wound on his arm is a bit deep but it didn’t affect any major arteries. But he did bleed a lot because of the alcohol. The alcohol levels in his system are way over the limit. But he will survive.” The Paramedic tells them before pulling him out of the apartment.

“Well, there you have it. He got drunk and decided to come and intimidate my client.” Mgazini tells the officers.

“Well we will get to the bottom of this. Where is the weapon used to stab him.” The other officer lifts up an evidence bag with a bloody knife inside.

“I have it.”

“Good. Let’s go. We will make sure to question the suspect as soon as he wakes up. In the meantime, please don’t leave town.” He says and follows his colleagues out of the house.

“At least he is alive.” Zethu says heaving a sigh of relief.

“Yeah well I wish he was dead.” Ndumi says. “I know I’m not supposed to wish death on anyone but I’m pretty certain the world would be a better place without that monster in it. I can’t believe there was a time I loved him.”

“We all make mistakes.” Phepsile says.

“I’ll clean up the blood.” Thando stands up to get the cleaning supplies. Zethu and Phepsile follow her. Mgazini takes a seat next to Ndumi. “Are you Okay?”

“I am fine. I’m just wondering what he would have done if I was actually here.”

“I guess we will never know now. But I will make sure he doesn’t come near you ever again. You’d think losing his job would have been enough of a message for him to stay away.”

He says, his eyes starring at the wall in front of him. Ndumi turns to look at him, questions running through her head. She knows Elias had something to do with Bokang being attacked. He spent a few weeks in hospital nursing his broken bones. She didn't know he'd lost his job in the process. This could be the reason he is so angry. She thinks to herself. And if he has nothing to lose he might come back and do something else. "We have to move." She says standing up. Her sisters stop scrubbing the blood and look at her. "We have to move, we have to find a place with a little more security. If he can just walk in here, just like that, he will come back, and this time we will be more angry no one knows for sure what he might do. We have to go." She starts pacing up and down. Mgazini stands up and holds her still.

"Nondumiso. Relax. He is going away for a long time now. Trust me I will make sure of it. You'll never have to deal with him ever again. Relax. You can't leave your home because of him." He sits her down on the couch.

"What if he comes back? You heard the officers, they don't believe anything we said."

"I know someone who can take care of Bokang once and for all." Thando announces. They all turn to look at her. "Mesuli. He took care of Jerome, I'm sure he won't mind taking care of Bokang."

"Thando you can't use your father to clean up our problems."

Phepsile says.

“How about I ask him and hear what he says.” Thando argues.

“Wait. Mesuli is actually your father? I thought he was just a family relative or something.” Mgazini exclaims.

“He’s her father. Why? Do you know something about him?”

Ndumi asks him.

“I know enough to know that if you call him, Bokang will either cease to exist or he will be so afraid to come anywhere near you he might even move to a different province.”

“Is he really that dangerous?” Zethu asks.

“Let’s just say if you ever get in his good books, make sure you stay there forever. I have to go and make sure there is an actual docket open for this idiot. I’ll come check on you guys later. In the meantime I’ll be drawing up a lawsuit against the complex for letting Bokang in here without an invitation or a thorough security check.” Mgazini stands up. “Make sure you keep the door locked as well as the burglar. I’ll see y’all later.” He walks out and Ndumi quickly locks the door behind him.

“Mesuli says he’ll be in Joburg by morning.” Thando announces.

“You told him?” Phepsile asks.

“I just texted him. And no, I’m not using him, it’s kind of nice to have a protective father for a change. And trust me, I’ll milk it for all its worth.”

## THANDO

She didn't think he'd come. Sure she had hope but when you've been disappointed for half your life you cant help but have room for disappointment, even if said room is bigger than your faith. But he is here. By 6AM he was calling her saying he is at the gate. She went down and tagged him in. He drove in and parked in their designated parking space since none of them had a car, the parking space was always empty. Except when Mgazini was here or Clint.

"I didn't think you'd actually come." She tells him as she walks closer to the car, he chuckles and gets out of the black SUV. It's a different car to the one she's seen him driving. The only common thing between the two cars is the pitch black colour with black tinted windows. If she didn't know better she'd think he was the president. He gives her a hug and they stand leaning on the car. Their dress code a complete opposite of each other. He has on a black suit and a tie, she has on pyjamas, a gown and an old stocking holding her braids in place. Anyone looking in from the outside would think he is her sugar daddy.

"Why wouldn't I come?" He asks. She shrugs her shoulders.

"I don't know. How was your trip?"

“Good. So what’s happening? You didn’t explain anything yesterday.” She tells him everything that happened yesterday. By the time she’s done he has his teeth clenched in anger. “So where is he now?”

“At Bara I think. Mgazini said he’d make sure he is in custody and the police actually build a case against him because when the officers were questioning Zethu they made it seem like we planned this whole thing. And that time we don’t even know how he got through security.” She tells him.

“You’ll have to move. I know I said I’ll take care of this, and I will but I’d feel much better if you’d move. Clearly this place is not safe for any of you.” He says.

“Ndumi suggested that but she recently renewed the lease so it won’t be easy to get out of it.”

“I’ll take care of it. In the meantime I’ll find a safe place for you. I will take care of this Bokang guy.”

“Don’t kill him.” Thando blurts out. Mesuli just laughs and opens the car door.

“I will try my best to control myself. Anyways I should get going.”

“You’re not staying for breakfast.” He quickly closes the door.

“I’ll never say no to food.” They go up to their apartment.

Ndumi is already preparing for work while Zethu and Phepsile are still fast asleep. Mesuli greets Ndumi and takes a seat on

the couch while Thando prepares food.

“I was telling your sister that you guys have to move out of here. It’s not safe for you.” He tells her. She takes a seat on the couch across from him.

“That would be nice except we cant afford it. The lease is new and if we leave now we will have to pay a lease cancellation fee and forfeit the deposit and pay for the next month. It’s a lot of money.”

“I’ll pay for it.”

“Thank you but we don’t want to go into unnecessary debt right now.” She argues.

“I didn’t say it was a loan. I said I’ll pay for it. And then I’ll find you and place to stay. One that is safe for all of you.” Mesuli insists.

“You really don’t have to.” Ndumi says.

“Stop arguing Nondumiso. He’s going to do it whether you say yes or no.” Thando says placing a steaming hot cup of coffee in front of Mesuli. Ndumi laughs and stands up.

“Well in that case, I wont stand in your way.” She picks up her bags just as Mgazini texts her saying he is outside.

When she leaves Mesuli joins Thando in the kitchen.

“So have you thought about the ceremony?” She hands him a plate of food. “Thank you.”

“I’ve thought about it. I will do it. I think I also want to change

my surname. But the issue I have with that is I already applied for school with the Nkosi surname. I'm not sure how that's going to be affected." She tells him.

"We'll figure it out. But I'm happy you want to do this. Its about time your ancestors know you."

## PHEPSILE

She walks to school, a little lighter than when she first came back. Khanyi was suspended for a few weeks after Clint and the other students reported her for harrassment. She had to go through a disciplinary process before her punishment was handed down to her. Today is the day she returns back to her studies. Phepsile is hopeful she has learnt her lesson. Clint told her he has something to take care off so he won't be in class. Having him here would have been a little comforting, but now she has to face Khanyi alone. The only thing she'll have to rely on to get through the day are the breathing exercises her therapist recommended for her. They've come in handy when she has her panic attacks so she's hopeful even today they will work to her favor.

When she gets to the lecture hall, she's the first to arrive. She



decides to go through some of her work before class starts. She puts her headsets in her ear and focuses on her laptop. Halfway through her typing someone shuts the laptop, barely missing her fingers. She pulls out her headsets and looks up to Khanyi's fire burning eyes.

“I hope you’re happy with yourself.” Khanyi says looking down at a terrified Phepsile. “My bursary is under review, and I might lose it.” She tells her. Phepsile tries to ignore her and open her laptop but Khanyi has her hand on it and she refuses to let go. “Khanyi, I’m working. Please move your hand from my laptop.” Phepsile says, sounding calmer than she feels. Her eyes are roaming around the lecture hall, hoping someone else walks in. She’s afraid of what Khanyi might do. Even though she was hoping Khanyi would come back with a different attitude than the one she remembers but at the back of her mind she knew Khanyi is not the type that can easily change.

“Because your work is more important than me losing my bursary? Wena you have your rapist/boyfriend/father to foot your bill. Me, I have no one. You better pray and hope I don’t lose my bursary or so help me God, you will regret it.” She turns to walk away but then stops when she hears Phepsile say something behind her. She turns to look at her. “What did you say?”

“I said I hope you do lose your bursary. I really hope you do. I’m not one to wish bad on people but you, you’re vile human being Khanyisile. You have no idea what I went through, you have no idea what being raped does to a person, especially when the perpetrator is your own father. You have no idea and I hope to God you never get to experience it. I hope to God even your children are spared from that heartache. But as for your bursary

Advertisement

I hope you do lose it. Maybe that will give you something to think about.” Khanyi throws her head back laughing and clapping her hands. She walks closer to Phepsile and stands in front of her.

“You almost had me. For a hot second I almost felt sorry for you. But now I don’t. Heck I never did. You’ve always thought you were better than us. I saw the judgmental looks you’d give us each time we got ready for a night out. While you were busy judging us for having blessers you were hiding a secret so big. In fact you had the biggest blesser. While the rest of us were hustling to make ends meet you never bothered because you knew daddy dearest would take care of you. So tell me, Phepsile Nkosi, how many rounds did you have to give him

before he agreed to sponsor you? It must have been so good to share a man with your mother.” Khanyi spits out.

“Khanyisile I’ve never judged you. No matter what you did I never judged you. If you feel guilty for the things you’ve done to get here that’s a you problem. Unlike you, I actually do feel sorry for you. I know how hard you had it growing up and I know why you felt the need to have a blesser. I get it. I really do. But don’t think picking on me is going to ease your conscience. Don’t think turning the tables and making it seem like I enjoyed being rape is going to help you sleep better at night. It won’t. So go ahead, continue making up lies about me if it helps your case. But one thing you’ll never be able to erase is my truth. So go ahead, do what you need to do. My truth will always remain the same. And you, you will always have your conscience and your soul to deal with. Have a nice life sis.”

Phepsile opens her laptop up just as people start to upload. The two girls have been so caught up in their exchange they didn’t even notice the other students slowly trickling into the class.

“Khanyi, please leave my class.” The professor says. One student raises her hand up. “Yes Thabethe.” The girl stands up. “Before she leaves professor I have a question for Miss Khanyi. Since you say Phepsile enjoyed being molested, does it also mean I enjoyed it when I was gang raped two years ago?” she

looks at Khanyi waiting for an answer but only gets a cold stare. Another girl stands up.

“Does it also mean I enjoyed it when my brother molested me when I was nine?” Another girl stands up.

“Did I also enjoy it when my ex boyfriend tied me up and raped me for three days because I had broken up with him?”

Another one stands up too.

“Did I enjoy it when I was raped by a police officer who was supposed to protect me from an abusive boyfriend?”

More than half the girls in the class stand up wanting answers from Khanyi. The silence in the hall is deafening. Even though the girls are still standing in silence, Khanyi can feel the daggers being thrown her way.

“I’m not sure which planet you come from Khanyi.” The lecturer begins. “But this is earth, and especially in South Africa, women and girls are raped every single day. Every single one of us here, as you can see, is either a victim of rape or we know someone who is. Next time you think of spewing the vile things coming out of your mouth, remember this, a woman is most likely to be raped and killed in South Africa than in Sudan. So thank you for attending my class but now you can leave. I will make sure to let the dean know why I never want to see you in my class again. Have a good day.” Khanyi grabs her bag from the chair and walks out of the classroom as students whistle and hurl

insults at her. “Okay. That’s enough. Let’s get to work.”

After the lecture the professor asks to see Phepsile. So while the other students walk out she sits still, waiting until the last one walks out before standing up and walking down to the professor.

“Miss Nkosi, firstly I’d like to apologize for earlier. No one deserves that. And I hope you won’t let what happened be a stumbling block in your studies.”

“It wont. I’m not going to let Khanyi get to my head.” She answers. The professor nods and hands her a card.

“That’s the number of a student counselor. If you feel like you need someone to talk to give her a call. You’re not alone in all this. Trust me, some of us have been there. So keep your chin up. And I will also recommend for Khanyi to be expelled. We cant have someone who bullies survivors on campus. We are trying to minimize rape cases on campus and with people like her around, it might make it harder for other victims to come forward.”

“Thank you. I’ll make use of it.” She walks out of the hall happier than when she came in, for the first time in her life truly believing that there truly is a rainbow after every storm.

## NONDUMISO

It's been a week since Bokang budged into their flat and caused havoc. He's been in hospital under police guard. As soon as he is released he is headed to jail to face the music for his actions. Ndumi walks into the hospital, nerves and fear clouding her mind but her heart needs closure. She needs to put an end to the toxic relationship she has with Bokang.

She turns the corner going towards his ward. There's a police officer sitting right outside with a newspaper in his hand and a can of monster energy drink sitting between his open legs. She takes one deep breath and walks towards the officer.

"Hello, I am here to see Bokang." She says nervously. The officer looks at her from head to toe. She's wearing one of her power suits and looking rather professional.

"Are you family?" The officer question, seemingly not interested in having a conversation with her.

"No."

"Then I can't let you in. Only family is allowed." He goes back to his newspaper, silently dismissing her. A thought pops into her head.

"I am his lawyer." The man quickly stands up and looks at her.

There's nothing about her that says she could be lying. He pushes the door open and she walks in. She sees him laying on the bed, his one arm is in handcuffs and the other has a bandage around it. ***He looks so peaceful laying there, no one would think there is a screw loose in his head.*** Ndumi thinks.

Her heels clicking on the floor make enough noise for him to open his eyes. She looks back and realises the officer is still there, standing by the door watching her.

"A little privacy please." He shakes his head and walks out, closing the door behind him.

"Look at you, are you here to beg for my forgiveness?" She turns back to Bokang and he has a smug look on his face. She takes a few more steps towards him. Being so close to him gives her an opportunity to look at him carefully. He doesn't look like the man she fell in love with. But then again he hasn't looked like that man in a long time. Maybe she was just too blinded by love to see it.

"Cuffs look good on you." She says. He looks at her, no longer smug as he was a moment ago.

"What do you want?" She drags the plastic chair sitting in the corner of the room and sits down.

"How are you feeling?" He chuckles and looks out the window. He is in a private ward that looks like it was made for convicted

felons. It has thick burglar bars on the windows and cameras in every corner.

"Why are you here Nondumiso?" He asks, his eyes not moving from the window.

"I came to check on you."

"Why?"

"Because there was a time I actually cared about you. Why cant you just accept the fact that it's over between us?"

"After everything I've done for you?"

"Done for me? Bokang are you hearing yourself? What exactly did you do for me? Because if I remember correctly I paid your rent, I sent money to your baby mama each time you'd ignore her calls because the child was hungry or sick. I'm the one who did that, for you. And what did I get in return? Nothing but slaps and kicks." She yells. "You are one piece of shit you know that."

"I know and I also know I didnt ask you to do any of those things. You did all that from the goodness of your heart. Or maybe you were so desperate to prove that you are more than just daddy's little freak." He laughs as Ndumi stands there, her jaw on the floor. "You can stand there and act like you're the saint who did poor old me favours, but let's be realistic sweetheart, you were so desperate to be loved you would have done that for anybody. Even a homeless hobo just to feel good



about....." A slap flies across his face. Ndumi wipes her tears and slaps him again.

"How does it feel being the bitch now? Huh?" She throws a punch on his injured hand and he screams like a little girl. "Look at you, screaming like a little bitch."

"You're lucky I'm cuffed or your ass would be....."

"Would be what Bokang? Mhmm? I'd be what? Keep acting tough, you'll be in a cell with twenty other people who'll be more than happy to boss your ass around. The days of you bullying me are over." He grins through the pain ripping through his arm.

"I'll be out in less than a month. And then I'm coming for your ass. You will pay for all this." He hisses.

"Keep telling yourself that. Even if you get out in an hour, you'll be lucky if you can get within ten feet of me." Bokang throws his head back laughing.

"You think your lawyer friend will protect you? He wont. By the time I'm done with you....."

"I dare you to try Bokang. I dare you." She walks out leaving Bokang screaming insults at her.

"Lawyer huh?" The officer says as soon as she closes the door behind her. "Dont worry, he will meet his mates in jail." He

adds and goes back to his newspaper.

Ndumi walks away with her phone ringing in her bag. She takes it out and sees Mgazini's number in the screen. She ignores it and waits for the call to cut before requesting an uber. The phone rings again and she picks up.

"Mgazini."

"Hey, where are you?"

"I'm leaving the hospital. What's going on?"

"I have some news. I'm on my way to your place now." He tells her and her heart starts beating fast.

"What is it?"

"Get to your place, now." He hangs up and her anxiety flares up. The uber is four minutes away. It's not much but right now it feels like a lifetime for Nondumiso.

After pacing up and down the front of the hospital entrance for what feels like forever, the uber shows up. It takes a while for her to get to her place, thanks to evening traffic. She pays the uber and runs up the stairs to her flat. She nudges in scaring the shit out of Thando and Zethu.

"What the heck Nondumiso." Thando says holding on to her chest as if it will stop her heart from galloping on her chest.

"What's wrong?" Ndumi throws herself on the couch also trying to calm her beating heart.

"I'm sorry, I didnt mean to scare you. I just got a call from Mgazini saying he is on his way here. I thought he was here already." Thando takes a seat next to her sister and hands her a glass of water. Ndumi takes the glass and drinks.

"He did call me too, he said there's something he needs to tell us." Thando tells her.

"What do you think he wants to tell us?" Zethu asks. "What if Jerome is being released?" Thando and Ndumi look at each other, wondering if that could be true.

"No way

Advertisement

he is not being released. He will die in prison." Thando says and takes a sip of Ndumi's water. Just then they hear a knock on the door before Phepsile and Mgazini walk in laughing. They stop when they see everyone looking at them.

"Ladies, you're all here. Perfect." Mgazini says then takes a seat next Ndumi.

"What was so urgent that you had to talk to ha about?" Ndumi asks.

"Hello, Nondumiso, how are you? Me, I am fine thank you for

asking."

"Stop playing mani Mgazini, what's going on?" She says lightly hitting him on the chest.

"Okay, so I have some not so pleasant news. Your father has a new lawyer." He says.

"Okay, but he has already been sentenced so why does he need a lawyer?" Phepsile asks taking a seat on the arm rest next to Thando.

"Well that's the thing, he is appealing his sentence and he has been granted leave to do so?" He tells them. Silence fills the room as each of them try to process everything that Mgazini just told them.

"I dont understand, he confessed. He literally stood in front of the court and told the court everything he did to us. So why would he appeal a confession that he made?" Thando questions.

"Well according to him, he claims that he was coerced into making that confession. He claims he was beaten and sexually assaulted and then forced to confess to something he knows nothing about."

"Wow, that man is unbelievable. After everything he has done he is just going to lie like that." Phepsile says.

"He cant do that, I mean the court can't possibly believe that?"

Right?" Zethu asks.

"You know how the courts are, everyone is entitled to prove their innocence. And Jerome is no different. The fact that he even got this appeal means there is a chance he might actually walk."

"So much for justice." Zethu says getting up and disappears down the passage.

"Let me dish up. Who's hungry?" Thando asks also standing up.

"Not me. I've lost my appetite." Phepsile says before following Zethu to the bedroom.

"Well I guess you two will dish up if you're hungry. I am going to take a nap." She follows her sisters leaving Mgazini and Ndumi sitting on the couch.

"So he gets away with it?" Ndumi asks.

"I dont know. But from the looks of it, he might." She chuckles and takes a sip of her water.

"After everything he has done to us, the pain, the trauma, everything and he still walks away Scot free. Where is the justice in that?" He pulls her in for a hug and she sobs on his chest. For the first time in her life she allows herself to weep for all her pain.

"Not if I can help it. Even if he gets out, i promise you i will do

whatever it takes to make certain he never comes anywhere near you or your sisters." She lifts her head up and looks at him. "There is nothing anyone can do to stop that man. He is manipulative and a liar. We spent years fearing for our lives because he said he'd kill us if we said anything about what he did to us. He made sure the world saw him as a saint, meanwhile behind closed doors he was a monster. Nothing will stop him." She says with tears running down her face.

"Okay maybe I cant stop him personally but I know someone who can." He takes out his phone and sends a text.

"Who are you texting?"

"Mesuli. He says he is on his way here."

"Okay. What do you think he will do?" Ndumi asks, a little calmer than she was a moment ago.

"I dont know yet. I just think he needs to be updated too."

"Well that's true. Are you hungry?"

"Yes please." She gets off the couch and dishes up for him.

Mgazini's phone rings and he gets off the couch to answer it. In less than a minute he is done with his call.

"I'll be right back, I need to get my work phone from the car."

He tells Ndumi before walking out. When he gets to the parking he finds Mesuli standing by his car.

"Ntshangase. What is so urgent?"

"Jerome might be on his way out of jail. He was granted leave to appeal his sentence. And from the looks of it, he might walk." Mesuli takes off his jacket and throws it in the car before rolling up his sleeves.

"Not if I can help it."

"That's what I said. So, what are we going to do? I could say let's get him out of the way now but he is being kept in solitary confinement to protect him. His lawyer seems to be good."

Mesuli leans on his car, his hands in his pockets and eyes looking up.

"Let him walk. For now. I need him to think he has won before we do something. Clearly jail is not enough." He says.

"The girls can't know about this though. Whatever we do, we have to make sure they don't get involved." Mgazini says.

Mesuli nods his head.

"Of course. They have been through enough. I can't believe that son of a bitch will walk."

"Me either."

"And then they tell people to trust the justice system and then this happens? Fuck that, if the law won't take its course then I will be his judge, jury and executioner."

"I think I like this one." Zethu says running up the stairs. They have been house hunting for the better part of the week. Mesuli sets up the appointments for the viewings then picks the girls up so they can see them. Today they are in Broadacres looking at a 5 bedroom house that Mesuli brought them to. Zethu and Phepsile are excited about it. Thando, not so much.

"You dont like it?" Mesuli asks seeing the look on Thando's face. She forces a smile on her lips.

"The house is nice, I just think it's too big. Can't we just find an apartment or a townhouse atleast. I'm sure the rent will be better than here." She says.

"Who said anything about renting?" Mesuli asks walking away leaving Thando with her jaw on the floor. He disappears into one of the rooms while Thando watches him.

Phepsile comes walking down the stairs to find her still standing there.

"And now? Why do you look like you've seen a ghost." She asks waving her hand in front of her sister. Thando blinks a couple of times before meeting Phepsile's gaze.

"When we agreed to move we were all under the impression we are moving to another rental place right? Or I got things wrong?"



"We are definitely renting. I don't think any of us can afford to buy this place, even with the money mum gave us, plus you still have to go to school and so does Zethu, Ndumi is almost done with her articles so rent we can afford." Phepsile answers unaware of the many questions running around in Thando's head.

"Okay. I'll speak to Mesuli, I think we all have to be on the same page. Let's go look upstairs." They go up the stairs looking around. The house is beautiful no doubt, but Thando is still skeptical about accepting help from her new found father. When the tour is done they all get in Mesuli's car. Phepsile and Zethu can't stop gushing about the house. Mesuli keeps stealing glances at Thando.

"Don't you like the house?" He asks her while parked at the traffic lights. She sighs and looks at him.

"The house is nice, but it's too big for us, we can't afford it." He nods his head and keeps driving.

"Okay, so let's say you had the money would you buy it?"

"Of course. Who wouldn't. It's beautiful." A smile forms on his lips as he pulls out his phone. He dials a number and thanks to the bluetooth speaker, they all hear the person when they pick up.

"Mr Ngubane?" The woman says.

"Mpho, I'd like to make an offer on the house we just saw."

Mesuli says ignoring the side eye he is getting from Thando.

And the backseat has suddenly gone quiet.

"That's great news. I'll have the offer drawn up by the end of business today and hopefully we can have everything done by the end of the month." Mpho says excitedly.

"Please do. The sooner the better." He hangs up and finally looks at his daughter.

"You're not very good at listening are you?" Thando says making Mesuli laugh.

"I am good at it actually. I just have selective hearing." Thando sighs and focuses on the road. She's conflicted, she likes the idea of having a present father who is supportive and caring but the other side of her keeps wondering what she'll have to give to pay for his kindness.

It's not easy just moving on. As much as everyone says when one door closes another opens, for Thando it's been hard walking through the open door. From where she is she can see the goodness waiting for her on the other side, but she's still scared. Scared to believe in a dream of a better life. Scared to believe that she deserves better and better is waiting for her.

Her phone rings just as Mesuli pulls up to their apartment. It's an unknown number. She decides to ignore it.

"Aren't you going to answer that?" Zethu asks as they get out of the car.

"Nope." Thando says opening her car door. "Are you coming in for lunch?" She asks turning to her father.

"I'd love to but I can't. I have an urgent meeting to get to. But I did order lunch so it should be delivered in a few minutes."

"You do know you don't have to do all these things right?"

Mesuli laughs and starts the car.

"You are my daughter Thando. My only child, I've already missed out on so much of your life I don't want to miss out on any more. And if making your life easier means buying you a house or food then I am doing it. And as cute as you are, there is nothing you can do to stop me." He says giving her a smile. She shakes her head and gets out of the car.

"Okay then. I'll talk to you later." She waves goodbye as he drives off the heads up to their apartment.

"So should we start now saying girls with title deeds or should we wait?" Zethu asks as soon as Thando walks in. She rolls her eyes and throws herself on the couch.

"You should be worried about your results coming out and leave me alone."

"Please, fail or pass it's not the end of the world. So, since it's

obvious you'll be taking the main bedroom, as your favourite sister I'll take the other bedroom with an ensuite bathroom." Zethu says. Phepsile pops her head out of the fridge and looks at them.

"I'm the third oldest so I'll take that bedroom please."

"I called dibs first." Zethu argues. Thando watches them going back and forth and she smiles. For once she's happy these are the only problems they have to deal with. It's a refreshing feeling

Advertisement

not having to worry. Although the threat of Jerome walking out of prison scott free has been in the back of her mind, she's chosen to cross that bridge when she gets to it.

"You do remember Ndumi is also coming right?" She tells them. They stop arguing and look at her.

"Not unless we dont tell her." Phepsile says and Zethu nods her head.

"Yep."

"I dont know why you guys are arguing about this, all the bedrooms are ensuite." Thando says getting up to answer the door. She takes the delivery and walks back into the house.

"Its not the same though. Only two bathrooms have a tub and a

shower. And I want that one." Zethu says as they dish up the food.

They sit back down on the couch and eat while the two argue about who is going to get the bedroom. Her phone pings alerting her of a text message.

**"Hey, how about dinner tonight?"** She puts her plate down and replies to the text.

**"Sure. Come pick me up later."**

**"Will do. Be ready by six."** Her lips curve into a smile seeing the smiling emoji he sent to accompany the message.

"I am going to take a nap." She leaves them in the lounge and goes to the bedroom. Before she can drift off into a peaceful slumber her phone rings. She looks at the screen and sees her mother's number. She quickly sits up and answers the phone.

"Ma. Is everything okay?"

"I should be asking you that. How are you guys?" Thando sighs and lays back on the headboard.

"We are okay. Did you hear that Jerome is appealing the sentence?"

"I heard. And his brothers want me to support him. Apparently that's what a good wife would do." She says almost laughing.

"And are you?" Thando asks, as much as their relationship with

their mother has shown signs of improvement it is still fragile. Her decision in this will determine how their relationship goes from here on out.

"Of course not. That man deserves to rot in jail. I don't even know why the judge would even give him the chance to walk out of there. That man is a monster." Her mother says making Thando breathe out. Her mother's support means a lot to her and in spite of everything she'd love for them to rebuild it.

"You know how it is, justice in South Africa is nothing but a far fetched dream."

"Tell me about it. I hope you're not going to let this derail your plans. Don't give that man power over you. Are you still going to therapy?" Thando closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. She hasn't been to the therapist in almost three weeks. Although she has made sure her sister's attend their sessions.

"I missed it last week. But I'll go next week."

"Thando, you can't be missing out on your sessions. You need those."

"I know ma. I'll go. I've just been busy with the whole house hunting thing." Thando says rubbing her temples trying to ease the headache that's slowly taking over.

"House hunting? Are you going to buy a house?"

"Not me, Mesuli. Ndumi's ex barged in here a few weeks ago and tried to attack Zethu. So Mesuli decided to get us a house

so we can be in a safe place." She tells her.

"Okay. How is Zethu? Is she okay?"

"She'll be okay. She's a little fighter that one."

"And Ndumi? How is she?"

"She's okay. She is still at work."

"Okay. Anyways I wanted to check on you guys. I'm glad things are going well. It makes me happy." Her mum says.

"I'll tell them you called. Take care of yourself." Her mother laughs again.

"Thando you need to stop stealing my lines. We will talk later." She hangs up the call and takes her nap.

\*\*\*\*\*

At six o'clock on the dot Thulani calls saying he is at the gate. Thando walks out of the house wearing Jean's and a bodysuit with a coat over it. It's not too cold but the wind is a bit chilly. She finds him standing by his car. It's been a while since she saw him and the sight of him brings a smile on her face.

"Look at you. You look beautiful." He says giving her a hug. He holds her at arms length starring into her eyes. "Joburg loves you. You're glowing." She feels her cheeks burning up from

blushing.

"Still a charmer I see. How are you?"

"Much better now that I've seen you. Let's go." He opens the car door for her before joining her and driving off. They get to a restaurant in Fourways and they are led to a table. The waiter leaves them with the menus after taking their drinks order.

"So, tell me how you're doing. For real this time." He says holding her hand across the table.

"I am okay. Really, I am. It's been an uphill battle no doubt and it will probably be for a while but one day at a time right?" A smile crosses her lips. This time more genuine than it usually is.

"I'm glad to hear that. So, any boyfriend?" She laughs as the waiter places the drinks in front of them.

"That is never going to happen." She tells him and takes a sip of her drink, missing the hurt in his eyes.

"Never ever?" He questions, a bit of hope in his voice.

"Never. I dont think there is anyone who would want a damaged person as a girlfriend." He takes her hand again.

"You're not damaged Thando. Dont ever say that." He admonishes her. He could never see her as anything else but the girl he has had a crush on since he was a teenager. Nothing could ever change that for him.



"Come on Thulani, we both know girls like me don't get a happily ever after. With all the baggage and damage I bring, it would take an angel straight from heaven to even deal with me. And that's not a burden I want to put on anyone."

"Well, even Angels walk this earth so who knows maybe one day you will find your own. Right in front of you." He says and she laughs. She lifts up her glass and they make a toast.

"Well, we will see."

Their dinner goes fairly quick and for Thando it's a great way for her to just be herself. To laugh and be genuinely happy. By the time she heads back to the apartment she is in a great mood. Just like she said, one day at a time.

Her phone rings just as she gets into the apartment. She takes off her coat and sits on the bed pulling off her jeans. She takes the phone out of her bag and looks at the screen. It's an unknown number. She decides to answer it. It could be important.

"Hello."

"Hi babygirl." She freezes. No matter how hard she may have tried to forget it, this voice is one she will never forget. Not even in the afterlife. Her mouth becomes dry, her hands start shaking but her phone stays in her ear. "I've missed you. But

not to worry, I will be out soon and we will have a proper reunion. Tell your sisters I said hi and I will see you soon okay. Be good little girls okay." He hangs up the phone. Thando sits there, eyes closed and hands shaking. Her phone slowly falls on the floor.

She lifts her knees up and hugs them to her chest as silent sobs wreck through her. '*It will never be over.*' She thinks and the words keep ringing in her head. '*It will never be over.*'

2 months. That's how long it's been since Thando got that phonecall. And that's how long it's been haunting her. She's tried to keep calm and not dwell too much on it but she knows Jerome probably has plans for revenge. Well he has made that pretty clear.

Today also mark's the first full month of them in the new house. It turns out Mesuli's influence is goes far and beyond. Or is it fear of him? Thando is not sure anymore, all she knows is that wherever he is involved, things happen. But she has been reluctant when it comes to telling him about Jerome's phone call. Her sister's are in a good place right now. The only thing that's been a constant negative is the reminder that Jerome might walk anytime soon.

It hasnt been easy for her, especially with school starting soon. Zethu scraped through her matric, instead of applying for college she has decided to rewrite her matric so she can get better marks. Her sisters are supportive so she's not worried much.

Today all the girls are home. Its saturday and they've decided to just laze around. Phepsile and Zethu are in the kitchen cookin and baking up a storm. Thando is in the patio just looking out at

nothing in particular. Today is one of those days when Jerome's phonecall runs through her mind constantly. Ndumi takes a seat across from her, looking at her she knows something is not right.

"Penny for your thoughts." Ndumi says taking a sip of her brutal fruit. Thando takes a smile and shakes her head. "Oh come on. Something is going on with you. What is it? And dont tell me its school. I know its not. You've been distant lately." Thando sighs and puts down her Savannah.

"Well, a few weeks ago I got a call from Jerome." Ndumi pops her eyes out with her mouth wide open.

"What the fuck. And you didn't think to tell us?"

"I wanted to. Just, with the move and all, plus he hasnt called since then. I just figured maybe he is all bark and no bite."

"Thando, we both know Jerome is more than that. If he is making calls and threatening you or us, we could use it to stop his appeal." Thando sips her drink and sits back on the chair.

"I doubt it would work. He has literally made himself out to be the victim. It's like everything we went through because of him was just in our imagination. And you know the justice system in this country is not really up to par. People get away with a lot of shit. And now Jerome is about to be one of them." Ndumi sighs, closes her eyes and shakes her head.

"I still can't believe his lawyer though, she is a woman, shouldn't she be on our side? How can she defend that sorry excuse of a man?"

"She is a lawyer. All they care about is charging ridiculous amounts of money per hour. They don't care about the victims. They are greedy monsters." Thando rants.

"Geez Thando, I'm a lawyer too. Have you forgotten?" Thando bursts out laughing.

"I'm sorry. I forget sometimes that you're a lawyer. But all lawyers are greedy monsters except you."

"Because I am your sister?"

"Exactly." Thando says laughing. Ndumi rolls her eyes and sips her drink. "When are you leaving the legal aid office anyway? Don't you think it's time to be a high flying money making lawyer?"

"I don't know. I enjoy working with legal aid. I get to help a lot of people who don't have the means to afford a high end lawyer. But Mgazini did offer me a chance to finish my articles with his law firm." Thando sits up and places her elbows on the table with her cheeks resting on her hands.

"Ooooooooooh, he wants you." She says in a sing song tone making Ndumi blush.

"Don't be ridiculous. He is just being nice."

"Nice enough to want you close to him. Of course. So when are you taking him up on the offer?" Thando asks.

"I dont know. I dont know if I want to be a criminal lawyer. I think I want to go into corporate law. I dont think I can defend criminals. Not after everything we've been through."

"I understand that." They sit there in silence although Ndumi is taking stolen glances at her sister. Thando sees her and pretends like nothing is going on. Until she gets tired of it.

"Okay what's going on? Why are you looking at me like that?" Ndumi laughs.

"Fine. I'm curious. You and Thulani, what's going on? Are you dating yet?" Thando frowns.

"Dating? No. We are just friends."

"Friends who go out every chance you get. Friends who spend hours on the phone with each other. Those kinds of friends?"

"Ndumi, stop reading too much into it. We are just friends."

Thando insists but Ndumi doesnt seem to be buying it.

"To you maybe. But I don't think you and him are on the same page. Let alone the same book. Thulani has had a crush on you since high school and I'm pretty sure he wants more than friendship with you."

Thando clears her throat, trying to imagine having a boyfriend and having to have sex with him makes the hair on her neck

stand up. Therapy or not, she doesn't see herself being with a man. Ever. To her sister or anyone else for that matter, it may seem extreme but not to her. Jerome ruined her idea of sex. Right now all it is to her is torture and pain. And no man is going to be in a sexless relationship so why should she bother herself.

"That's not going to happen. If it's a relationship he wants, he will have to find it somewhere else." She says and gets up leaving Ndumi alone and wondering if her sister will ever fully heal. Her phone rings just as she thinks about joining her sister's in the kitchen.

"Ntshangase." Mgazini laughs trying to hide his blushing face. "You should call me that more often. It puts me in a good mood." Typical Zulu man. Ndumi thinks.

"I will try. So what's up?" The aura suddenly changes. In just a second Ndumi can feel that the laughter he had a moment ago is gone and now a cold almost weird feeling has taken over. Mgazini clears his throat.

"He is out." Ndumi sits there as each word seeps into her brain. Three words but they are enough to make her stomach turn and knock her world off its axis.

"When?" She asks after gathering her bearings.

"Last night. The judge dropped the charges yesterday." He says.

"The judge believed his story of being coerced into making the confession. There are medical records that show he was fine when he was arrested and during his bail hearing and then during his confession he was beaten up and sodomized. So the judge believes the confession was made against his will that's why he dropped the charges." He explains but nothing seems to be getting through to her.

They speak for a while before he hangs up, leaving Ndumi's blood boiling. She gets up and goes into the house. She watches Phepsile and Zethu laughing and giggling in the kitchen. A part of her wondering if she should burst their bubble now or wait until later. She decides later will be fine. They deserve a good day. And it's not like Jerome will be at their doorstep today or anytime soon.

She takes the stairs and goes up to her room. Pacing up and down her room trying to figure out how to even tell her sisters and wondering how they will react. The past few months have been somewhat a new chapter. A part of their lives they never thought they could ever have. The man responsible for all their pain was finally paying for his crimes, but now he is free. How is it that the very justice system that's meant to protect the weak is the one that's sending them back into a life of horror. Because she knows going forward they will have to look over their



shoulders at every turn, wondering if he was there, silently mocking them. She knows Zethu will do what she does best, crawl back into her little dark hole as a way to protect themselves.

For year the burden of protection rested upon Thando's shoulders, but now maybe it was time for her to take the reigns. But how can she protect her sisters from a man who seems determined to torture them all over again. Not telling them would be a disservice to them, because if he finds them before they know, it will break them. But now they can prepare for it, his arrival, because like it or not, he is coming.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Lunch is ready!" Zethu shouts from the bottom of the stairs. Thando and Ndumi walk out of their rooms and make their way downstairs. The table is set. Quite impressive really. It's a Saturday and the table is decked out like its Christmas.

"Okay, what are we celebrating?" Thando asks as she takes a seat.

"Well this is our official house warming lunch. We figured since we dont have any friends around to host a proper housewarming party we can just have a lunch." Zethu says, excitement all over her face. Ndumi looks at her, time and her

therapy sessions showing themselves in her mood. She's been happy lately. So maybe keeping the news of Jerome's release a little while longer wont hurt.

"Or maybe you need to make sure you're full before the concert." Thando argues.

"That too." Phepsile chips in and they laugh. Lunch goes on with laughter and banter the order of the day. This is what happiness looks like.

As soon as they are done with lunch Ndumi and Thando clean up while Zethu and Phepsile get ready for the concert. Clint will be here soon.

"What's going on with you

Advertisement

you've been quiet all through lunch." Thando asks.

"Nothing. I've just been thinking about your phonecall with Jerome."

"You shouldnt even give that man half a thought. As long as he is still behind bars we are safe. If, God forbid, he makes it out then, I don't know, we will cross that bridge when we get to it. Until then dont even think about him."

\*\*\*\*\*

"Wake up sunshine, we have to make lunch." Ndumi says pulling the blankets away from Thando. Thando pulls the blankets back up and covers her head.

"Let's cancel the whole lunch thing." Thando groans.

"You know we can't. We already invited your father, Mgazini, Thulani and Clint Eastwood will be here too." Thando pulls down the blankets laughing.

"Clint Eastwood?" She asks.

"What? I don't know his surname and the only Clint I know is Clint Eastwood so. Come on. Let's go make some food." Ndumi says walking out of the bedroom.

Thando gets up, washes her face, brushes her teeth and changes out of her pyjamas before joining her sister in the kitchen.

"Remind me again why we didn't have this lunch yesterday. I mean Zethu and Phepsile had a whole feast on the table. Why didn't we stop them?" Thando asks taking a seat on the kitchen island. Ndumi laughs and hands her the potatoes to peel.

"Because they were happy doing it. But next time they have to find another thing to make them happy. Decking out the table two days in a row is a waste of groceries." She says looking in

the fridge. "There is chakalaka from yesterday, I'm sure we can warm it up and it will be good. The rest we have to make from scratch. And we need more drinks. Hopefully tops is open."

Four hours later the table is set. The food is ready. They have bathe and changed clothes. All that's left now are the guests. There's an hour and a half before the guests start arriving. Ndumi decides to go get more drinks before tops closes. She requests an uber and leaves Thando to put the finishing touches on the food.

Thando looks around the kitchen making sure everything is in order. Yesterday was fun with just her siblings but today they have guests coming so everything needs to be in order. She hears a knock on the door and figures one of the guests is here early.

"Come in." She shouts while placing the cutlery on the table. She hears the door open and close before she turns around and comes face to face with her worst nightmare.

"Hi babygirl. You missed me?" He is different, his voice is wheezy and he looks gaunt and it's like he has aged ten years since the late time she saw him. His beard has grown and so have the grey hairs. He is wearing a yellow tshirt with a courier logo on it, which would explain how he got through security.

But then its Sunday, what courier company works on Sunday? Clearly he planned this.

"You're out?" Thando says in a tremulous voice. He smiles and takes off the cap on his head. His hair is grey too. She stands there, her back on the table, frozen in place.

"Of course I am out nana, did you really think I would be locked up forever?" He asks looking around the house. "This is a nice place you got. Let me guess, your new daddy got it for you?" He laughs, but his laugh is interrupted by a cough. "Of course he did. He is trying to make up for lost time." He turns around and looks at her, eyes cold and scary. She instinctively tightens her hold on the steak knife she was putting down.

"What do you want from us? Haven't you hurt us enough?" He walks closer to her, every step he takes sending Thando's heart on to overdrive.

"Hurt you? See I had an idea, when your mother tried to pin you on me, I let her. I acted like an idiot who didn't know any different. But see I knew everything. I knew about Mesuli and their little affair. I figured I'd pay myself back for raising an illegitimate bastard. And I found a way. A perfect way. It was supposed to be a once of thing, but then you were so young and so soft and perfect. I couldnt help myself but go back for more." He tells her running her hand on her cheek, wiping the

tears rolling down.

"You are a sick twisted man. You're a monster." Thando whispers between sobs. He laughs and turns around, opening the serving dishes.

"You've made a feast. You always were good at cooking." He picks up a drumstick and takes a bite. "Mhmmm. This is amazing. Almost as amazing as you." He says, a snide, devious smile on his face. "You know it's your fault I did what I did to your sisters right?" He takes another bite of the drumstick. "If you weren't so nice and fresh I wouldnt have wondered how they felt. I wouldnt have wanted to get a taste of them. I would have ended with you. So if you want to blame anyone for their 'hurt' as you call it, blame yourself." He throws the bone on the table and wipes his hand on his tshirt.

"Why wont you leave us alone? Just go and I wont tell anyone you were here." She begs. He gives her his creepy smile.

"Do you know the kind of torture your good for nothing father put me through in prison? Different men sodomizing me day and night. So much so I was diagnosed with HIV a few weeks back. I mean, I never gave you guys any diseases. I protected you. But your father, he wanted to make sure I suffer. Now I am going to make sure we all suffer. If you had kept your mouths shut we wouldn't be here. What do they say again, yes, injure

one injure all." He grabs her by the throat trying to slam her on the wall behind him. She quickly brings up her arm and sticks the knife on his abdomen. He steps back and groans holding on to his bleeding stomach.

"Sfebe ndzini. (Bloody bitch.)" He says after seeing the blood on his hand. He charges towards her again and she ducks, reaching her arm up and sticking the knife on his chest. She pulls it out as he falls on the floor bleeding. She watches as he gurgles blood and his breath slowly leaving his body.

She looks up to find Ndumi standing by the door, drinks splattered on the floor and her mouth wide open.

"I didnt mean to kill him." Thando whispers, the bloody knife in her hand and tears streaming down her face.

"Okay, think Nondumiso, think." She says pacing up and down, her dead father laying on the floor, blood slowly seeping onto the tile grout.

"We need to call the police." Thando says. The knife still in her hand and her feet still stuck in the same place. Ndumi stops and looks at her.

"No. We cant call the police. Unless you want to go to jail."

Thando sighs and pulls out a chair and sits down.

"So what do you suggest we do? We have guests coming."

Thando argues. "And we can't let Zethu and Phepsile see him like this." Ndumi bites her fingernails and sits down on the cold floor. She looks at her father, wondering if he would still be alive if she had told her sisters he was out of jail.

"I'm calling the police." Thando announces standing up and grabbing her phone. Ndumi quickly grabs the phone from her.

"Thando we cant call the police. Remember what happened with Bokang? The police were practically interrogating us like we had planned to hurt him. What do you think will happen when they find Jerome here, dead. The very same man who was in jail for raping us? Not only will we be facing jail time but trust me, his brothers and sisters would make sure we rot there."

"Despite the fact that he came in here, in a disguise clearly



ready to not only rape us again but make sure he infects us with HIV?" Thando questions. Ndumi sighs and rubs her forehead.

"Unfortunately this is South Africa, justice isn't as blind as it ought to be. We need to get rid of his body. Leave no trace he was ever here. Not even a piece of hair."

"Okay. I'll go get an old duvet so we can cover him up." Thando offers.

"No, stay here. You're bloody, we can't be spreading blood all over the house." Ndumi rushes up the stairs and comes back with two old bed covers. They lay one on the floor and roll Jerome's body onto it.

"We need to tie it up." Thando says. Ndumi rushes to the kitchen and opens every drawer until she finds the ropes they were supposed to use during their move. They tie him up before rolling him onto the other bed cover. They tie it up tight making sure blood is not seeping out before they roll him again onto refuse bags they lined up on the floor.

"Take off your clothes and put them in the refuse bag." Ndumi orders her sister. Thando does as she is told. She takes off her dress and her sandals and throws them inside the refuse bag. "Now go take a shower. I'll clean up here in the meantime."

Thando runs up the stairs while Ndumi grabs a bucket, gloves, bleach and a clean cloth. She gets on her knees and starts scrubbing the blood away. By the time Thando comes down, freshly dressed Ndumi is almost done.

Thando cleans up the broken bottles and spilt alcohol.

"Your turn, take off your clothes." Thando tells her sister.

Ndumi takes off her clothes and throws them onto the refuse bag together with the gloves and the cloth. "We need to burn these before anyone comes here. Go take a shower. I will burn these." Ndumi rushes off as Thando searches around the cupboard looking for something to use to start the fire but finds nothing. She grabs the bottle of cooking oil hoping it will do the trick.

She drags the bag out to the backyard, tosses it onto the braai stand and pours the cooking oil over it then sets it alight. It takes a while for the oil to fully catch the fire but eventually it does. She goes back in the house and finds Ndumi standing over the body.

"What do we do with him?" She asks.

"We keep him in the garage. We will dig a hole in the garden and bury him in it tonight." Ndumi says. Thando shakes her head.

"No. It's too obvious. And if God forbid he is found we will be the first suspects. We need to get rid of him as far away from here as possible. We can't leave any clue he was ever here."

Thando argues.

"Okay, how are we supposed to get a dead body out of an estate Thando? We don't have a car."

"I'll borrow Mesuli's car. I'm sure he won't mind. I'll have to make up a story but I'm sure he will give us the car." Ndumi nods her head.

"Okay, let's take him to the garage. Our guests will be here any moment." They each hold one end as they hear a car pull up outside. Ndumi rushes to the window and sees Clint's car parking and Zethu jumping out. She quickly locks the door, leaves the key in and rushes back to help Thando. They drag the heavy body out to the garage using the door that goes straight out to the garage. Gaint as he is, he is still heavy and it takes time for them to get him there. They lay him down on the corner as the girls start banging on the door since they can't put their keys in.

Thando and Ndumi place some old boxes on top of the body. And once they are certain he is not in plain sight they rush back in the house. Thando takes the keys to the garage and keeps them in her bra. They look around the dining room and kitchen

making sure everything is in order.

"I'll go check on the fire." Thando says as Ndumi opens the door.

"What took you so long?" Zethu asks rushing in followed by Phepsile.

"Hello to you too sis." Ndumi replies rolling her eyes.

"Dont mind them. They are still strung out from the concert." Clint says giving Ndumi a hug.

"I bet. How was it anyway?"

"It was amazing. They had the time of their lives." Clint answers.

"I can see. Thank you for taking them out."

"You do know I had my own ulterior motives right?" Clint asks, a mischievous smile on his face making Ndumi laugh.

"Oh I am certain of it. Any excuse to spend time with Phepsile." He gives her a wide smile and hands her the bottle of wine.

"Exactly." He says walking away.

"Ooh it smells nice in here." Phepsile says opening the serving dishes one by one.

"And it smells like bleach." Zethu adds, her nose up in the air.

"Were you spring cleaning?" She asks looking at Ndumi.

"Something like that." Zethu claps her hands and sings a loud hallelujah.

"Thank you Jesus I wasn't here." She exclaims.

"You do know spring cleaning happens more than once a year right?" Thando says walking in from the backyard.

"Whatever. I'm just glad I survived this one." Zethu says sticking her tongue out at her sister.

One by one their guests arrive. They serve them drinks and snacks as they gather around the lounge, chatting and laughing. Thando and Ndumi join in on the conversation even though their minds aren't fully here. Thando keeps glancing out at the backyard, wanting to make sure their clothes are fully burnt.

"Are you guys burning something?" Thulani asks seeing the smoke in the backyard.

"Just some old boxes and old clothes. Let me go see if the fire has died down." Ndumi says getting off the table. She walks out to the backyard and pokes the fire making sure everything burns.

"It's still burning?" Someone asks behind her making her jump and scream. She turns around to find a petrified Mgazini looking at her, unsure of what is happening.

"Really? Don't sneak up on people like that." She scolds him.

"Okay. I'm sorry. What's going on? You seem on edge." He says taking her shaky

Advertisement

sweaty hand in his. "Ndumi what's going on?" She pulls her hand away from his and checks on the fire again.

"I am fine. I've just been a little on edge since you called about Jerome. I feel like he will show up here any moment." His face softens and he pulls her to him, engulfing her in a hug. She lays her head on his shoulder taking in his scent.

"Unless he has lost his mind, he wont dare step foot here. Mesuli already has people on their way to make sure he doesnt come anywhere near you. By morning there will be guards all over here. And security has been alerted about him so they will not let him in here. Trust me, before he gets to you he will have to go through a whole lot of trained guards who shoot first and ask questions later." He assures her. She pulls away from him with a faint smile on her face.

"Thank you."

"We will keep you safe Nondumiso. I promise you." He says brushing her cheeks.

"Sorry to interrupt, we are about to serve dessert." Thando interrupts, walking towards them.

"Let me use the bathroom before then. I'll see you inside." He says and walks into the house leaving the two sisters alone.

"Is everything okay?" Thando questions seeing the fear in her sisters eyes.

"We have to get rid of him tonight. Mgazini said Mesuli is sending guards in the morning. And once they are here it will be hard for us to be alone long enough to get rid of him so we have to do it tonight." Thando nods her head, biting her nails. "I'll ask Mesuli for the car tonight. I'll tell him we need to use it in the morning. In the meantime we need to find a suitable place to get rid of him. And it cant be anywhere close to here."

-----

After lunch the girls walk out their guests. Mesuli is the last to leave. When they get to his car, the three girls say their goodbyes and head back in the house leaving Thando with him. He leans on the car and looks at her.

"Are you Okay? I noticed you've been preoccupied all through lunch." He asks her.

"Uhm, I am fine. I just have a lot on my mind."

"I'm listening." He urges.

"Just school stuff I need to do. So I was wondering if I can borrow your car. I have some things I need to do and using uber's or taxis will cost me." She rambles on missing the wide smile on his face.

He pulls out the car keys from his pocket and hands them to

her.

"You still need to drive home." She reminds him. He chuckles and buries his hands back in his pockets.

"Don't worry about it. I will get someone to come pick me up. Maybe I should buy you a car." He adds.

"No."

"Thando, I don't have any other child besides you. My mother is financially stable all on her own, my siblings are successful in their own right. If I don't spend money on you, as my daughter, who am I supposed to spend it on?" He asks. She shakes her head. He pulls his phone out and sends a text message.

"As grateful as I am to have you in my life, I don't want your money." She argues.

"Too bad. You'll get it anyway." She figures there is no point I'm arguing with him so she just lets it go, grateful to have the car for tonight. A few minutes later a black Mercedes pulls up. It's the same one he came to Mpumalanga with.

"You can use the car for as long as you want. Or until you get yours." He says walking to the Mercedes. She waves as they drive off then quickly rushes back into the house.

Time seems to be on slow motion. It's just after six and the girls are in the lounge watching TV. Zethu roped them into watching The Wife. Phepsile and Zethu are engrossed in the show, well



mostly just swooning over the men while the wheels turn in Thando and Ndumi's heads. Ndumi keeps looking at her watch, each minute seeming like an hour. Thando keeps biting her nails, desperate for her sister's to go to sleep.

At nine thirty Phepsile starts yawning. Zethu is already passed out on the couch. From the looks of it they are tired.

"Go to sleep." Thando tells Phepsile. She yawns again and stands up from the floor. Ndumi shakes Zethu who wakes up and stretches her body. The two follow each other up the stairs till they disappear into their bedrooms.

"Should we go now?" Ndumi questions.

"No. We have to make sure those two are sleeping. We need to also change our clothes. Have you thought about where we will get rid of him?"

"I was thinking we can drive towards Witbank. There are barren areas around there. We can toss him on the side of the road, take his phone and wallet and toss it and make it look like a robbery gone wrong." Ndumi answers. It looks like she put enough thought into her plan.

"His phone. We didn't take his phone. What if they can trace it and ping it to this location." Thando says. They get off the couch and rush to the garage. They hear a faint ringing sound, they look at each other in panic before opening the bed covers

and finding the phone. Luckily it's an old phone, without internet.

"Well atleast this one cant be traced." Ndumi says.

"Yeah but Mfankhona has been calling. There are ten missed calls here." Thando tells her. She quickly switches the phone off. "I'll get the car in the garage then we can drag him inside." She goes around to the front and reverses the car into the garage. Once the door is closed they open the boot, it's an SUV with plenty of space in the boot. They drag his body to the edge of the car before they pick him up and stuff him inside. He is heavier than he was when he died.

"The legs are overlapping." Ndumi says.

"Let's try and bend him, put him in a fetal position." They groan trying to bend his body. It doesn't help that he has been dead a while and his body is stiff. Eventually they manage to fit him in the compact space even with the covers.

"We need to burn these when we get back." Thando says and closes the boot.

"Let's go and change so we can go." They rush upstairs and change into black sweatshirts and sneakers. Thando checks on her sister's to make sure they are fast asleep before they head back into the garage. She gets into the drivers seat and takes a deep breath before driving out.

The roads are clear with just a few cars here and there. They drive towards Mpumalanga, the only company they have being the huge trucks driving around. As they approach Witbank Thando notices a roadblock up ahead.

"Oh God, we are screwed." Ndumi says, her hands shaking and beads of sweat forming on her forehead.

"Just relax. Hopefully all we have to do is give them cold drink and we will be on our way."

"Do we even have money? I didnt bring my wallet and we left our phones." Ndumi reminds her. Thando searches the cubbyhole and finds a twenty rand note and some coins.

They drive up to the roadblock and an officer waves them to the side.

"Act natural." Thando whispers as the officer knocks on her window. She rolls down the window and smiles at the officer.

"Good evening."

"License please." The officer says. Thando pulls out her licence from her pocket and hands it to him. He flashes his flash light on it and looks up at her.

"Have you been drinking Miss Nkosi?" He questions flashing the light inside the car.

"No sir." She answers hoping the wine from earlier has left her system or at least reduced to an acceptable level.

"Please step out of the car and open the boot."

"Shit!"

She sees it, her whole life falling apart right in front of her. She thinks about her new found father, her sisters and even her mum, all of them will have to talk to her with steel bars between them. She is close to tears, but she blinks them away. "Sisi, I said open the boot." The officer repeats pulling her out of her daze. She slowly unbuckles the seatbelt, a part of her praying for a miracle. A bolt of lightning, anything to distract this man from her.

She takes a glance at Ndumi and she is dripping with sweat. Her hands are on her lap and they are shaking. Thando takes one deep breath and opens the door. She will have to convince the officer that Ndumi had nothing to do with this. They cant both go to jail for this. She'll take the blame and go to jail. That's it, that's the only way to solve this. She will take the blame.

She gets out of the car and walks to the back like a small child who has been caught doing something she shouldn't. She takes one last deep breath before opening the boot.

"Is everything okay officer?" That voice. She knows it. It's dark and it's hard to see him but its him. He is here.

"Ngubs. What are you doing here?" The officer asks shaking his hand.

"Ngubs is your mother." He answers shaking his hand too and

they laugh.

Thando stands there like a statue as both men 'catch up.'

"What are you doing here?" The officer asks him.

"You just stopped my kids. I wanted to make sure everything is okay. We are going to Mpumalanga and I'm following behind them. Why did you stop them?" The officer glances from him to Thando and back to him again.

"These are your kids?" He flashes a light in Thando's face making her close her eyes. "Nope. She's too pretty to be yours."

"Tsek. Are you broke? That's why you're here so late at night."

He says and the officer laughs.

"Ke Januworry boss." Mesuli laughs and shakes the man's hand, transferring a couple of two hundred notes to him.

"It was nice seeing you again man." He says and the officer gives him a mock salute and walks away. He turns to Thando who still has her hand on the door. "Get in the car and keep going. I'll be right behind you." He tells her. She quickly gets in the car and drives off with Mesuli behind her.

"What just happened?" Ndumi asks.

"Mesuli happened. He just saved us from a jail cell." Thando answers. Ndumi turns on the seat to face her, a little calmer than she was a while back.

"What exactly does he do? In terms of work that is?" Thando shrugs her shoulders, her eyes glued on the road. She's been asking herself the same question. Wondering who the man she now calls her father really is.

When they have driven for almost twenty minutes Mesuli flicks his lights behind them. They don't have their phones so they don't know what he wants. Thando pulls over on the side of the road and waits. Mesuli pulls up behind them, gets out of the car and gets in the backseat.

"Okay talk, where are you going this late?" He asks looking at them. They look at each other, not sure if they should tell him about the elephant in the boot. "I have all night and day." He tells them. Thando sighs.

"Uhm, we were going to get rid of something."

"Who?" They both turn to look at him confusion all over them.

"There is no trash smelly enough it would make you drive across provinces just to get rid of it. Who is it? Bokang?"

"Jerome." Thando whispers.

"Jerome as in Jerome Nkosi." They nod their heads. "Where did you find him?"

"He came to the house dressed as a delivery guy. I think that's how he got through security. I got into an altercation with him and I stabbed him. Twice." Thando tells him.

"Did you call the police?" They shake their heads. "Why?"

"Because, knowing him, he probably had a whole plan when he came to the house. And chances are, if they found him dead in the house we would have been charged with murder, even if it was all self defense." Ndumi tells him.

"Okay why not call me?" He sounds pissed and calm all at the same time. But now he is getting angry. Not at them, but at Jerome. He wanted to be the one to teach him a lesson he will never forget, he wanted his face to be the last thing he sees. But more than anything he is angry at him for thinking he can waltz into their lives and just do as he pleases.

"We panicked. We were scared and we didnt want to get anyone else in trouble. If we were caught atleast one of us could take the fall." Ndumi answers. Mesuli curses under his breath and takes his phone out of his pocket and dials a number.

"Where are your phones?"

"We left them at the house." Thando says.

"Good." The person answers the call and thanks to bluetooth, their voice fills the car.

"Bozza."

"Thulani, listen, I need you to hack into the security system at Thando's place and wipe out the entire footage for Sunday."

"The whole twenty four hours?" Thulani asks.

"Yes. Make it look like there was a problem with the server. And also wipe out today's footage and plant a virus in the server."

"Got it."

"Hold on a second." He says and turns to the girls. "Did he come with a car?"

"We dont know but it should be there." Thando replies.

"There was a black Citi golf parked just a few feet away from the house. I saw it when I came back from buying drinks. It was still there after lunch. And it has an MP registration number."

Ndumi tells him. Mesuli goes back to his call.

"Okay, get Rubber to the house and take the Citi golf you'll find there. Get rid of it."

"No problem boss. We are on it." Thulani answers before hanging up the phone.

"Okay I need you to get in the car behind us. Pele will drive this car and get rid of the rat. I am taking you back." They do as instructed. They get in the car as two of the guys who were with Mesuli get out and take instructions from him.

"I think your father is a gangster." Ndumi says from the backseat.

"I think so too." Thando answers, a ghost of a smile on her face.



Mesuli gets in the car after telling his men what to do. He starts the car and drives back to Joburg.

"How did you find us?" Thando asks him.

"The car has a tracker. My men noticed it was on the move and when you drove out of Joburg I knew something wasn't right so I told them to follow you." He answers, his eyes still on the road and his knuckles white from clutching the steering wheel hard.

"Are you angry at us?" Thando asks. Mesuli sighs.

"Of course I am angry. What you did was risky. You should have called me as soon as that man walked in the house. Or after he took his last breath. You can't be risking your life for dirtbags like Jerome. That cop could have arrested you and you'd definitely be looking at life behind bars." He takes a deep breath, his hands on the steering wheel softening. "Thando, I am your father, my job is to protect you. All four of you. If something happens please just call me. Day or night. Even if I can't be there physically to solve whatever problem you have but I can make plans. Just don't ever think you can do things on your own like this. You're not criminals so you can't think like criminals."

"Sorry." Thando whispers.

"Actually this is my fault. Thando wanted to call the police and I convinced her not to. So if you should be angry at anyone, it

should be me." Ndumi murmurs from the backseat.

"Are you not a lawyer?" Mesuli asks her.

"I am. And if i ever needed a sign that i am not cut out for criminal law, this is it. My clients would probably all end up at sun city." She says and they laugh.

By the time they get to the house the tension is somewhat gone. Mesuli drops them off and leaves citing some things he needs to take care of. They get in the house and throw themselves on the couch, sleep nowhere in sight. For Ndumi

Advertisement

her insomnia is at play today, it happens a lot when she is frustrated and anxious. And it's been a while since she's had an episode. For Thando, it's Jerome's face constantly popping up in her head.

A few hours ago adrenaline had taken over her body. All she could think about was the need to bury the man and forget about him. But now he is in her head. Everything he said keeps coming back to her. The fact that he knew all along that she wasn't his child and why he did what he did. Except it makes zero sense to her even now. Was he really so heartless that he turned on his own kids because the pervert inside him had taken over? From the looks of it, he didn't even show remorse

for what he did. Instead he was ready to continue where he left off. Something must truly be wrong with him. Or was wrong with him.

"You should get some sleep. You have work in the morning."

Thando tells her sister. Ndumi shakes her head.

"I'll call in sick." She says as they sit there, facing the blank TV. They sit in silence, each just thinking about their lives and their futures and how close they came to losing it all. Because of Jerome. The man seems to be making their lives hell even in death.

"Do you think mum will be sad he is dead?" Ndumi asks, her eyes stuck on the blank TV.

"I dont know."

"For her sake I hope not."

"They were married for almost thirty years, you can't expect her not to feel sad. He was her husband. But it wont matter, especially if they dont find him." Thando says. Ndumi takes her eyes away from the tv and looks at her sister.

"Do you think he will make it seem like he vanished into thin air?" Ndumi questions. Her fascination with Mesuli growing by the minute. Not, it's not some crush or fantasy, its the feeling of being protected. She's never had that before. And right now its overwhelming and yet fulfilling. She's wanted that from her

father for a long time, but all he gave her was sti's and a bucket load of daddy issues.

"Most probably. I just hope it doesnt come back to bite us in the ass." Ndumi sits back, facing forward, her arms crossed on her chest and a smile on her face.

"It wont. All we have to do is deny deny deny." Her smile fades again as a question pops into her head. How did Jerome know the house? "Maybe Mesuli can find out how Jerome knew the house. Because it's not like he was knocking on every door asking if we are there. The man came straight here."

"I'll ask him. I'm going to try and get some sleep. You should too." Thando says walking up the stairs.

She gets to her room and takes a quick shower before getting into her pyjamas. She kneels down and prays.

"Heavenly father, I come to you tonight or this morning, whichever one you prefer. I come to you asking for forgiveness. I took a life. No matter how horrible he was, his life wasnt mine to take. But I had no choice. He was coming at me and I had to protect myself. Lord I hope you forgive me for this though. And I hope you get me through it. I need you now more than ever. Amen." She gest off the floor and gets into bed.

She closes her eyes willing sleep to come. After a while it answers. As her body drifts off into slumber she see him. Bloody and menacing. He is laughing and dragging his bloody body across the room, coming towards her. She screams for him to leave her alone but he just laughs harder.

She backs up until her back hits the wall. With nowhere to go, he cages her in, wraps his hand around her neck and lifts her up. She fights him, her feet kicking in the air and her hands try to rip his hand from her neck but failing. She gasps for breath as he tightens his hold on her.

She jumps when someone wakes her up. She sits up on the bed, sweaty and holding on to her neck.

"Are you Okay?" Phepsile asks her, worry masking her face.

"Juat a nightmare." Thando answers looking around the room.

"Let me guess, Jerome?" Phepsile says rolling her eyes. Thando looks at her wondering how she knows that. "That's a real life nightmare, all on it's own. Anyways I am going to take a bath, I have to go to town to add something's. I'll take Zethu with me, wena get some rest, I will make lunch when I come back."

"Lunch?" Thando exclaims. She picks up her phone and looks at the time. Its way past eleven.

"Yes lunch. You and Ndumi slept all through breakfast.

Anyways, we are leaving. See you later." She gives her sister a

hug and she walks out.

Her dream, or rather her nightmare keeps playing in her head. She sighs and lays back down on the bed, looking up at the ceiling.

"I will never be rid of you, will I?" She asks the empty room. As if to answer her, her ears fill with his ugly laugh. Maybe it's time she took her therapy seriously, she thinks.

For the first time in a long time she's not anxious. Even with the possibility of Jerome being somewhere out there, she is far better than she was a few months ago.

"You look good." Dr Nxele says. She's been watching her for the past few minutes. The smile on her face, the glow in her skin and the shine in her eyes. It's one of the things that make her job worthwhile, seeing a patient slowly blossoming and getting out of their shell.

When Dr Gule referred her and her sisters to her she wasn't sure she'd ever get to this point. Zethu is the only one who has been consistent with her sessions. It started out with two sessions a week and phonecalls anytime she needed her and now they are down to one session a week and the phone calls have dwindled down significantly. Progress. She likes to see it.

"I made a friend." Zethu says looking out the window. "She seems nice."

"That's nice. I know it's a big thing for you, making connections outside your sisters." She sighs and takes a seat on the brown leather couch. She's been here so many times she now has her own little spot on the couch. It started out as her 'comfort zone' as Dr Nxele called it. A place where if she sat there it meant she was ready to talk. It worked well when they first met and it

hasn't stopped since then.

"I don't know. It's scary."

"Okay before you tell me about the scary part. Tell me about this friend of yours." Her lips curl into a smile. A genuine smile that makes Dr Nxele smile too. Usually all she gets is a fake, practiced and perfected smile. The past few weeks it's been slowly becoming genuine and today it's not just genuine it's wide.

"Okay, her name is Aluwani Raphasha. She stays around the same estate as us. She just finished her matric and she's taking a gap year before she starts school next year." Zethu narrates.

"How did you meet her?"

"I met her at the kids playground when I was taking a walk a couple of weeks back."

"The smile on your face, I've never seen it before. Is it safe to say Aluwani has been a positive influence in your life?" Dr Nxele asks her. She sighs and sits back on the couch, bringing her legs up and crossing them under her.

"She's okay." She says, her voice suddenly lower than it was a few seconds ago.

"So why are you nervous? Right now you seem like you're second guessing yourself? Your friend seems like a nice person."



"It's not her. It's me. My father never wanted us to have friends. He always said he didn't want us to have negative influences in our lives so the only people we could play with was each other. So now I keep pulling back because I don't want to find myself too attached to her." She says, her eyes gazing at her interlocked hands.

"But your father is not here to tell you what to do anymore. He is in jail and I'm pretty sure your sisters won't let him come anywhere near you."

"I know. But it's still scary. Especially with the possibility of him being out." Dr Nxele writes something on her notepad before looking back at Zethu.

"And how does it make you feel? Him possibly being free in spite of everything he did to you and your sisters?" She asks.

"I'm not surprised. He did always say that if we ever said anything no one would believe us and he wouldn't spend a day behind bars. I guess he was right. If it wasn't for Thando's father I don't think I'd be here right now."

"Where would you be?"

"Dead. After he got bail my biggest fear was coming face to face with him. Seeing the smug look on his face, I don't think I could handle it. Especially with the pitying looks we got after that." Dr Nxele smiles at her as the timer goes off.

"Well I am glad you're here. I know sometimes it might seem like an uphill battle but I can safely say you're doing good. You're smiling more and you have a friend now so, you still have your power. Whether or not his appeal goes through, dont let him take your power. I will see you again next week right?" She asks standing up to give Zethu a hug.

"Of course. Next week, same time, same place." Zethu answers, a smile plastered on her face.

"Good. Have a safe trip and let me know when you get home Okay?"

"Of course. Bye doc."

She straps her tiny backpack on her back and walks out of the building. The blazing sun forces her to put her shades on. As she walks down the stairs two men exit a vehicle with MP plates on it. She sees them in the corner of her eye, she pulls her bag to the front and holds on to her pepper spray just as one man taps her on the shoulder. Her heart stops beating for a second as she turns around to look at them. They dont seem like thieves. But then again this is Joburg, thieves come in every shape and form.

"Zethu Nkosi?" One of the men asks looking down at her.

"You have the wrong person." She says and turns to walk away. One of the men blocks her way and pulls out a badge.

"Zethu, I am Detective Dlamini and this is my partner, Detective Khumalo. Would you mind coming with us." The man says, Zethu notices the smile on his face, he is probably trying to make her comfortable but it's not working. Instead she becomes weary and alert.

She takes a step back, putting some distance between her and these men.

"Why?"

"We just have a few questions regarding your father. Please come with us to the station." Dlamini says. He must be the good cop between them. Khumalo on the other hand seems to be the kind that doesn't smile.

"As far as I know that man is in jail so I don't know anything about him. So please leave me alone." She turns to leave but Khumalo pulls her back making her scream. She quickly pulls the pepper spray with one hand and sprays the burning contents onto his face, he screams, letting her go as his eyes burn. As soon as she is free she runs back into the building with Dlamini behind her.

She barges into Dr Nxele's office and locks it, panting and out of breath. Lucky for her Dr Nxele is alone. She quickly gets up from behind the desk and hurries to her.

"Zethu, what's going on?" She questions trying hard to remain

calm even though her heart is galloping like crazy.

"They are after me." Zethu manages to say before Dlamini bangs on the door.

"Who are they?" Dr Nxele asks in a whisper.

"They say they are cops but they are asking about my father."

The banging continues as Khumalo threatens to shoot the door.

Dr Nxele pulls Zethu to the bathroom.

"Stay here, I'll be right back." As soon as the doctor leaves, Zethu pulls out her phone and dials her sister's number. Thando doesn't pick up so she tries Ndumi. She picks up immediately.

"Zethu, is your session done?"

"Yes

Advertisement

but there are some men here, they said they are cops and they tried to take me with them but I sprayed one of them with pepper spray and now I'm stuck in Dr Nxele's office." She whispers.

"Okay. I'll get Mgazini to come over there. Whatever happens don't go with them." Ndumi orders then hangs up the phone. Zethu stands by the door listening to the conversation or rather screaming match that's happening on the other side of the door.

"Doctor, I saw her coming down this passage and since the other office is empty, I know she's in here." Dlamini says.

"That bitch is dead. My eyes are burning." Khumalo screams.

"I have absolutely no idea what is going on but unless you have a warrant I can not allow you to search my office. I have sensitive information here and for my patients privacy, I cannot let you just waltz in here and do as you please." Dr Nxele says.

"I swear when I get my hands on that girl....." Khumalo mumbles.

"We will leave." Dlamini starts. "But there is only one way out of this building so we will wait outside."

Zethu hears their footsteps fading away before the door closes. Dr Nxele opens the bathroom and Zethu walks out.

"I'm sorry about that. I didnt know what else to do." She says taking a seat on the couch.

"Its okay, I'm glad you're safe. But those guys said they are police officers, why didnt you just answer their questions?" Dr Nxele asks handing her a glass of water. She takes a sip.

"I don't know. I guess the mention of my father scared me a little." They are disturbed by a knock on the door. Dr Nxele opens and Mgazini walks in.

"Hi, Ndumi called me." He says looking at the two women. Dr Nxele smiles and holds out her hand. He takes it.

"Dr Nxele. And you are?"

"Mgazini Ntshangase. I'm here for her." He says looking at Zethu.

"Of course. The police guys said they will be waiting outside." She tells him, her hand still in his. Zethu looks at their hands and then up at Mgazini. He quickly pulls his hand away from the doctor.

"Thank you. We should get going. Thank you doctor." He says walking out. Zethu shakes her head, says goodbye to the doctor and follows him out.

As soon as they get to the parking lot they see the two detectives leaning on their car.

"That's them?" Mgazini asks. Zethu nods her head. "Okay, let's go to my car." They head to Mgazini's car with the two men behind them.

"You cant run forever little girl." Khumalo says. Mgazini opens the door for Zethu and then turns around to look at the two men.

"We need to talk to her." Dlamini says pointing at Zethu.

"Why?"

"None of your business." Khumalo blurts out. Mgazini chuckles.

"Gentlemen, she is my client. Unless you have some sort of identification with you I'm afraid you wont be talking to her about anything." The men take out their badges and show

them to Mgazini.

"We are actually investigating the disappearance of Jerome Nkosi. According to his brother he left home to see his children, to make peace. But they haven't heard from him since then. His phone is off and no one seems to know where he is." Dlamini says while Mgazini inspects the badges.

"That's sad." He says handing back the badges. "But your badges state that you are actually from Mpumalanga so why are you investigating a case outside of your jurisdiction?"

"We are actually working with Detectives from here." Dlamini tells him. He looks at his watch then turns back to him.

"Well, until they are with you, my client is not answering any questions from you. And please, stop harassing my client." He gets in the car and drives off.

"So what was that about? Why are they asking questions about my father? I mean the man is in prison, why don't they just go there." Zethu says looking out the window. Mgazini steals a glance at her and realizes she doesn't know that he is out.

"Uhm, I don't know. I'll find out. Don't worry yourself too much about them."

They get to the house and Ndumi and her sister's rush to the car and pull Zethu into a hug.

"Are you Okay? What did they do to you?" Thando asks her.

"I'm fine. Just some cops asking questions about Jerome. I don't know why because he is still in jail." She says. Ndumi and Thando look at each other before watching her walk into the house with Phepsile.

"So they don't know that he is out?" Mgazini says looking at the two. Ndumi sighs and runs her hand down her face.

"We didn't have the heart to tell them. Look at her, she is so happy and for a while now she can walk out of the house alone and not come running back because she thinks someone is watching her or someone said the wrong thing at the wrong time. If we tell her about this she'll go back into her shell and whatever progress she's been making will be wasted." Ndumi says.

"So you'll keep lying to them? What happens if Jerome actually shows up here because according to those officers, Jerome left home saying he is coming here to make peace with you guys. What if he has just been watching you? Or them? The least you can do is warn them so they know what they are up against." He says pacing up and down the driveway.

"He won't come here." Thando whispers.

"How do you know that? Mhmmm? How? You know the person Jerome is, and right now, he is probably ready to avenge himself for everything that happened in prison and guess who is probably number one on his list? You guys?" He sounds frustrated, angry even. But Ndumi and Thando don't seem



bothered and he notices. He stops, crosses his arms on his chest and looks at them. One at a time.

"Why are you so relaxed about this? What do you know that I don't?" He questions.

"We dont know anything." Ndumi says looking at everything but him.

"Yeah we should go inside. Thank you for getting her." Thando says and leaves the two lovebirds.

"Nondumiso?" "Ntshangase!"

"What's going on?" She takes a couple of steps towards him, closing the gap between them. Running his tie between her hands, his eyes glued on her.

"Ntshangase, there is nothing going on. We will tell them about Jerome but for now, I just think it's best....."

"And what happens when the cops speak to them about it? They waited for Zethu to finish her session, dont you think they will be waiting for Phepsile too? Dont you think they should hear this from you first?" She sighs and lays her head on his chest. "We will tell them." She whispers.

As soon as Mgazini leaves, Thando and Ndumi sit out in the garden, contemplating their next move. Maybe Mgazini is right, it is time for the truth to come out. But how much of it are they ready to share?

'You have to protect your sister's Thando, you're their big sister and you have to lead by example.'

The words have been ringing in Thando's head for a week now. The first time she heard them, she was six and starting primary school, Ndumi was in pre school and some kid was pushing her around. Crazy how early bullying starts. Her mum picked them up from school and she saw the scrapes on Ndumi's knees and elbows. She told Thando to protect her sister. The next day the kid who bullied her sister went home with a broken lip courtesy of Thando.

She's tried to protect them since then. Each one of them, she's tried to protect. Seeing them now, laughing, giggling and being genuinely happy makes it all worth it. Even sticking a knife in Jerome's chest.

She was in shock when she saw the knife go in. But that disappeared just as quickly as it had appeared. Seeing him bleed out on the floor, his blood gushing out of his chest, brought a sense of relief to her. The panic and fear set in only after they had to get rid of his body. And now it's back. But this time it's because she has to tell her sisters that the man who tormented them and made their childhood a living hell is out of prison. But

can she tell them that he is dead and that she's the one who put the knife in his chest?

"Earth to Thando." Ndumi says clicking her fingers in front of Thando's face. "Where are you?" She asks handing her a glass of juice.

"I'm here."

"Physically yes. But your mind is not here. Ucabangani? (What are you thinking about?)" She takes a seat next to her sister and follows her line of vision.

"Do you think they will forgive me?" Thando asks, her eyes still glued on Zethu and Phepsile who are busy taking pictures next to the pool in their bikinis.

"Forgive you, for what?"

"Killing Jerome. Despite everything, he is their father." Ndumi turns on the lounge and faces her sister.

"If I had a chance I would have done the same thing. You need to stop thinking about it. Mesuli took care of that problem so you need to relax. Mzikayfani Jerome Nkosi is exactly where he is supposed to be, burning in hell."

"I am relaxed. I just don't know how those two are going to take it. What if the police who spoke to Zethu come knocking?"

Ndumi sighs and takes a sip of her brutal fruit.

"Okay, how about this. We tell them that he is out of prison.

And leave it at that." Thando shakes her head.

"And then they will be looking over their shoulders for the rest of their lives wondering when he will show up. Especially since the cops said he left Mpumalanga to 'make peace' with us. Whether we like it or not, we are the ones they will be looking at." Ndumi sighs and sits back on the lounge. Realization setting in as much as they want to protect their sisters, there are some things they can't protect them from, and this seems to be one of those things.

They lounge around the pool enjoying the scorching summer season, oblivious to the commotion surrounding them.

Jerome's siblings are determined to find him and from the looks of it, they won't stop till they find him.

THULSILE

She sold her house and went back home. Her siblings were more than welcoming. Elias being the only son never moved out of home. Together with his wife Girly, they have extended the four roomed house they were raised in. Lucky for him he married a kind hearted woman who knows how important family is to Elias and his siblings.

Nomcebo has come to see her sister a few times since she's been home. Even though she built herself a two bedroom house outside the main one just to give her brother and his family their privacy.

Thulsile is in her small kitchen making herself a cup of coffee when she hears commotion outside. She puts the cup of tea down and walks out of the house. From her doorstep she has a clear view of the gate. She sees her brother and his son Samkelo standing at the gate, rifles in hand while her in-laws stand on the other side, yelling and shouting.

"Elias, we did not come here to fight, we just want answers." Mfankhona says, rubbing his hands together.

"Answers to what? My sister filed for a divorce from your brother. So any questions you have, direct them to her lawyer." Elias answers. Dumsile claps her hands pacing up and down on the dusty driveway.

"Elias dont forget, until that divorce has gone through, Thulsile is still a Nkosi bride and she needs to answer for what she has done." Dumsile says.

"And what exactly has she done?" Samkelo asks. He is an exact replica of his father, in looks and in deeds.

"Angkhulumi nebantfwana mine. (I dont talk to children)."

Dumsile hisses.

"Elias, I get that you're trying to protect your sister, but my brother needs answers." Nomthandazo says trying to calm the situation.

"Answers? Answers Nomthandazo? We also need answers. Answers to what in the world led him to see wives in his children. His own blood. Will he answer that for us? Will he tell us why it was so easy for him to break the very people he was meant to protect? Will he answer that? Have you asked him that or you just dont care about your nieces?" There's silence for a while until Dumsile breaks the silence.

"That case was dismissed. I'm sure you know that."

"That doesn't mean it didn't happen. For a woman with daughters even, you sound stupid." Samkelo says.

Thulsile decides to step down to the gate after a while. As much as she loves her brother being protective, she also needs to stand up for herself.

"Ah, finally she shows herself." Mfankhona says seeing her walk to them.

"Go back to the house Thuli." Elias orders but Thulsile stands next to him, her arms crossed on her chest.

"Cha Bhuti, they need answers, I'll give them answers." She says starring at them even though her heart is sprinting in her chest.

"Where is my brother?" Dumsile questions. Their altercation has brought on some attention from the neighbors. But none of them seem to care.

"Do I look like your brothers keeper?" Thuli asks.

"First you sold his house, his shop, cashed in his policies and investments. He has no place to stay but he built himself a home. Where is his money?" Nomthandazo shouts.

"Aunty you dont have to answer that." Samkelo tells her.

"Its okay, I'll answer them. I actually divided it into four and gave it to my children. I'm sure it is coming in handy right now. Medical school is expensive and Thando will need the money. I dont know what Ndumi will do with hers since she's done with school, Phepsile is doing her final year so who knows

Advertisement

maybe she will buy herself a car and Zethu, well I don't know what she's going to study but I'm sure the money will come in handy." Nomathemba claps her hands once.

"So this was your plan all along? Accuse my brother of rape and then clean him out so you can spend his money anyway you like." She says.

"Accuse him? Nomthandazo, for your brothers sake, make sure he never sets foot in this home because if he does, trust me, I

will greet him with one bullet through his chest and I will gladly serve my sentence with a smile on my face. Now get the fuck away from my gate before I shoot you." Elias says and points the rifle at them.

"This is not over. You will pay for this Thulsile, you will pay." Mfankhona shouts pointing at her. "I will go to Johannesburg myself and find him. He will make you pay for this. Trust me."

Thulsile watches them as they get into the car and drive off. She let's out the breath she's been holding in. The Nkosi's are united in everything, good or bad and she knows they will not let this go. Not by a long shot. She turns back to her house just as her sister pulls up into the yard.

"Tweny bucks says one of her congregants called her." Elias whispers.

"You're on." They stand there and watch their sister get out of the car and rush to them.

"What's going on. I heard the Nkosi's were here." She says, almost out of breath.

"How did you know?" Elias asks, a sly smile on his face.

"Make Tfwala from down the road called me. We go to church together." The two siblings burst out laughing. All Nomcebo can do is watch them, confusion all over her face.

"I'll give it to you later." Thuli says.



"I'll be waiting. You'll explain everything to her, I need to go check on my cows." He says walking away.

"What are you giving him?" Nomcebo asks as they walk into the house. Thuli boils the kettle and prepares new cups.

"Nothing. So how did you get here so fast? Your house is on the other side of town." Nomcebo rolls her eyes and throws herself on the couch.

"I was in the neighborhood." Thulsile laughs knowing that her sister is lying. She might be married to a pastor but when it comes to gossip, she knows everything there is to know about people's business.

She takes the cup of tea her sister hands her and blows on it before looking at her.

"So, what were they doing here?" Thuli shrugs her shoulders.

"They wanted answers to a whole lot of bullshit. Like why I sold the house and the shop. And they wanted to know where he is, from what I gathered, I think he is missing." Nomcebo sits up and places the cup on the coffee table.

"Do you think he went after the kids?" The two stare at each other for a hot minute before Thulsile takes out her phone. She dials Thando's number but before she can press call a thought crosses her mind.

"Thando would have told me he was there right? I mean we spoke a few days ago and she said everyone was fine. She would have told me right? Plus Mesuli would have told me too if Jerome was there." She locks her phone and puts it back on the table.

"I guess."

"Plus Mesuli is not going to let Jerome come anywhere near Thando, not even with a ten foot pole." She says and relaxes back on the couch. Nomcebo watches her, a smile on her face. "Whatever you're thinking about, stop thinking it." Thuli says making Nomcebo laugh.

"I am just thinking, what kind of love potion Jerome fed you, that made you leave someone like Mesuli."

"You know why. Besides, how was I going to explain a divorce to our parents. You know as far as they were concerned only death should separate a marriage. Besides, I thought I was doing the right thing." Thuli says, her voice suddenly filled with sadness.

"I hear you. I just like his bad boy vibes." Thuli's eyes almost pop out of her sockets.

"Hhaybo Mamfundisi, what are you saying?"

"I'm just saying, they say good boys go to heaven and bad boys bring heaven to you." Nomcebo says sipping her tea. Thuli burst out laughing.

"I hope your husband never hears you say that."

Samkelo rushes into the house just as Thuli prepares to make lunch.

"Aunty." He says out of breath.

"Samkelo, ucoshwa yini manje? (What's chasing you?)" She asks looking at her nephew who is leaning over, his hands on his knees as he tries to catch his breath. Nomcebo quickly gets up and hands him a glass of water and leads him to the couch.

"Yini Samkelo? (What is it?)" He pulls out his phone and scrolls through a news site then hands over the phone to his aunts. They stand there reading the story on the site.

"57 YEAR OLD MAN STABBED TO DEATH IN SUSPECTED HIJACKING." The headline reads.

*'A 57 years old man has been found stabbed and killed on the outskirts of Klipspruit. The man was found with just his wallet next to him. Police spokesperson, Lieutenant Thabo Singh said although the investigation is still on going they believe this was a hijacking and robbery gone wrong. The man had no money or jewellery on him. His cellphone was also take as well. The police also believe the man's car was taken during the robbery.*

*The Klipspruit community woke up to the gruesome discovery*

*early this morning. The man has been identified as Mzikayfani Jerome Nkosi from Elukwatini in Mpumalanga. Nkosi was recently acquitted on rape charges after he made a confession a few months ago. He recently claimed his confession was coerced....."* Thuli continues reading as Nomcebo dances around the room, saying how great God is.

Thuli lowers herself onto the couch, completely zoned out from what's happening. Even though her eyes are glued on the phone, the words seem to be fading away. She's not sure how to feel. But one thing is for sure. She's not sad or heartbroken. Shocked maybe, but that's as far as her mind can comprehend what she's feeling.

"IFIL'INJA (The dog is dead)." Nomcebo shouts, bringing Thuli out of her daze. Samkelo is just watching his aunt with a huge grin on his face. Soon Elias and his wife join them wanting to know what's going on. Nomcebo tells them and they join her in dancing.

"We need to celebrate." Nomcebo says, fanning herself.

"Yebo." Girly shouts. "Samkelo, go to the chicken coup and get me two fat chickens."

"Yebo, and we need champagne. Samkelo catch those chickens then drive to town to get us wine and drinks. It's a party today. We have to thank God for his mercies." Nomcebo adds.

Elias takes a seat next to Thuli and takes her hand in his.

"Sisi, are you okay? Please don't tell me you're sad." She shakes her head and forces a smile on her face.

"No. Shocked maybe. I can't believe he is dead."

"Well, I am happy. At least now the kids will sleep better at night knowing he is gone. Forever this time."

"Yeah. I guess he finally met his match."

"Yes. Now smile, liphume nebovu. (It's over.)" He says getting up. Thuli gets off the couch and joins in on the celebration.

Anyone walking past would think someone has won the lotto, the noise and whistling is loud and it seems to be getting louder. Had he known his death would be anything but a sombre occasion, maybe he would have done things differently. Or not.

"He is dead." Phepsile whispers as she scrolls on her phone. The four of them are sitting around the lounge, glued on the TV screen watching a rerun of The Kardashians. Her sisters ignore her and continue watching. She sits there, reading the article, drops of sweat forming on her forehead. Until this moment she didn't know her father was out. And now to find out he is dead on top of that. Her heart is racing, fear and shocking gripping every part of her body.

"HE IS DEAD!" She shouts drawing attention from her sisters. "Papa, he is dead." She says, seeing the shocked look on their faces. Zethu freezes while Ndumi and Thando look at each other, not moved at all by what Phepsile just said. "They say it was a suspected hijacking gone wrong."

"Uhm, how did he die?" Ndumi asks.

"They say he was stabbed. Twice."

"Well there goes our nightmare. Thank you Jesus." Zethu says getting off the couch.

"Let me call mum." Phepsile says following Zethu up the stairs.

"Did he tell you that Jerome would magically appear?" Ndumi asks Thando.

"No. I just thought he would bury him in some hole in the middle of nowhere, never to be seen again." Ndumi gets off the

couch, her panic suddenly setting in.

"So what now? What if the police find out he was here? Thando, we will go to jail." She says pacing up and down the lounge. "What are we going to do?"

"For a lawyer, you can be slow sometimes." Thando says, hiding a chuckle.

"Really, who was panicking more than me when it happened?"

She says looking at her sister, her arms crossed on her chest.

Thando just laughs and throws some popcorn in her mouth.

"That was then, this is now. I'm sure Mesuli knows what he is doing." Ndumi quickly looks up the stairs before sitting down.

"I know that the man is connected, but are we sure he can pull this off?"

"How about this, I will call him and set up a lunch meeting tomorrow. I'm sure he will tell me what the plan is going forward. Okay?" Ndumi rolls her eyes and sits back on the couch.

"Fine. I just need to know that, that man is not going to come and haunt us."

"He won't."

"Why are you so relaxed about this?" Ndumi asks just as Phepsile and Zethu come running down the stairs laughing their lungs out.

"You're not going to believe this." Phepsile says throwing herself on the couch.

"What did mum say?" Thando asks trying to keep the conversation going. But truth be told she's not really interested in anything that has to do with Jerome. Right now she feels like a burden has been lifted on her shoulders. Now she doesn't have to tell her sisters anything about Jerome's appearance in the house and how he left here in a bed over. As far as she's concerned the universe is conspiring and working for her good. Or maybe its Mesuli, either way, she's happy to not have to carry the burden of protecting her sisters, and now they can all move on, each with their own healing road to take.

"There is a whole celebration going on right now at home. Malume Girly even slaughtered two of her prized possessions." Zethu says.

"Her chickens?" Ndumi exclaims and the two nod their heads.

"It must be a real party then."

"You have no idea. Ncane even sent Samkelo to buy champagne." Phepsile adds.

"I can't believe he is actually dead. When did he even get out of prison?" Zethu questions but gets no answers.

"It doesn't matter when or how, all that matters is that he is gone. Now we can breathe easily." Phepsile says.

"Amen to that." Ndumi echoes.



They sit in silence for a while, each of them fully digesting the news and what it means for their future. One thing is certain though, there is definitely light at the end of the tunnel.

"You know I had a weird dream about Jerome's death." Zethu says, her sisters turn to look at her. Her eyes are glued up to the ceiling as her mind goes back to her dream.

"What did you dream about?" Thando questions..

"When I was in hospital, I had this dream that seemed to be an ongoing film playing out in my head."

"What was happening in the dream?" Ndumi asks. They are all looking at her, waiting for her to tell them about this dream.

"We were at home, you guys had gone to town to get groceries or takeaways I dont know, mum was at church, I came home from school and dad was the only one there. As usual he took advantage of us being alone so he came into my room and forced himself on me. You guys came in while he was busy and one of you took the spear that was in the house and stuck it in his chest. He bled out on the floor and died." She tells them. As freaked out as they are, they are more shocked by the smile on her face.

"Okay I think that sounds more like a nightmare than a dream." Phepsile says and the others agree. Zethu just laughs.

"Actually the nightmare was having to hide the body afterwards. We actually ended up taking his body to Songimvelo so the animals can feast on him." She says laughing out loud. Her sisters keep staring at her, wondering why she finds this so funny but not bursting her bubble.

"Wait no, we didn't take him to Songimvelo, we actually buried him in the garden." She bursts out laughing when she hears her sisters gasping. "Thando, remember when I woke up from the coma....."

"Yeah I remember you were freaked out about seeing Jerome at the hospital. You kept asking me why he was there because we killed and buried him." Thando adds. Her memory coming back. She hadn't thought much about that moment. But now that Zethu is telling them all this, it makes sense why she was freaked out about seeing Jerome as soon as she got out of her coma.

"And guess who did the stabbing?" Thando asks and the three of them look at her. "Phepsile did."

"Hha. Why me?" Phepsile asks as they laugh at her.

"Eh, dont ask me, I didn't do the dreaming. Ask her." Thando says pointing at Zethu who is dying of laughter. If anyone walked in here right now, they would never think just a few minutes ago the girls found out their father is dead. Maybe

Zethu's dream was telling of his end, that he would die at the hands of the very children whose lives he turned upside down. And the irony of it all, as per his confession

## Advertisement

he died at the hands of the person he wanted to hurt the most, as payback for whatever her mother did.

\*\*\*\*\*

Thando walks into Tashas in Sandton for her lunch date with Mesuli. She sees him sitting at the far end of the restaurant. She smiles at the waiter and tells him she doesnt need a table because her date is here. She walks to him. He stands up when he sees her.

"You look beautiful." He says giving her a hug and pulling out a chair for her.

"Thank you, you dont look too bad yourself." She says. The waiter takes her drinks order and walks away.

"So, how are you holding up?" He takes a sip of his drink and watches her.

"I am good. So they found him?" She says, staring back at him. It's amazing how far she's come the past few months. For the

longest time she couldn't look at someone in the eyes for a long period of time, especially men. Most people thought she was shy but no one knew the pain she was trying to hide.

"Yes, Mgazini told me about the cops who accosted Zethu at the doctor's office so I decided if they found his body it will get them off your backs." He says, sounding so unbothered.

"How sure are you this won't be traced back to us? I don't want to get my sisters into trouble." He holds her hand across the table.

"Thando, nothing is going to come back to you. I failed to protect you before, I'm never doing that again. The security system has been wiped clean, according to security records he was never even there to begin with. The car he was driving is already in Mozambique as we speak on its way to Zimbabwe. Trust me, you're on the clear." She nods her head and lets out a deep breath.

The waiter comes back and takes their food order and disappears again.

"Have you spoken to your mum recently?" Mesuli asks her.

"A few days ago. But Zethu and Phepsile spoke to her yesterday, apparently there was a celebration happening at home." He bursts out laughing and she joins in.

"I bet you Nomcebo was behind it." He says.

"Of course. But it seems everyone is happy. I'm just worried about the Nkosi's, they are not going to take this lying down." She tells him. She's been thinking about them for a while now, her uncles might seem like typical rural people but they are not to be underestimated. And she's afraid of the hell they will unleash now. Especially since their cash cow is gone and they have no chance of claiming anything from his estate since her mother made sure to clean him out while he was alive.

"For their own sake, I hope they let it go. Anyways, your mum is coming to Joburg today, she has an interview at some private clinic in Sandton for a Matron position." Thando looks at him, an astonished look on her face which quickly turns to curiosity. "So you two have been talking?" She asks, Mesuli immediately looks up from his food.

"Whatever is going through that head of yours, let it go." She laughs seeing his face flush with, embarrassment, perhaps. Or is he blushing.

"I'm just saying, batsi lapho kwake kwema khona emanti aphindze eme. (History repeats itself.)" She says. Mesuli just shakes his head and eats his food. Although he has kept in touch with Thulsile, he is not sure about what Thando is insinuating.

"She is someone's wife remember."

"That never stopped you before. Plus her husband is dead. So, avulekile amasango. (The gates are open.)" She says.

"Maybe you should study to be a love doctor instead of an actual doctor."

"So where will she stay when she gets here?" She asks. It would be nice for their mum to see where they live, but she also knows that her relationship with Ndumi is a bit strained. Their mother has tried to reach out a few times but Ndumi isn't as receptive as the others are. Her sisters have made peace with the fact that their mother didn't know what was happening under her own roof, but Ndumi is a little less understanding and the sisters have stopped trying to make her see reason.

"She said she's booked a hotel room. I'm sure she'll see you guys before she goes back."

"Maybe I should speak to Ndumi and have her come stay with us instead."

"I'm sure she'd like that. Family is important Thando, and you guys have only one mother. She's apologized and tried to make up for her mistakes. I know it's hard to just forget. But making peace with her might just bring you all together again." He tells her.

"I know."

"Speaking of family, everything is set for your birthday. It's just a couple of weeks away so you guys will come down to KZN for

the ceremony?"

"Yeah. I can't believe I will officially be a Ngubane."

"Its about time. Plus I will be sending my uncles to the Nkosi's to pay damages." Mesuli says. Thando looks at her and realizes he is serious.

"Why?" She questions. "After all the horror we endured you are going to do that?"

"Thando, if you're going to carry my name then I need to make sure I do things right. And part of that is me apologizing for sleeping with someone's wife. And I need to make sure my ancestors welcome you with open arms, with nothing holding you back." He says. She closes her eyes and sighs. As much as he is right, she hates that the Nkosi's will benefit from anything that has to do with her. And knowing them, they will make this whole process difficult just for the sake of it.

When she gets home she finds her sibilings lazing around. It is Sunday after all and they are taking in the hot sun and getting ready to face another week. None of them have said anything about going home for the funeral. It's highly unlikely that any of them will go. And she wont even bother asking them about it.

She goes searching for Nondumiso. Zethu and Phepsile wont

object to their mother staying with them. Ndumi on the other hand is a whole different case. She finds her in her room, going through some work files.

"Can we talk?" She asks poking her head in the door. Ndumi nods her head so Thando walks in and sits on the bed.

"What's up?"

"Well, mum is coming to Joburg. She has an interview in Sandton tomorrow. So I was thinking, maybe she can come stay here. It will be nice to see her again. Plus she can get to see the house." Ndumi looks at Thando, her face unreadable. "So what do you think?" Thando asks.

"Where was she going to stay?"

"At a hotel."

"If I say no will you let her stay there?" Ndumi asks. Thando sighs.

"Ndumi, she's our mother. And I know you still think she is feigning ignorance about this whole thing but at some point we have to get past it. We cant hold it against her forever. Atleast she is trying." Ndumi nods her head and goes back to her files.

"In that case do whatever you want. It's your house afterall."  
She says.

"Ucalile. (You're starting.)" Thando hits back, sounding irritated.

"I'm just saying."



"Well you can lose the attitude, mum is coming to stay here."

Thando says getting off the bed.

"Then why did you ask me?"

"Because I don't want you feeling uncomfortable with her here.

This is your home just as it is mine, I was trying to be respectful and considerate to you. But since all you want to do is dish out attitude, I can dish it back. Nxa." She walks the room slamming the door behind her.

She gets downstairs and finds the two making dinner.

"Listen, mum is coming to Joburg for an interview, I was thinking of asking her to come stay here. Are you guys okay with that?" She asks.

"I'm fine. I'd like to see her." Phepsile answers.

"Me too." Zethu concurs. Well its three against one. Thando calls her mother and tells her to come over. She texts her their address before throwing herself on the couch.

"Aren't you supposed to be sitting on a mattress?" Thando asks her mum as soon as she walks in the house.

"I have better things to do with my time." Thuli replies giving her daughter a hug. Zethu and Phepsile follow suit greeting their mother. "And then, I thought you guys were living in a flat. When did you move here?" She asks looking around.

"Argh, this old thing. Do you want something to drink?" Thando asks.

"Tea please." She answers sitting down.

"I'll make it." Zethu offers. "And dinner is almost ready. We should eat soon."

While Zethu makes the tea, Phepsile and Thando sit with their mother.

"So, how are things at home?" Thando asks.

"Argh, same old same old. The Nkosi's came home yesterday wanting me to go sit on the mattress and mourn properly like a proper wife. But Elias made it clear that that's never going to happen."

"And you? Did you want to go?" Phepsile questions.

"Hell no. I'd rather swim in a river filled with crocodiles. I can't believe I spent thirty years of my life with that man."

"Well it's over now. It's time to move on." Thando says taking her mother's hand.

"I'll go dish up." Phepsile says just as Zethu places the tray on the table.

"So where is Nondumiso?" Thulsile asks. The sisters look at each other for a moment, unsure of what to say. This is not the reunion Thando was hoping for. But right now she has to make the most of it. She can't force Ndumi to forgive her mother, but she can focus on her own relationship with her. She realises that at some point she has to stop trying to live other people's lives for them and focus on herself and her own growth.

They have dinner, just the four of them while their tells them all the gossip from home. Ndumi sits in her room, hungry. She hears her sisters laughing and having a good time without her. A tiny part of her regrets giving Thando attitude earlier, but her pride won't let her go downstairs to join them. She decides to call and talk to the only person who will listen.

"MaNkosi, unjani. (How are you?)" Mgazini asks as soon as he picks up the phone.

"I'm good. Mum is here." She says sounding down.

"That's nice. How is she?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen her." She answers, her heart breaking a little, wondering if maybe she is overreacting in all this.

"Hawu, are you not at home?"

"I am."

"Okay, I'm lost. How are you at home but you haven't seen her?" She wipes the lone tear running down her face.

"I don't know how to forgive her. I don't know how to not look at her and wonder how she didn't know. I don't know how to see her and not be reminded of my own fears. You know I used to pray every time that man was on top of me that she would come and save me. That she would do something. I left clues but I guess they weren't clear enough for her. And now I feel like she should have been more vigilant. She should have known something was going on. Instead she's downstairs giggling and laughing like nothing happened." She says as more tears run down her face. Mgazini sighs and listens to her sniffing.

"Nondumiso, I understand where you're coming from."

"But?"

"But you're not telling her any of these things. Instead you keep them buried deep inside you and somehow hoping that she'll magically feel it. That's like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die instead. You're the one in pain right now, you're the one sitting alone while your mother laughs and carries on with life. You have to tell her all this otherwise you will always hate her for something she doesn't even know." She

sighs, taking deep breaths trying to calm herself down.

"You know I'm scared to have kids." She says chuckling. "Every time I think of bringing a life into the world I always relive everything in my head, except this time I picture my own child and failing to protect her. I don't know how I would live with myself knowing I failed to protect my own child."

"Tell you what, how about I come over there, you'll sneak out and we will go and get some takeaways and talk." He offers.

"I'm a grown woman, I don't sneak out." She argues and he laughs.

"Okay grown woman, I will be there in thirty minutes. You better be ready." He hangs up the phone.

She gets off the bed and rummages through her closet. She pulls out black high waisted skinny jeans, a crop, off shoulder knit top and black black block heel ankle boots. She accessorises with a pair of gold hoop earrings. She grabs her bag and walks out of her room after brushing her weave and putting on some lip balm. She quietly walks down the stairs then turns the corner towards the garage. As soon as she makes it out she gets into Mgazini's car and they drive off.

Thando and her mother remain in the lounge as her sisters go up to their bedrooms. She's happy to have her here. But she

keeps thinking about Ndumi, alone and probably hungry in her room. Somehow her conscience kicks in.

"I'll dish up for Ndumi. I'll be back." She tells her mother. She dishes everything up then puts the food in the microwave.

When the two minutes is up she loads up the salads and takes the food upstairs. She knocks a couple of times on the door with no reply. She pushes the door open and realises her sister is not on the bed.

"Ndumi?" She calls out but gets no reply. She places the food on the side table then checks in the bathroom. She comes back to the bedroom and calls Ndumi's phone. It rings a couple of times before she answers.

"Thando." Well at least she doesn't sound as pissed as she was earlier.

"Ndumi, ukuphi? (Where are you?) I brought you food."

"I actually went out with Mgazini." She replies.

"Oh okay. I didn't see you leave."

"I used the garage."

"Okay, I'll see you when you get back. Be safe." She hangs up the phone and takes the food back downstairs.

"Let me guess, she won't eat." Her mother exclaims seeing her put the food in the microwave. Thando sighs and takes a seat next to her.

"No, she went out. She will probably be back late."

"Because of me?"

"Mum, please dont. She will come around." Thulsile sighs and tries to focus on the TV, but her mind is not on the tv show.

"I should get some sleep. I have to be at the hospital by nine."

Thando switches off the TV and leads her mother up to her room. The house has four bedrooms, which leaves no room for guests.

"This house is huge. How can you afford the rent here? I'm sure its expensive." Thuli says looking around the huge room. It's the biggest one in the house with it's own ensuite bathroom and a walk in closet that looks like it was pulled out of pinterest pages.

"Do you want to take a bath before you sleep?" Thando asks trying her best to change the subject. Not that it's a secret but besides those closest to her, no one knows the house is actually in her name. Yes having a father, a good father is nice but she's still getting to know the man and she doesnt want anyone thinking she's milking him dry.

Thulsile grabs her toiletry bag from her luggage and heads to the bathroom. She's in awe of the it, it's probably bigger than any she's ever been in before. When she's done with her shower she puts on her pyjamas and gets into bed with Thando

next to her. She drifts off to sleep with her mind wandering and worried about Ndumi. She's always been the hard headed one

Advertisement

but behind the stubborn nature she is a vulnerable, broken little girl. And Thuli would like nothing more than to reach out to that girl and tell her how sorry she is for not protecting her.

-----

At Mgazini's apartment, Ndumi is sitting out in the balcony watching the little stars she can see amidst the many high rise apartment buildings. They are on the fifteenth floor, just ten floors below the rooftop that houses the pool and a huge lounge area that residents are always happy to use.

Mgazini comes out with a platter of braaid meat and places it on the steel table in front of them. He goes back and returns with a carton of juice and another bottle of brutal fruit.

"You do know you should be helping me with this." He says, his hands on his waist looking down at her. She gives him a wide mischievous smile and takes a sip of her drink.

"I'm a guest here." He shakes his head and goes back inside and returns with a bowl of pap and a smaller one filled with salsa.



"You forgot the plates." She teases. "Go get them." They dig in.

"Isn't it a little late to be eating pap?"

"I promised you food, I give you food. Eat." He takes a sip of his juice and looks at her.

"So, tell me about your mum?" He asks, his stare on her. He sees how her face immediately changes from relaxation to irritation. She sighs and throws a piece of meat in her mouth.

"Well, she's, I don't know. Right now she's like this naive person who seems like she didn't know what was happening. And personally I feel like it's all an act. I don't believe anyone can be so naive that they don't see anything offish in their own home. So nje it's hard for me to get past everything with her."

"What if she really didn't know what was happening? Do you honestly believe she would have looked the other way if she had known?" He sees it, the pain in her eyes. He wants nothing more than to help ease it, even just a little bit. Part of him feels guilty that he didn't see it before. Maybe things would have been a little different if he had just paid more attention to her words and not just focused on her body.

"When we were in high school, I was doing matric, one of our neighbors kids accused the pastor of raping her. A case was opened and all, but you know what the people at church did? They discredited that girl so much her entire family moved away." She tells him.

"Was your mother part of the people who terrorized the girl?"

"I don't know. But you'd think being a nurse and a mother to girls she would have said something. Stood up for her in anyway. Maybe it would have made it easy for us to speak out too." He leans forward on the chair and takes her hand from the table and engulfs it in his.

"You've never asked her about it did you?" She shakes her head. "Okay, so you're going on assumption? Nondumiso, unless you open your mouth and speak to your mother, you will always go on not knowing the full story. You will hate her for maybe nothing. I'm not saying forgive her, I'm saying talk to her. That's all you can do."

They spend the night chatting and laughing, not paying attention to the clock and the dawn that's slowly creeping in. For the first time they connect not just physically but emotionally too. Ndumi tells him her biggest fears, something's she's never been able to share with her sisters. Not because they aren't close, but because she knows each of them carry their own burdens and sometimes it's hard to pile on more than they already carry. So she does what she does best, keep quiet and when pushed, lashes out.

Early in the morning Mgazini drives her home. She finds Thando in the kitchen making breakfast for her mother. She walks in and takes a seat on the kitchen island and watches her sister move around. After her conversation with Mgazini she realizes that maybe she owes Thando an apology. But right now, her

pride is choking her and refusing to go down.

"How was your night?" Thando asks, breaking the silence.

Ndumi looks at her and is reminded that Thando has never been good at holding a grudge. Even when Ndumi blamed her for her silence when their father was raping her, she still tried her best to shield her sister from it. Even if Ndumi never saw it.

"It was great. Mgazini and I talked."

"That's good. I'm glad you had someone to talk to." Ndumi looks at Thando, wondering where all this is going. "I know you're not that great at saying what you really feel most of the time so I'm happy Mgazini was there to listen."

"I'm sorry about yesterday. I shouldn't have said what I said. I just feel like you're trying to get me to forgive her and turn us into this one big happy family. And trust me, that's a faraway dream." Ndumi says. Thando pushes the eggs aside and takes a seat.

"I understand what you're saying and that's why I asked you first before I asked her to come. I don't expect you to sing kumbaya with her, I get your anger, I really do I just wish that you could talk to me sometimes."

"Thando you already have too much on your plate, you don't need me to add anymore."

"Okay, tell you what, since we both have a hard time seeing therapy as a way to help us, how about we help each other. You talk to me and I talk to you and we help each other through

our healing." Thando says holding her hand out to her sister. Ndumi looks at it for a second before she takes it and they seal their deal.

"I'm not sure if this will work but I'm game." Ndumi says.

Thando gets up and continues with her breakfast. "Can I ask you something?" Thando nods her head as the eggs sizzle away.

"Remember the girl who accused Pastor Gamedze of rape?"

"Yeah?"

"I know they left after the church terrorized the hell out of her. What happened after they left town? I was already in Joburg by then."

"Uhm, some of the women and girls at the church led a campaign against the pastor when two other girls came forward, he was fired. He came back a couple of years ago claiming to have repented so the church took him back. Some of the women left when he returned. Why are you asking?"

"Where was mum in all this? I know she loves church."

"She quit with the other women. They found a different church and they go there now." Thando says not realizing that she has just pulled the curtain of her sister's eyes.

It's a funeral like no other. He was a married man but there's no wife sitting on a mattress wailing for her dead husband. No black mourning clothes have been prepared for the spouse he leaves behind. He had children but none of them are here to welcome mourners and serve tea to guests. Everyday neither of them is seen in the yard being busy is another day for the gossip mongers to ask questions and answer them. Today is no different.

The tent has gone up, it's a big one, befitting of his stature in the community. A cow was slaughtered, women are busy chopping all kinds of vegetables, the back of his family home is roaring with a huge fire that's heating up three of the biggest three legged pots they could find. With or without his wife and children, his siblings have vowed to give him the dignified burial he deserved.

Two black SUVs pull up just outside the gate, gaining attention from everyone in the yard. The chatter dies down as four men emerge from each car, some older than the others. One man leads them into the yard, his stance alone is enough to send anyone running, his salt and pepper hair the only evidence that he has seen way too many Christmases in his lifetime.

He leads them to the one house where there are shoes outside on the stoop. An indication of where the chief mourners are. The house is filled with silence as soon as they walk in, even the women who were preparing to pray are now staring at the men who have just come into the house.

"Good afternoon." The man says. "We would like to have a word with the Nkosi family." He continues. Everyone sits still, wondering what is going on. "In private please." He adds, glaring at anyone he thinks is not family. The people get up, one by one and walk out leaving Dumsile, Nomthandazo together with Daniel and Mfankhona's wives sitting on the grass mats, fear washing over them. One of the man stands up and closes the door.

"Please dont kill us." Dumsile screams hiding under the blanket. The man look at each other seeing the craziness in front of them. They watch as Nomthandazo pulls the blanket down from her sisters face.

"What can we do for you?" She asks. The older gentleman clears his throat.

"My name is Sizani Ngubane. These are my brothers. We are here on behalf of our son, Mesuliwey'nmbezi Ngubane." The women's faces turn from fear to anger in seconds.

"What do you want from us? Is it not enough that your criminal son has taken our brother from us." Dumsile shouts, clearly no longer afraid. The man look at each other, mumbling among themselves.

"Unfortunately we know nothing about that. All we are here to do is discuss the issue of our son doing wrong by this family. We know he impregnated your brothers wife and that's why we are here. We would like to pay damages to the Nkosi's and do what we need to do for our daughter to be Ngubane and come back home to her family." Sizani says. The sisters look at each other, not sure what to say. Just then the door opens, Daniel and Mfankhona walk in and sit down.

"Manje? What's going on?" Daniel questions looking around the room. Sizani clears his throat and starts again explaining why they are here.

"So you decided to come and do this while we are busy preparing for a funeral? Are you Okay upstairs?" Mfankhona hisses between clenched teeth, trying to intimidate the men in front of him. His gesture however doesn't seem to get through to the men because they are still looking at him like he is crazy, which makes him angrier.

"Mr Nkosi, we understand what you're going through and we sympathize with you. Losing a loved one, in any way shape or form is hard, but we also need to do this for the sake of peace

and for Thando's sake." One man says. The women mumble and grumble among themselves.

"The same Thando who rallied her sisters and accused my brother of raping them? Why would we do anything for her?" Daniel asks.

"Ask that again Bhuti. Even as we are here right now, they haven't showed up to pay their respects. Their mother is no sitting on a mattress like a good wife would be. So explain to us why we would want to do anything for her?" Dumsile questions. Sizani sighs, this will be harder than they expected. Not that they expected a smooth ride.

"Thulsile cheated on my brother, got pregnant and brought another man's child for my brother to raise. As if that was not enough they tarnished his reputation and ruined everything he built and worked hard for. And now you expect us to bend over backwards for her, you must be nuts." Mfankhona barks.

"How much?" One of the man with Sizani asks. Everyone turns to look at him.

"Excuse me?" Daniel asks.

"I said how much?" The man says, refusing to budge. "How much will it cost us to have you do this for our daughter. Because whether you like it or not, Noluthando is a Ngubane. And one way or another she will be one of us. Now, we can sit



here and debate about your dead brother or we can make this worth your while. So, how much? 100 thousand? 200 thousand? How much? Name your price and we will be out of your way."

The siblings stare at each other, each one mentally calculating what this means. Wondering how much they can squeeze out of them. They were not expecting anything over 50 thousand but now the stakes are higher. Jerome is gone, he was the main breadwinner in the family. Even though all of them had jobs, he still made sure to take care of each of them, allowing them to live comfortably. So maybe this money won't hurt.

"One million." Mfankhona says and his sisters gasp. "One million

Advertisement

two cows and a goat." He adds. The Ngubane's shake their heads, chuckling a bit. Money solves everything it seems. Sizani pulls his phone out and dials Mesuli's number.

"Baba." He answers.

"They want one million, two cows and a goat." Mesuli bursts out laughing.

"One million baba? Do they think money grows on trees?"

"Those are their demands."

"I can't believe they are so greedy they'd do this to get a quick buck. How lower are they going to stoop?" He asks.

"Beats me. But we need to get this done as soon as possible. You know that right?" He sighs, any other day this would be a ridiculous amount to pay for damages but this is his daughter, he will do anything to cut the cord and make sure there is nothing tying her to the Nkosi's.

"I hear you. Fine. Tell them we will pay the money. I'll call my banker now and see if they can free up the money so we can get this over and done with."

"Okay. I will let them know." He hangs up the phone and looks up at the many eyes staring at him waiting with baited breath.

"Who do we send the money to?" He asks. The siblings look at each other, in some way they didn't expect them to accept that much money.

"What do you mean? Aren't you supposed to bring the money and we count it here?" Daniel asks, making the man chuckle.

"You asked for a million. We are not going to walk the streets with a million in cash. Give us an account number and we will deposit the money." Sizani tells them.

"Here's mine." Daniel's wife says ready to read out the number from her phone.

"Musa kuphapha wena. (Dont be forward.)" Dumsile says sending her sister in law shrinking back. "I'll give you my account number."

"Hhay sisi, I'm the older one here, the money will come to me." Mfankhona argues.

"Do you have a bank account Bhuti? Or you've forgotten kutsi uholo ngemvilopho wena? (That you get paid via an envelope?)" She asks him. He keeps quiet. "I didnt think so."

Dumsile writes down her account number and hands it to Sizani. He quickly types it out and sends it to Mesuli. Within minutes a notification pings on Dumsile's phone. She takes her phone out and checks her messages. Her jaw falls to the floor when she sees the number of zeros there.

"As you can see, we've also included the amount for the cows and the goat. So now you will tell us the way forward from here." Sizani says.

"Well, we will discuss all that after the funeral and we will get back to you." Daniel says.

Sizani and his entourage say their goodbyes and walk out.

THANDO

Their car pulls up just as the cousins and uncles that she doesn't know walk out of the Nkosi home.

"Who are those?" Zethu asks seeing the men get in their car and drive off. They sit in the car watching everything that's going on.

"I don't know. But it's clear they are not family." Ndumi answers.

"Probably debris collectors." Phepsile chimes in, getting side eyes from her sisters.

"As if. You know Jerome hated owing anything. He preferred being owed instead." Ndumi says.

"One of them looks like Mesuli." Thando muses. She's been trying to place the man's face and then it hits her. He looks just like Mesuli. She pulls out her phone and dials his number. He answers quickly, he has made it a point to always answer her call, no matter how busy he is.

"Thando."

"Hey, so I just saw someone who looks like you leaving the Nkosi home. Do you know anything about that?"

"Okay, what are you doing there? I thought you said you won't attend the funeral." He asks.

"I know but we decided to come."

"Why?" She keeps quiet. None of them had a valid reason for

coming here but they came anyway. And now that they are here it seems like such a redundant thing to just get in a car and drive across provinces for a funeral of a man responsible for their nightmares. But they are here now so they might as well go through with it.

"I don't know. But answer my question." She demands trying to not think about their stupidity.

"I sent my uncles to pay damages for you." He says.

"And you thought the day before a funeral would be the perfect time?" Ndumi questions.

"Well, the sooner it's done the better. Besides, it would have made no difference, before or after it was going to happen anyway." He argues.

"So how much did they charge you? I bet they wanted 100 thousand." Phepsile says laughing.

"Oh come on, they are greedy yes but not that much." Thando argues. Mesuli chuckles.

"Let's just say it was worth it." He says. "I have to get back to work. Whatever you do please don't get yourself in trouble while you're there."

"We won't." The girls say in unison. They hang up the phone just as the family drives out to fetch the body from the morgue.

"Should we follow them or stay here?" Thando asks watching

the cars drive away.

"I think we should follow them." Phepsile says. "I want to make sure that monster is dead." Thando starts the car and follows the convoy.

"Just so we are clear I still think this is a bad idea." Zethu says, busy texting on her phone.

"Whatever. This is closure and we need it." Phepsile argues.

"That's a whole load of bullshit. Seeing Jerome being buried will not bring closure. The three of you need to start taking therapy seriously. That's the only way you will heal and get closure."

"Whatever." Phepsile mumbles.

They get to the morgue and find parking close to the exit. They watch as the Nkosi's go into the morgue and come out thirty minutes later following a brown oak dome coffin with gold encrusted handles. Mfankhona leads the mourners while explaining to his brother where they are taking him.

"They went all out didn't they?" Ndumi says shaking her head.

"It doesn't matter, they are still burying a monster." Thando says. When the cars drive out they follow behind them.

They sit in the car as the night vigil goes on. More and more people keep coming throughout the night. Just after midnight they make their way into the tent. They find space at the back of the tent and sit down. Different churches are gathered in the

tent. At the front there are four tables lined together to form one huge table covered with a white tablecloth and flowers placed on them. The different pastors sit at the table like the VIP guests that they are. Each one of them sings Jerome's praises, speaking about how well loved he was in the community and how helpful he was.

"So vele vele we are going to pretend as if the man didn't rape his kids?" A woman whispers from the row in front of them. One tries to shush her but she seems determined to make her point. "Don't shush me. Everyone is busy praising the man like he was a saint. Where are his children? Where is his wife? Everyone who has come here during the week hasn't seen any of them."

"Hhay man Samaria, let it go. The case was dismissed anyway." Her counterpart says

"It doesn't mean he didn't do it. There's no way all his children would accuse him of the same thing. Trust me, he did it. And those hypocrite preachers acting like the man was Jesus himself." "Yeah. Nami I wouldn't bury my rapist."

Just before the start of the morning service, people are preparing for the burial when the family is called in to view the body. The girls get up and follow the line and the whispers begin. They walk into the room and their aunts who were crying a minute ago keep quiet. They ignore them and head straight for the open coffin.

"He is really dead." Phepsile says looking down at her father.

"Of course he is, you killed him." Nomthandazo says getting off the mattress. The girls ignore her, starring at the man laying inside the coffin as if he will wake up and torment their lives again.

"What are you doing here?" Daniel asks walking into the room.

"Haven't you done enough?" Again the girls ignore them.

Ndumi spits into the coffin, her saliva landing on Jerome's face, as people gasp.

"I hope you burn in hell." She says and walks out.

"How dare you disrespect my brother even in death." Dumsile shouts.

"Your brother disrespected himself when he decided to be a pervert and rape his own children." Thando says. "You can sit here and act like he was a saint, but deep inside you know he wasn't. Even as he lay here, he knows who he is, a perverted rapist." She turns to the coffin and spits in it too and people gasp and whisper among themselves. "I do hope you burn in hell."

"Hhaybo, get these people out." Daniel shouts. A group of young men walk in ready to throw the girls out.

"I dare you to touch a single hair on any of them." Thulani says appearing in the doorway with three other men behind him, their guns held tightly on their side. The young men step back, fearing for their lives.



"Get them out of here. They are not welcome." Dumsile says. The girls walk out with their newfound bodyguards behind them.

"I cant believe you just spit in his face like that." Phepsile says as soon as they get in the car.

"Dont you think we just set a curse upon us? I mean they say you shouldn't speak I'll of the dead." Zethu says, her hands tucked gently under her thighs.

"Curse my foot. The only curse we had was having Jerome as a father." Ndumi argues.

They drive the car away from the gate and head straight to the cemetery. Parking away from the burial site. Two hours later the hearse shows up, they stand on the top of the hill watching as Jerome's body is lowered into his final resting place. They stand there and watch until the last of the grave diggers are gone the cemetery is empty. Each one of them take a deep breath, for the first time in forever allowing their bodies and souls to relax.

"Maybe Therapy isn't such a bad idea afterall." Thando says as they drive out of the cemetery.

"Yeah. Maybe I might give it a shot." Ndumi mumbles as they drive away.

## THANDO

One full year. That's how long since they buried Jerome. A whole full year and yet he still haunts her. Moving on hasn't been easy as she thought it would be. Even with everything that gas happened that was meant to change the trajectory of her life, she couldn't really change her soul or fully erase her pain. Officially she is a Ngubane. Unofficially, she is still the girl trying to heal her pain and failing.

She thought going to therapy would help, but it hasn't. Even when everyone tells her therapy is not a sprint but a marathon, all she wants is for her heart and soul to not hurt as much as it does.

Today is one of those days where even getting out of bed is a struggle. Lucky for her she only has one class today. Missing one class won't make her fail, not that she could. Even with all the ups and downs she's come across this year, her studies have been up to par. Not even one failed test or assignment.

Her bedroom door opens and Zethu walks in. She gets under the covers too, laying on her side and looking at her sister.

"One of those days?" Zethu asks, pity washing over her. Thando nods her head. "It's okay. It will get better." She assures her. Of all the siblings, Zethu seems to be the one therapy has worked

for the most. Everyone expected her to be in the dark the longest but everyday she surprises them.

Thando turns on her side to stare at her sister. None of them would have imagined being in place at this very moment. A place where healing is tangible and within reach. A place where they can fully leave the past behind. Zethu has been steadily walking down that path.

"Does it ever truly get better though? I feel like every day I take one step forward and ten back. Things were better when I had everything buried somewhere in the back of my head." She asks.

"It does. The danger of keeping everything buried is that not everything stays buried. Burying your pain in the same hole over and over again does nothing but pile everything up and eventually it will overflow. And when it does, it takes everything on its path." Zethu says channelling her therapist. Thando gives her a faint smile.

"Maybe you're right."

"I know I am." Zethy says taking a glance at her watch. "I have to go, Aluwani should be here soon. I will see you later. Should I bring you food?"

"Yes."

"What do you feel like? Hot and spicy, bland or savoury?"

"Surprise me." Zethu gives her sister a kiss on the forehead before getting out of the bed and walking out.

Common sense tells Thando to get out of bed, take a bath and make something to eat but the heaviness inside of her keeps her grounded on the same spot, her mind idle. And like the English say, an idle mind is the devils playground, different thoughts start running through her mind. Thoughts she's tried her best to keep hidden and private. When she was younger they used to rule her mind, the only thing that stopped her from carrying them out was the thought of her sisters and her need to protect them. But now they are Okay. They are living their lives and they seem happy.

Ndumi is officially an Admitted Attorney specializing in human rights and working under Mgazini's firm, although their relationship has not made it to the public domain yet, especially since Mgazini is now her boss. Phepsile is doing her honours and she's decided to give Clint a chance. She seems happy. No one knows what's really happening between Zethu and Aluwani. On some days they seem like normal best friends but on some days they've been caught lovingly staring into each other's eyes. Ndumi thinks their relationship is more intimate than they make it out to be. But everyone has decided to let them be.

She gets out of bed, gets her notebook from the drawer and sits at her desk. Her therapist told her to write down her feelings, especially when she doesn't understand them. She figured maybe letting things go might help her heal somehow. Sometimes Thando thinks it helps and sometimes she feels it's just a waste of pen and paper. For a while she used to jot down everything like she was writing in a diary, but today she decides to write a letter to herself. She's not sure if it will help or not but she tries.

When she is done she fills the tub with water. She can't decide between the lavender or strawberry bubble baths so she foregoes both. She grabs the tiny green box hidden away in her cabinet. It's been a while since she's used these, but lately they have come in handy. Especially on those days when her heart was heavy and burdened.

She takes off her clothes and gets in the tub with just her underwear. She takes out the contents of the green box, the razor shines brightly under the morning sun. One cut to her thigh and she bleeds. Not much, just a tiny bit of blood. The heaviness in her heart is still there. She cuts again and again and again until some of the water turns crimson. She moves to the other thigh and starts again. It seems to work. The heaviness in her heart gets lighter and lighter with each cut.

Although that might just be an illusion her mind has learnt to sell her just so she feels better.

She lays back in the tub as drops of blood dye the water. As the blood dries down, the heaviness resumes. She takes the razor and starts again, this time on her arm. She starts at the top and slowly goes down. Today is one of those days where she just needs to bleed a little more.

As she goes further down, the razor makes contact with her vein and blood oozes out. As much as she knows the danger of her bleeding out, the blood oozing out of her seems to have her in a trance. She watches as the blood runs down her arm and into the water. She closes her eyes and allows the sensation to take over her. The more blood she loses the more she seems to slowly fade into a peaceful place. Maybe this is the peace she's always wanted. Maybe now she's found it.

\*\*\*\*\*

NONDUMISO

She's scared and she doesn't know why. Since morning there's been a heaviness in her chest that she doesn't understand. She can't even concentrate at work. She's been typing the same paragraph for the past hour now and she keeps making mistakes. She decides to close her laptop and call her sister's. Phepsile picks up after the first ring and the first sound she hears is her giggling like a lovestruck teenager.

"Sisi." She says after composing herself. Ndumi rolls her eyes. She can tell her sister is in a good mood, she can't even remember the last time Phepsile called her sisi.

"You're in a good mood." Ndumi remarks making Phepsile laugh.

"Nghlala ngjabulile kulamalanga. (I'm always in a good mood these days.)"

"Injabulo imnandzi nayinendvodza ekhatsi. (Happiness is always good when a man is involved.)" She exclaims. "Are you Okay though? I've had this uneasy feeling all morning like something is wrong and I can't seem to figure out what." Phepsile sighs as worry washes over her.

"I'm fine, but I've also had the same feeling. I even told Clive about it. He thinks I'm just nervous."

Ndumi panics even more hearing her sister say that. Now she knows something is definitely going on. As to what she doesn't know.

"Okay, let me call Zethu and Thando and see if they are okay. I'll call you back." She hangs up the phone and dials Zethu's number. Zethu picks up quickly and she hears noise in the background.

"Where are you?" She asks.

"Hello Ndumi, how are you? I am fine too." Zethu replies rolling her eyes.

"Zethu man, where are you?" Zethu's playfulness quickly disappears as she hears her sister's panicked voice.

"I am at Wimpy with Aluwani. Is everything okay?"

"I'm fine. Are you safe? Like there's nothing out of the ordinary that has happened?" Zethu's antenna goes up a bit. Ndumi is not one to panic so easily so she knows something is up.

"I am fine. Nothing is out of the ordinary around here."

"Okay. Let me know if anything changes. Let me call Thando." Ndumi hangs up the phone, her heart slowly settling down. She dials Thando's number and the phone rings unanswered. She calls again and nothing. She calls a third time and nothing. She



starts panicking again. She dials Zethu's number again and she quickly picks up.

"That was fast." Zethu says.

"Did you see Thando when you left the house?" Ndumi questions as a million thoughts start running through her mind.

"Yeah I saw her. She was feeling down a bit but she said she'd be okay. When I left she was in bed. Maybe she's sleeping." Zethu answers. Ndumi sighs and starts pacing up and down the small office.

"Thando is a light sleeper and she wouldn't let her phone ring three times without answering."

"Well you have a point there. But mum called

Advertisement

she said she's on her way to the house, maybe Thando left her phone upstairs and they are having tea." Zethu tells her.

"Okay, let me call mum." She hangs up and dials her mum. Lucky for her she picks up after the first ring.

"Ndumi."

"Ma, hi. Una Thando? (Are you with Thando?)"

"No, ngilandlini but she's not opening the door. (I'm at the house.) I was thinking of leaving cause I figured maybe she's already gone to class." Their mum answers.

"She doesn't have classes today. Don't go. I'm on my way." She hangs up the phone and grabs her stuff. She requests a cab before sending Mgazini a message telling him she's going home.

Lucky for her it doesn't take long for the cab to arrive but the drive home seems to be taking too long. She keeps checking the time, each second that passes feels like a lifetime. There's mild traffic on the roads which frustrates her even more. She keeps tapping her fingers on her thigh as the driver tries to make conversation with no success. They pull up to the house and find her mothers Yaris parked in the driveway. She quickly pays and rushes out of the car.

Her mum gets out of her car and gives her daughter a hug. Their relationship has improved a lot the past few months. Its steadily going back to what it used to be when she was a child.

"Hey, what's going on?" Thulsile asks seeing her daughter's worried face.

"I don't but I have this bad feeling in the pit of my stomach." She pulls out her keys from her handbag and opens the door. They walk in shouting Thando's name but get no reply. Phepsile

and Clint pull up just after them and Phepsile rushes into the house.

They all rush upstairs still calling out Thando's name. They walk into her bedroom and the first thing Phepsile sees is the notebook with a pen on top of it. Ndumi heads for the bathroom. She let's out a loud scream silencing everyone.

\*\*\*\*\*

## ZETHU

As much as she's not sure what is going on she's decided to go back home to see if everything is Okay. They are in Aluwani's sisters car driving back to the house, their food in takeaway boxes in the backseat. No one is picking up. She's tried calling her mother and sisters but no one picks up. In her head she keeps making up excuses for why no one is picking up. Most of them are joyful and happy excuses. But there's always that one little nagging one at the back of her mind telling her something is wrong.

The ambulance is the first thing they see. Even in the suburbs the neighbor's can be nosey. There's a bunch of them huddled together a few feet away from the road. Her heart starts galloping in her chest. Something is definitely wrong, even Aluwani's words of encouragement are not working at this point.

The car stops just as the Paramedics walk out of the house pushing their stretcher. She can see there's someone on it but she's not sure who. Only when Phepsile and Ndumi walk out with their mother does everything sink in. She rushes out of the car and runs to her sisters. Their eyes are red and puffy from all the crying.

Their mother is trying to be strong, she is a nurse after all but no one ever prepares a parent to see their child like that. No amount of nursing school could have readied her for the moment she saw her daughter laying in a tub filled with bloody water.

She hugs Zethu and hands her car keys to Ndumi before getting in the ambulance with Thando. Phepsile gets back in Clint's car while Ndumi and Zethu get in their mother's car and follow the ambulance. Only after they drive out of the estate does she remember Aluwani. She sends her a text telling her she'll explain everything when they get back. She gets a quick reply,

Aluwani is right behind them. She looks back and sees the car following behind them and she smiles.

She stares at Ndumi and she can't seem to read her face. The only indication of anything being wrong are her red eyes and her furrowed brows.

"What happened?" Zethu asks. Ndumi shrugs her shoulders keeping her eyes on the road. "Come on Ndumi, what happened to Thando? Is she okay?"

"She's in an ambulance Zethu on her way to the hospital, of course she's not okay." Ndumi snaps making Zethu jump.

They get to the hospital and find Mgazini and Mesuli already waiting. No one knows who alerted them to what's happening but it doesn't matter now, they all rush in and watch as nurses and doctors gather around the stretcher before it's pulled straight to theater with her mother right next to her.

A nurse shows them to a waiting area, it seems private because there is no one else here.

"So vele no one is going to tell me what happened?" Zethu says staring at her sisters.

"Not now Zethu." Ndumi answers.

"Then when?" Zethu shouts. "When I left this morning Thando was fine and now she's fighting for her life. I want to know what happened."

"You and me both." Mesuli speaks for the first time since he arrived. Although he doesn't know what's really going on since Thulsile just told him they are rushing Thando to hospital. He thought it was something minor. But now he is scared. That's his only daughter. His only child. He can't lose her. Not when he just found her.

"Thando slit her wrist." Phepsile tells them raising her head from Clints shoulder. "We are not sure yet if it was one of her cutting sessions gone too far or she was trying to kill herself." Zethu sinks back into the chair as guilt fills her heart. Maybes, could have, should haves are running through her mind. She keeps beating herself up, she knew her sister wasnt Okay and she left her.

"She was probably trying to off herself because she's selfish." Ndumi bellows silencing everyone.

"Ndumi dont say that." Mgazini warns her. She turns to look at him. As much as he sees the anger in her eyes he also sees her fear.

"Why not? Of all the things we've gone through she thought this was a good time to off herself? Now? We are supposed to

be healing right now, we are supposed to be rebuilding our lives so what gives her the right to do this?" She questions as tears run down her face.

\*\*\*\*\*

## PHEPSILE

When Ndumi called her earlier she didn't think this is how her morning would turn out. For the first time in a long time she is happy. She thought her sisters were happy too. They were all on the road to recovery, getting their lives back and fetching their dreams one by one. They had an agreement, they would not let Jerome win. Not like this.

She didn't get time to read the letter on Thando's notebook so she tore the page and shoved it in her jeans pocket. She excuses herself and finds the closest bathroom. She opens the unoccupied stall, puts down the toilet seat and pulls the letter from her pocket. She sits down and stares down at the paper in front of her.

Dear Noluthando

One day maybe you will look back on this letter and smile. One day maybe you will read the words 'you made it' and they will ring true. One day maybe you'll be able to silence the many voices causing a mess in your head. One day. Just one day.

Today is not that day though. Today the voices are as loud as a stadium filled with spectators. Today even your feelings are loud. Everyone will tell you it was never your fault, any of it. But that hasn't stopped you from going back to that first day and wondering what you could have done differently. I thought by now everything would have disappeared, the fear, the shame and the constant wish to go back in time and erase it all.

Truth be told it's harder now. Before it was easier to bury your thoughts and feelings because you had to fight for your sisters. You failed though, and that's what's harder to deal with. All those feelings come rushing back to remind you that you failed. You can even hear Jerome's voice when he told you. He told you he did what he did because you weren't his child. He has always known that and he used it for his own selfish behavior. Even moving to his own biological children was an extension of the monster that he is.

You thought everything would be alright as you watched the life being sucked out of him as he took his last breath. Watching as his eyes became lifeless while you held the knife in your hand, the knife responsible for the hole in his chest and the



blood oozing out like a broken faucet. He should have taken these feelings with him but he didnt. Even from the pits of hell he still haunts your mind.

Peace and rest is all your want now. They will tell you to sleep, but sleep is not enough to silence the voices roaming freely around your head. All you want is silence. That's all. Silence.

There's no conclusion to the letter. Phepsile is not sure if that's a good or a bad thing. Maybe it could mean Thando had intentions to finish it later but never got around to it. It could mean even in her darkest moments she still held a sparkle of hope. She folds the letter a couple of times before ripping it into shreds. It might be her sister's thoughts and all but should it get in the wrong hands it might spell trouble.

She opens the stall and washes her face in the sink. The cold water helps a little with her puffy eyes before she makes her way back to the waiting area. Its quiet. Everyone seems to be lost in their own thoughts.

Seconds turn into minutes and minutes turn into hours with no word from a doctor. Any doctor. Each moment feels like everything is going around too fast and yet too slow at the same time for Phepsile. The contents of her sister's letter are stuck in her head. One thing sticks out though. Jerome didnt die

the way everyone thinks he died. Thando's letter was specific about that.

Mgazini and Mesuli decide to go buy food for everyone while Aluwani heads back home. Clint joins the men, offering a helping hand, leaving the sisters alone.

"I know how Jerome died." She blurts out as soon as everyone is out of ear shot. "What do you mean?" Ndu asks.

"I know Thando killed him." She sees the shocked expression in Ndumi's eyes. And for some reason she can tell it's not because of what she just said but rather that she knows. "You knew didn't you?" Ndumi grabs a bottle of water and takes a sip.

"I have no idea what you're talking about." Phepsile chuckles.

"I found a note on Thando's desk and she said she watched as Jerome's life was sucked out of him. I'm not saying I'll go to the police with this but a heads up would have been nice." She argues.

"Why?" Zethu asks. "Who cares who did it? All that matters is it's done. The man is dead. Even if an armed robber did it I would have thanked them for it."

"Okay, listen. Yes, Thando did kill him. He came into the house. We don't even know how he found us. He started saying things, hurtful things before trying to attack Thando. She grabbed a knife and stabbed him and he died. We found someone to help

us get rid of the body and that's that. Now, this is something we can never speak about again. Ever. Not even in your death beds should you ever mention this. Promise me." Ndumi says looking at her sisters. "I promise." Zethu whispers.

"I promise too." Phepsile mumbles. "Now what?"

"Now we wait and see if our sister makes it or not." Ndumi says as day turns to dusk. And like everything else in their lives they wait to see what the night brings with it. With their Hope's raised, prayers sent up and Angel's summoned, they wait.

.....**THE END**.....

Thank you guys for downloading this book from my site please keep visiting <https://novelsguru.com/> for supporting me and also don't forget to share it with your friends. Dear Friends please download these books direct from <https://novelsguru.com/> bookmark this site for latest African books, and also supporting me Thanks.

**For daily latest books please visit <https://novelsguru.com/>**

**And also visit my Facebook page, and like and share it**

**<https://www.facebook.com/groups/3345453369055623>**