



## **Fated Encounters by Letlojane-Sibande Ntombie**

### **Prologue**

“I looked at you standing there I didn’t want to disturb father and daughter moment.”

I kissed her cheeks then kissed my husband. He had been distant of late I don’t know maybe it was because of our fight a

few months back. I had forgiven him but he seemed not convinced.

Nadifa Samatar was a stubborn man I was done begging for his attention because life was too short. If he was cheating I would have known what to do because I would have confronted him about the lady he was cheating with.

“Go and fill the tub honey daddy will come and bath you.” He was not even looking at me.

She turned and looked at me, “I love you mommy and I miss you. May you bath me today? I want to hear more about your mom.”

My smile was so wide. “She is your granny.”

“I know but she is your mother.” She said giggling then ran to the bathroom.

I looked at the father who was not acknowledging me. “You know what, I am done. Tomorrow I am looking for a place to stay and leave you alone in your house.”

I turned going to the bedroom.

“You are not taking my daughter with you.”

I laughed looking at him. If he thought I was joking then he didn't know me at all. I was not even going to tell my

mother. His pastor was forced to come twice in the same month and I was done.

“Okay” the shock in his face said it all. I was done running after him.

“I am coming Kali.”

She shouted back with no care in the world. “I am waiting.”

I did the bathroom routine and put her pyjamas on. I let her run to her room. I was thinking about the job offer my friend promised me; but another province was a no no for me.

“Listen stranger I have to go. You know our talks give me hope to go on. I was about to give up but your story keeps me going.

Me: “I am always on the phone because of you. I always look forward to the day because I will listen to your story after work. Speaking of work do you think I should quit?”

“I have been telling you to come here in Limpopo or go to my mom’s friend in Joburg she is like a sister to me now.”

Me: “What is her name again Zee, your family stories keep me going. Who is this one who is married to a guy in a wheelchair?”

“You mean Brandon and Wani. They can also help you find a job.”

Me: "The problem is I love my home town it is my happy place, no one will ever judge me and I can easily manoeuvre my way here. Come on do you think a simple girl like me can make it in a big city. I am good here. All I need to do is to get out of this mess I created for myself."

I didn't want to tell her that ever since the fire I had a phobia for the big cities and towns.

"You know you can always leave and your manager can see what to do with his love life. He is being rude while you are trying to help him. Not forgetting the fact that the ex-wife is still using him and he has the guts to think otherwise."

Me: "Sometimes patience is a virtue my love."

"Well It's I am not going to be like you."

Me: "Say the woman who is in love with her husband but is afraid to tell him. You know God made us meet not by coincidence but by fate. We are both in the same predicament although our lives are totally in different directions. I wish to meet you one day."

"The day we will meet I will broadcast it to the world."

Me: "I have to go my stranger. I will chat with you tomorrow. I will buy airtime. I need to know what happened when you told Nadifa that you were moving out."

“Do not even think about it. Do not even think about it.”

We said our goodbyes as I smiled I was a lucky lady. Who would have thought that a wrong number was going to create a sisterhood like no other. I was even healing after 10 years of agony I was finally healing or was I ?.....

Itumelang Mahlaba here; checking in if there are people in this home. If they are please allow me to relate my story as we ride along...

I love you a million Swedish fishes

1

“I will be done in a minute my love.”

I said running to the toilet outside. I was at my happiest moments. My triplets were going to grade one the following year. What do I mean it was only a month away? I was a proud mother; I had a princess and two boys.

“You are taking long.”

I laughed because I was already by the door. My husband was my world we didn't have much but the love he had for me was unconditionally.

Lethabo: “I know you my wife you were going to take long.”

Itu: "I was never going to take long you are lying. What do you want to tell me? Look at you four looking like mice that stole the cheese."

Faith: "We have a surprise or you mommy."

My girl was always the first one to initiate the conversations no matter what.

Fortunate: "Do not say 'we' say 'he' because daddy did this."

Faithful: "HE is our daddy so it is a fact that we fall in the same category."

Itu: "Who taught you such a big word?"

My kids were getting cleverer by the day. Not that I was blowing my own horn but I had the most intelligent kids ever.

Faith: "We heard it from the television."

Lethabo: "They are getting older daily now do not steal my shine. Baby we have a present for you."

He said taking out a gift bag that was behind them. They all moved towards me.

Faithful: "Open already mom."

They were all looking at me waiting for me to open it. I finally did and it was a piece of paper I opened it with disbelief.

Itu: "Is this what I think it is?"

Lethabo: "Yes my love. I bought a stand; from next year we will build our own house and move from this place."

Fortune: "We will have our own room as boys."

I was in tears. We were staying in a one room which we shared a kitchen; a bathroom and a toilet with other tenants. We moved to a big city when we got married. Bloemfontein was too busy for me but I had to adjust as we were trying to raise our family and live a little. I adjusted as soon as the triplets were born I had to because home was far and my grandmother was too frail to be bothered by unemployed married me.

Lethabo: "I am going to finish the payment March next year then we will apply for a loan. At least they just hired me permanently this year."

Itu: "We are coming far; from sleeping on the floor to owning a stand. This is going in the right direction at least something is going alright in our lives."

Lethabo: "Soon my love. We will be planning our wedding because I am going to marry you. Even if it takes me years I will marry you."

We were not yet officially married his mother was on husband number three he had gone through university alone through a scholarship. The company also made sure he got an internship which took longer and was not paying much. I think he was paying back their money.

He spoke to my granny because he didn't want to take me without their knowledge. His mother didn't care she only cared about her monthly cheque from him. In which he provided for her on monthly basis; because he loved his mother.

Some months we were left with barely nothing while he sent the cheque to his mother. I supported him still because my love for him was beyond measure.

Itu: "I know you will."

Faith: "So we will be at the wedding too"

Faithful: "Of course silly we will be there too wearing our suits and you will be wearing a white dress like mommy."

Faith: "Yeeeeees; I will be like mommy. I love it when we are matching with mommy."



I felt my heart swell with love. I was also mentally planning the wedding because it was my dream since I was a child.

Lethabo: “Okay let us not overwhelm mom let us change and go for an ice-cream.”

Kids: “Yesssss.”

They ran to their tiny bedroom which their father created partitioning our room which was also a sitting room.

They came back wearing descent clothes; they ran outside to wait for us.

Itu: “Thank you very much for this; for the stand and for loving me unconditionally.”

Lethabo: “I am the one who is grateful; even if I have nothing I am going to make sure you are happy. You make me happy. Your love for me made me change my ways. You remember how I used to change girls?”

Itu: “You were denying every step of the way.”

Lethabo: “I was still in denial I guess. Since we moved here I saw your strong abilities and the fact that you stuck by me even when I had nothing.”

Itu: "That is what love does. I hope you are not one of those who leave their wives when they have it all, the money and all the worldly things."

Lethabo: "Do not even entertain that idea my love because I am not even like other people. I did my running around now I am settling down. The kids and my wife are enough, what do they say

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if you were not there during my struggles then you do not even deserve to be in my successes. I lost a lot of people around me because we had nothing. Now my luck is beginning to change I hope they don't come running back to me."

Itu: "I am going to see if you can resist Tshepo. He is persistent."

Lethabo: "We don't even talk anymore. We ended on bad terms so worry not."

Itu: "In all this I am happy that we will have a place of our own. I am really tired of the fact that our kids have to go and play outside when we are bathing. Sometimes I feel like crying when they ask us why they can't have a sleep over like other kids."

Lethabo: "I am never going to fail my kids like my dad did. I know you are a good mother and your mother doesn't know what she lost in you."

Itu: "I am sceptical. I sometimes think maybe I troubled her too much in her stomach that's why she left me without looking back."

Lethabo: "Have you ever thought of the fact that she might not be with us?"

Itu: "It crossed my mind a long time ago but I was afraid to say it loud."

Lethabo: "Let us hope for the best."

Itu: "I am not holding my breath. Right now I am focusing on being a good mother and wife. Let us go before your rascals become impatient."

Lethabo: "Do not call my precious angels rascals."

He had called them like that from birth. He said that because they changed our lives so they were little angels. I laughed taking my handbag going out.

Lethabo: "I will leave you here alone if you call my angels funny names."

Itu: "Sorry daddy zimonya."

I was calling him 'zimonya' a word adopted from my Shona speaking friend. She told me that tough bouncers who worked in clubs were called 'Zimonya' meaning tough and strong.

Lethabo: "You too if you are insulting me."

Fortune: "We are not dirty look mommy."

They knew that when they became dirty I cancelled the entire trip. It was a way to teach them to take care of themselves at a tender age. They were looking descent that was what I loved about my husband; even if we had nothing he made sure our kids wore descent and elegant clothes. He also encouraged me to buy and wear elegantly always because no one knew the future I might meet my destiny on that particular time.

Lethabo: "Today you will order what you want."

Kids: "Yesssss"

Who could say no to an open buffet? I wanted to dance too but I was an adult so I kept it to myself but the child in me was dancing gwaragwara. Going out even to a KFC outlet was a privilege that I never endured as a child. We were not poor but we were also below the average line. So I can safely say we were the rich of the poorer if there is something like that. I laughed at the thought.

Faith: "Mommy so the wedding will be this year?"

Lethabo: “What do you know about a year?”

We all laughed as we walked to the taxi stop. I looked at my family and couldn't be more content than that. I was going to treasure them till the end of time. I took a picture and smiled.

Faithful: “We know a year daddy; we are going to be in grade 1; remember.”

Itu: “My kids are growing so fast and I am planning on getting a glass box to store them there so that they don't grow so fast.”

Fortune: “We do not want to live in a glass box and we do not want to be this young. I want to drive my favourite car and they say I will only do it when I am old.”

We laughed.

Lethabo: “Yes my boy.”

We had a wonderful time with my kids so chatty. I was the happiest person in the world at that moment. It reminded me of a scholar who said, ‘Happiness is not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort.’ I was not complaining because I was happy.

The January rush came. Lethabo was busy at work and paying the site. He had people on standby to clean the area for building. My bambinos were going to school which made them very agitated because they wanted to wear their new uniforms.

Faith: "Daddy tomorrow we are going to school."

Faithful: "Our mom prepared our uniforms and she....she....she...."

Fortune: "Ironed them silly."

Faithful: "I am not silly."

Lethabo: "Do not call your brother silly. Let me see the uniforms."

Kids: "Come."

They pulled him to the house passing our neighbour at the passage. We had four neighbours in one house imagine the chaos but lucky enough all of them worked even over the weekend so we met them here and there. We greeted as we passed.

Itu: "You should have let daddy rest first."

Faith: "No mommy this couldn't wait."

We laughed as the kids showed their father their uniforms. I couldn't afford much so they were going to go to the school around the corner for transportation reasons. Lucky enough we were not going to pay for the third child triplets advantages.

On the day the schools opened I didn't even need an alarm my alarms were up before us. We were both taking them to

school. It was our proudest moment; their smiles and happiness brushed onto us.

Lethabo: "This makes me work hard. I can't believe I am a father to these wonderful souls."

Itu: "Are you crying?"

Lethabo: "Why wouldn't I? This is too emotional for me. I am capturing this moment for keepsake."

I was recoding and laughing it was a priceless moment indeed. I was still not working but looking for a job. I was selling a few items to bring some cash also in the house. When they came back from school we heard different stories they had made friends although Faithful seemed sceptical about his friend. He was the reserved one so I wasn't surprised.

"Mommy tomorrow is a big day we are going for sports akere?"

My girl was a good athlete she was the one happier while the brothers just wanted the day to pass.

"My girl is going to kill it tomorrow please support your sister boys."

They agreed in unison. We slept early on that particular day.

Little did I know that it was our last day as a family.....

2

The following day I woke up very early in the morning. I was going to prepare for the kids and my husband. I always woke up early with two of the tenant. Bro Themba always woke up to make food in the morning. On that fateful day he was making eggs. I greeted him and left to do my morning routine, I was the one sweeping the yard on that particular day. After the toilet routine I went to sweep.

I do not know what made me look up but when I did there was smoke coming from the kitchen. We only used the kitchen door because there was a tenant using the sitting room hence closing the other door.

I ran to the house but I was met with the smoke. I screamed trying to go inside.

Itu: "Themba what the hell happened."

Themba: "Sister I was cooking then I let the oil boil too much so I placed an egg without removing it from the stove it just blew up."

Itu: "Do not just stand there please do something my family is in there my kids."

I was trying to run inside when there was an explosion.



Someone held me but I fought them I was trying to go inside.

“You can’t go in there the chipboards are the ones exploding” I didn’t even look at his face. I let loose and ran then another explosion.

“Please God if you are out there let my kids come out now.”

I was kneeling down at that moment. I was screaming at the top of my lungs.

“My child come this side.” The woman talking I had seen her somewhere in our street.

People had started to flock in.

Itu: “Where is the stupid fire engine and ambulance? Did you call them? Why are they taking long?”

“Ma’am please; move back; there will be another explosion. We tried to open the other door but failed to go through because of the furniture.”

Itu: “Do not even ma’am me; I want my husband and kids here. Where is my phone?”

I was still wearing my night dress and gown. I regretted not listening to my granny when she always told me to freshen up before doing anything in the morning. I consoled myself with the fact that there were some neighbours still on their gowns.

Itu: "Themba I need to send my kids to school why were you this careless I always told you about this carelessness of yours."

Themba: "I am sorry sister."

I ran again towards the door but was distracted when the police and the fire fighters came.

"Please help my kids they are going to die. The fire is not yet in our room."

Policeman: "Please ma'am calm down; we are doing everything in our powers to save them."

Itu: "This cannot be happening please God."

I was sweating in all the places. I didn't know what to do. I was even pulling my hair.

"They are coming out with them."

Before I could even look there was a big explosion the biggest everyone just screamed and they got down. I didn't have the energy to go down I just stood there. I was relieved to see the three stretchers with my babies and then my hubby was being taken to the ambulance.

Little did I know that my happiness was going to be short lived.

I ran to my babies they were all lifeless.

“Please sir; try something. Ma’am please.”

I was even shaking from one paramedic to the other.

“I am so sorry ma’am there is nothing we can do. They inhaled too much smoke. The good thing is they died in their sleep.”

“Nooooooooooooo.” My scream stopped everyone the rest just stood still. I ran to the ambulance but the stretcher was outside they were checking his pulse. I knew he was gone but I was hoping it was a nightmare and I was going to wake up from the nightmare.

“Please tell me I am dreaming.” I was shaking the paramedic so hard he was even scared because the power I was possessing at that time was supernatural.

“Ma’am please come with us.” It was a police officer. I was not in the mood for him.

“Why would I come with you? There is the person who murdered my family and you are busy saying nywenywere nywenywere to me.”

“Please we.....”

“Just leave me alone.” I barked and he just jumped.

I ran back to my husband. He was as if someone in a deep sleep. He was there looking all handsome as if he was going to

wake up and say; “Stop looking at me as if I am candy” the tears just went down uninvited.

“My love; please wake up

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wake up please.” I was crying as the tears ran down my face.

That moment it dawned to me that I had nothing again.

There was nothing left for me. I went back to my babies. Held them one at a time and kissed their foreheads one at a time.

My girl was even smiling. “Faith please wake up you will be late for your race today.”

People looked at me as if I was a mad woman. People without a conscience were taking pictures and videos I was speechless. If I had strength I was going to chase them away.

“Ma’am we have to go now.”

“Go where? You are not taking my family.”

The land-lord came and I just ran to her and slapped her hard.

“You wanted to kill my kids how many times had we asked you to fix the faulty wires here.”

“I am so sorry I was going to fix them this month.”

Itu: “Well that won’t bring my babies will it?”

I ran to Themba who was led by the police to the van.

“I hope you are happy. You didn’t want to see me happy. Thank you now I am lonely like you. I hope you will be lonely forever.”

I just broke down and cried. The police women scooped me and carried me to the car. We left as I watched the undertaker taking my family to the car. I just broke down. Was I dreaming, if I was I was praying that I wake up from that bad dream.

When I got to the hospital mortuary the doctor had to certify them dead. I was even hiccupping without a stop.

“Come this side ma’am I need to give you a shot your breathing is not normal now.”

I was not at liberty to argue; I becoming weak. It had been two or more hours since the fire. I kept replaying the scene in my mind it was like second nature to me but nothing made sense. I was looking at it from all angles but I was even getting frustrated.

“I will give you something to numb the pain.” The doctor said before injecting me

“I do not want to numb the pain I just want my family back.”

He just looked at me and wrote down the prescription. The police officers were still there.

“Do you have anyone to call?”

I was dreading that call to his mother. I knew my granny was going to need that call also but she didn't have much to help me with. I was glad he had taken a policy when he started

working. I was not holding my breath because his mom was very sleek.

"Yes I need to talk to my granny."

They gave me a cellphone and I called her. She didn't answer. It worried me I then called his mother.

"So you succeeded in killing my son. I told him not to move in with you."

There was no love lost there so I knew what awaited me. I dropped the call and broke down again. The other female police officer just went out of the car sniffing. I looked at the male officer who gave me a ringing phone. It was my grandmother. He gave me the phone I dropped the call and called her back immediately.

"Nkhono how are you?"

"Ngoan'a ka; how are you?" she sounded down also.

Itu: "I am not good Nkhono I need you."

Nkhono: "I know I have been having dreams. I am coming from the mountain to pray."

Itu: "It didn't work Nkhono because I lost everything they are all gone."

Nkhono: "What do you mean?"

Itu: "There was a fire a few hours ago and I lost all of them; my husband and my kids all are gone and they are never coming back."

Nkhono: "Oh ngoan'a ka I have been fasting and praying because I knew something was coming but it was inevitable. Modimo waka."

My granny had premonitions she knew that things were going to happen before they could even happen. She never had powers to learn what was going to happen and to whom.

Nkhono: "So are you bringing them back home?"

Itu: "I have to because I don't have a life here anymore. I .....  
I....."

She just prayed as I let the phone go down and rested on the head rest. I didn't know where to go because I had literally nothing. At least when I left home I had a bag of clothes but I was going home with nothing.

"What am I going to do? I do not have a home anymore I don't even have clothes."

Man: "We will take you to the station commander and she will tell us what to do."

Lady: "There are those confiscated goods I think you will have changing clothes there."

Man: "Sometimes God has a plan for you; that is why you are going through this."

At that time I didn't even want to hear a reason because no person was expected to live after this. I was even meditating on how to end my life too.

Lady: "Are you listening?"

Itu: "May I please rest?"

Man: "We are almost there."

The station commander said I should go and rest in the witness protection houses south of Bloemfontein. It was my first to discover that there was witness protection in Africa. I only watched it in the movies and read in books. When I thought of my books; which where my escape; I started crying again.

I cried myself to sleep. The following day I was taken to Qwaqwa they said I was on suicidal watch. They took me to my in-laws' place I wished I had the remote to fast-forward the time; or to just play rewind. My mother in law was all over the



place and I knew why, it was because of the money. I was not in the mood to fight.

Mother-in-law: "You have to go with me and sign for the money because we need more food."

Itu: "But I signed everything."

I knew that she wanted the investment money that we took before other policies.

Mother-in-law: "You know that by right you are not supposed to get anything because you are not married even if you go to court you will get the same answer."

I didn't reply I looked at her and her sister.

Aunt: "She is right we only allowed you to sit on this mattress because of your kids."

I looked at my granny who looked down. I gave them all the signed papers. I was not going to fight them while my kids needed a proper burial. At least I had chosen coffins for them; I was very much satisfied with them.

Nkhono: "You have to be strong my daughter God is watching."

Itu: "Which God the one who is allowing all this to happen to me."

Nkhono: "Should we accept the good only not the bad? Even if you may not see the reasons maybe God wanted to change someone's life through yours."

I didn't have words to say. I was done planning because the more I planned my life the more I got the opposite. I had gone to school studied hard because my granny used to sell in the street to get that money. Still I couldn't find a stable job;

because of her teachings I had to learn to sell whatever I could get my hands on.

Nkhono: "I know one day I will look at you and remind you that you were once down. The advantage of being down is that there is no way to go except up."

Itu: "I want to lie down and never get up. I am not zealous to go up anymore."

Nkhono: "You will forget about that one day."

I was not going to get up. I was going to lie down and wait for the day I join my family wherever they went. My granny was my rock. I was even adopting the idea my granny had that my mother was no more. If I could lose my family in a blink of an eye then it was possible that my mom was gone with the wind.

The day finally came.....

I dreaded to wake up on the day of the funeral I was not in the mood to burry my family.

“You have to do this my daughter there is no going back. Let us get over with this. They said you are not officially their wife so after the burial we are going home.”

Nkhono was my life without her I would have followed all of them.

Itu: “Thank you for being here with me without you I would have given up. I feel like a failure already that’s why my family was taken away from me.”

Nkhono: “Do not even think like that because you are belittling yourself. You have a purpose in life and even if your life won’t change then maybe your life will change other people’s lives.”

Itu: “I wish I was not born if it’s like that.”

Nkhono: “Now you are talking rubbish; come let us get you cleaned up. Only a few hours and we will be out of these people’s hair.”

I obeyed her and stood up. At least she had bought a few things with her grant money. I was never going to hold my breath about the money from the policies because I was sure they were never going to give it to me.

Mother-in-law: "You were supposed to let the elders bath first; now you are going to finish the hot water."

This nightmare had to end because I was not well anymore, emotionally I was going to collapse.

Itu: "Sorry."

I just wiped myself as I was not at liberty to upset the queen. My granny went to bath next door because the neighbour went with her to the society every month.

We went to the chapel for the service. When I saw the small caskets and the big one I just broke down.

Nkhono: "Be strong my child we are about to reach the end."

"Be strong ausi Itu."

I looked at the back and it was Lesedi my granny's neighbour's granddaughter. She used to visit me in order to make sure I helped her with her homework.

"Thank you Sedi it means a lot."

"I already cleaned your old room Nkhono said I should help her with cleaning. I used your favourite; lavender."

She was so bubbly and I wished to be her. I just smiled and sat down. While they proceeded with the service I was looking at their pictures in the programme. It was old pictures because

the recent ones I was hoping to bring when I came home and that opportunity never came.

All their memories and the ones I kept when I was pregnant were gone. How does one live after such a loss. If at least a few memories were spared; I think I would have healed better with their memories intact. I had a phobia of bigger cities I didn't see myself going to a bigger city again. I was going to start a life with my granny again just like the day my mom abandoned me.

I woke up from a dream when they were praying. It was time for body viewing. They were not burnt at least that was the good part.

Nkhono: "Be strong for them."

The choir was so precise and sang from the heart. They started singing:

Ke se ke utloile

Ke se ke utloile, Jesu, ha o mphitsa

U mpona ke lahlehile, u re wa mphoosa

E, ke demetse, Nthole, Morena

Ntlhatswe, ntlhokodisise, ke be montle le 'na

Ke tla ka dishila

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ke moetsadibe

Ke tla ke le fela-fela, oho, nketse mohale

E, ke demetse, Nthole, Morena

Ntlhatswe, ntlhokodisise, ke be montle le 'na

When I went there to view their bodies everyone was gone it was only the choir and my family which was my granny, Lesedi; her uncle; his wife and I. My uncles had gone ahead with other men.

“Please wake up my babies. I will do anything. I will even allow you to eat sweets every day. Please honey wake up and wake the kids.”

Nkhono: “Please do not do this my child.”

Lesedi: “Ausi Itu please let them rest they are with the Lord.”

Itu: “I want my family back you don’t understand.”

I cried till I reached the car. Inside the car I had lost my voice I was just releasing low mourns. I had so many wishes that the car can get involved in an accident. I also had a wish that a whirlwind can come and spin the car in the air so that it can

land upside down and kill us. I didn't even care about the driver of the car. The four coffins were in one car with me.

The other mind wanted to tell the driver to stop the car then I was going to drive the car into a ditch and die there with my family. All those thoughts were running in my mind before I knew it we were at the burial site.

After the burial I didn't even want to go back to their home I was done tolerating nonsense.

Itu: "Lesedi please ask your uncle to take us straight home."

Lesedi: "Let me go and talk to him."

Nkhono: "I am going with you. We have tolerated them for so long."

Itu: "Thank you Nkhono I was never going to survive I am not even hungry."

Nkhono: "You need to eat. It's been days if you think of killing yourself through hunger then you will never survive with me. I am going to personally feed you."

Lesedi came back with the uncle and his wife.

Uncle: "Let us go before the cars starts going so that we can beat traffic in town."

Wife: "Come ausi I will help you."

Nkhono told them that I needed the toilet. They looked at us but I was done with them.

Wife: "I know they will talk about you but I think you have suffered enough for you to be treated like a punching bag. They are not even mourning their son but in a fashion spree. Did you see how they changed their clothes this week? I wish you can just cut ties with them today."

Uncle: "Ha a lerato la ka don't say that."

Lesedi: "Uncle she is telling the truth."

Nkhono: "She is not going anyway near them. I gave them my daughter because their mother was my friend now that she is no more I am also cutting ties with them."

I was listening as they talked all I was thinking about was the bed so that I could sleep. I wanted to sleep for days or weeks if possible.

Uncle: "You know they will come looking for her for the cleansing?"

Nkhono: "What cleansing they took all the money saying she was not the wife so she will be the wife during cleansing?"

Wife: "See; they want to do what suites them only."



Nkhono: "I am not going to let them in. My brothers will come after the funeral we will see what they will do because they will have to go through them."

Wife: "Do not even let them through I am also not going anyway. My love you are also not going anywhere we need men to help us."

Uncle: "Okay"

I laughed at how supportive he was to the wife. It reminded me of my Lethabo. Was I ever going to forget about them or they were imprinted in my life forever?

Wife: "Please go and rest; we will help Nkhono to cook and clean the house. Once we are done we will wake you up to eat."

Itu: "Thank you."

I was not going to eat. I took four sleeping pills. I know what some are thinking that I wanted to kill myself or that I was addicted to pills. No I wasn't it was my first time drinking them since the doctor gave me. I guess I was a sucker for pain because I wanted to have those nightmares in peace. I didn't even take them; not even a single day.

When I woke up it was the following day and there were so many people in the yard.

Lesedi: "Ausi Itu you are up. Nkhono has already called an ambulance she saw your sleeping pills and thought that you wanted to kill yourself."

Itu: "What? I wanted to rest because I never rested since the fire. Why would I kill myself in my granny's house when she is my life?"

Lesedi: "Oh you don't know how your words are making me feel right now. Thank you."

She rushed to me and hugged me tight with tears running down her cheek."

"Lesedi we are still waiting.....oh ngoan'a ka you are up I was going to kill myself too if you did."

She came for a hug too crying it was too emotional. From that moment I removed the suicidal thoughts from my head because I had people who cared about me. My mother in law can jump all I care. She was not my mother in law to begin with. Her words not mine. I was going to call her by her name, Moipone.

Itu: "I was not trying to kill myself I was trying to rest because since the fire I never took those sleeping pills. My body was exhausted may I eat now."

By then Lesedi's uncle and his wife came in.

Uncle: "You are alive thank God." Wife: "Do not ever scare us again." She hugged me.

Itu: "Who are these people outside?"

Wife: "Your uncles are here because your in-laws are coming they were here yesterday but we couldn't wake you up. Then our neighbours are also here to comfort you."

Itu: "I am so sorry. I am not going to entertain them at all. I am done my kids are gone and their father the only people who connected us."

Uncle: "I told them the same. I told your older uncle to help you out because my wife and I are leaving for Welkom now; I have a night shift at the mine today."

Itu: "Thank you for coming it means a lot to me."

Wife: "We are neighbours we did it for our relationship. Please take care if you need a job you can come to the mines."

I knew she meant well but I was not going to go there. I was so scared and I knew my phobia was not going to allow me to leave Qwaqwa.

Itu: "I will call you when I am healed."

Wife: "Even if you send an sms I will call you back."

I was never going to call because I wanted my peace. We said our goodbyes as I followed them outside. My uncles were outside; they all stood up. I greeted them as I sat down. Before we could talk much there were cars outside the gate. Some of the neighbours were also sitting with my uncles because

culturally they were supposed to stay with the bereaved family for at least a week.

Uncle Seelo: "They are here didn't they hear enough yesterday?"

Itu: "Please uncle they are not worth it. Let us deal with them peacefully as a peaceful family that we are."

Uncle Scelo: "She is right let us not let outsiders change our values."

Nkhono: "Thank you very much let them see what humility is."

"Lumelang lapeng"

They greeted coming inside the yard. There were chairs which the neighbours vacated to give us privacy so we let them sit there.

Moipone: "We came here to ask the reason why you came here instead of home for the cleansing."

Elder: "According to our culture you have to be at home now finishing the rituals. You also need to wear the mourning clothes; this will show people that you are mourning so that no suitors will come your way."

Moipone: "Yes you are not allowed to date till two years has elapsed."

This woman thought I was a stupid fool.

Uncle Scelo: "What are....."

I stopped him because it was my fight.

Itu: "I....."

4

Itu: "I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to know your son and to live with him even though I was told he was not officially my husband to me he was my husband and I respected that. The fact that he didn't do right by me was not his fault because he lacked support from home. If he had a family that could help him like he helped them he could have married me a long time ago. I....."

Moipone: "You are not sure that he was ....."

Itu: "With all due respect Moipone you had your time you said what you wanted to say and I respected that; because I

was in your space. This is my granny's space and I have all the right.

You can listen to what I have to say or leave in peace. Baholo I will address this now if you give me the chance.”

I was looking at the elders Moipone and her sister were still shocked at the fact that I called her by her name. She wanted to say something but they saw how serious I was. I was hungry but no hunger formed against me was going to prosper.

Itu: “Ntate do you know that Moipone took all the money for the policies because according to your family I was not officially your daughter in law?”

Elder: “What?”

I knew she never told the whole story to the family so I was going to un-turn all the stones because I was done with them. I wanted to keep the memories of my family at heart. I wasn't going to do it with a hovering Moipone.

Itu: “Yes she took all the policy money even the one we took with my savings and the very same one I was paying with the money I raised from selling tomatoes and second hand clothes. She said that I can go to any court but I was never going to win because legally I was not his wife. So please tell me which wife is it again that is going to mourn for your son for two years?”

Elder: “Moipone when we had a family meeting yesterday you never told us what you did and what you said to this child. We are sorry my child.....”

Itu: “I was not telling you this because I wanted your sympathy; no, I want all of you to leave my life in peace because the people who were connecting us are gone. Secondly I was quiet when my husband; yes I call him that because to me he will always be man enough to be called my husband. I will never reduce him to nothing because he was my king. We didn't have jobs when we moved to Bloem. Life was hard but never; not even once did we get help from his family. My granny sent a few cents she had from her grant money but never did we get even a cent from his family. Then the moment he started working; as an intern for that matter; a message

came that he had to send money home to a mother who never even bothered taking him to school. She was busy chasing husband number two by then. She never even bothered to come and see the grandkids those grandkids she is benefiting from.”

Elder: “MOIPONE”

Itu: “You see my grandmother taught me well and I am never going to disrespect my elders this is me telling you the truth on why I am cutting ties. My husband was hired permanently

because he loved his mother so much he took a phone and called her. She had the guts to tell her son that her allowance was supposed to go up with a 100%. I was forced to sell everything I got my hands on so that I would never upset my husband because I loved him that much. To her I was a useless daughter who never worked but she never took time to come and see how we lived so that she could see that the monthly cheques going to her were crippling us a lot.”

Elder: “All this we were not aware of.”

Itu: “I know because I protected her. My granny taught me that such things destroyed families. She taught me to protect my husband because he was going to lose his crown if I ever told the family about that. She had respect for my husband because he never toyed with me; he came straight through that gate and asked for me to live with him. Because my grandmother is

a loving person she agreed. Today the same people that she protected from prying people are the same people who are coming to humiliate her in her own house.

Do you know how difficult life was because of the monthly cheques we sent to you Moipone. We couldn't afford to rent a proper house. Your son and my kids died because we couldn't afford to get proper accommodation but when I called you as a mother you had the guts to tell me that I killed your son. If I



was spiteful I was going to tell everyone even your high profile friends how your son died and how it was your fault that we had a mass funeral.

Hence elders I am saying I do not need anything from you even your apology because it will be a forced fake one. All I need is to be left alone to pick up all my broken pieces. I also ask for my family not to be disrespected. We do not have much but we respect each other as a family. My uncles are not talking now because they respect me enough to make the right decision. Even after I make a wrong one; they will support me all the way.

You know the gate which you used to come in this yard. It might be old and rusty but it will help you find your way out. I am afraid you wasted your fuel for nothing. This is the last time I expect to hear you talking about my family. If you dare not then Qwaqwa radio will be a small radio for me to broadcast

your laundry I will go to Thuso Motaung if you need your laundry to be aired. So please do not disrespect us because you have done enough of that. Good day.”

I bowed at my uncles as a sign of respect as I went inside the house to eat. Too much talking had just wasted my energy.

After a while my family came into the living room. Our house was still made of clay although the roof was fixed it was made

of zinc. My granny missed the opportunity to get an RDP house because she had gone to the hospital for an operation. From then we tried to apply for it year in year out.

Uncle Seelo: “My niece we are so sorry that you had to go through this but let us not focus on the past because the past is gone we can never change it let us focus on tomorrow.”

See why I loved my family? We never dwelled on the past, even the immediate past. I had said my mind they listened and digested but they were never going to dwell on it unless I wanted their help.

Nkhono: “We wanted to know if you want us to do a cleansing for you as a family. You know our culture requires that you do the cleansing ceremony.”

Uncle Scelo: “We are doing it so that you can never have bad luck. Also one day you would want to get married and then who will marry you with a shadow following you?”

I wanted to tell them I was never going to get married but that was not important at that time because the important issue was the ceremony.

Itu: “Will it cost money?”

Uncle Seelo: “Do not worry about this only answer us then we will tell you how it will go?”

Itu: “I am not going to dispute and I know it is your duty to do it so I am not going to deny you that opportunity.

Nkhono: “Thank you very much. We are not the only ones who want to do this for you. Our neighbours even Morena has contributed. They made their pledges to help. We are doing this as a community. They also donated clothes and some few utensils some are used but.....”

Itu: “You don’t even need to explain because it is the thought that counts. This means a lot. I will never say no to the community and family if they want to do this for me I am ready. Even if I need mourning clothes I will wear them even if they say five years because I know they are doing it from the bottom of their hearts.”

I was in tears. It was a good gesture because our community had less privileged people so if they contributed which meant it was not from the plenty but from the little that they had.

Uncle Seelo: “As a family we will buy the sheep because it has to come from us. Mr Moloji down the road said he will buy the cloth and his wife will sew the dresses. Mrs Sibeko offered to buy your undergarments with the shoes that you will wear during the mourning period.”

Nkhono: “The mourning period will come from you. We do not go beyond 6moths in this family so if you want to go further

then you can do it. To me I am still mourning my husband and it never stops so clothes won't stop you from mourning."

She was right I was going to mourn my family till the end of time. I was grateful that my granny was always there. My uncles were not that active and they were also not distant we had a normal relationship like any other.

The day came for the ceremony. It was a weekend after the weekend of the burial. People came in their numbers to support. The only thing I hated was when people looked at me with pitiful eyes. Some people had gotten a hold of the video they took during the fire.

It really broke my heart at how people could take someone's misfortune as a play thing. Lesedi and his uncle's wife were there too. Her name was Dipulelo but I didn't want to call her by her name out of respect.

Lesedi: "Ausi Itu I know you are sad because someone was playing that video. People will always be mean but put it behind you and look forward."

She was too mature for her age I will say it again.

Itu: "How am I supposed to forget when everywhere I go I get pointed by fingers because some people want to validate their claim to know me? Yesterday my granny accompanied me to

the clinic we had to ask to be served first because I couldn't take it anymore."

Dipulelo: "Sometimes people will always be insensitive but please be patient with time. Time can heal you if you are not aware of it."

Itu: "This ceremony needs to end so that I can live my life again. I need to rest without being looked at."

Dipulelo: "I still say you have to move away from people who know you. Come with me."

Itu: "I am still recovering and I need my granny so for now I am good here."

Dipulelo: "I thought you might say that so I brought a present for you. I know you will say no but it is a contribution because my mother in law told me that everyone contributed."

She was one lucky lady. Her mother in law was friendly you could swear she was the daughter.

Lesedi: "Please do not say no because I will take it if you say no."

I was curious I was never going to say no because whatever Lesedi wanted I knew it was going to be a good present.

Dipulelo: "Okay this present is from Lesedi my mother in law, hubby and I. It will help you if you also want to look for a job and research."

She took it out of the gift bag and gave me. It was wrapped neatly with a ribbon on top. Lesedi: "Open it please."

She was even jumping up and down. I opened it and my jaws dropped it was a new phone.

Itu: "Thank you very much. People were calling me through Nkhono's phone and I know it irritates her." Lesedi: "Wait it's not all." Okay I was waiting for it.

Dipulelo: "It is a contract phone it comes with calls, sms and data on a monthly basis. You need this to look for a job so you don't need any money to buy airtime."

I was not even going to trouble my granny with money. This was too much for me. I was in tears when granny came to my room.

Nkhono: "Why are you crying is everything okay?"

Lesedi: "She is happy Nkhono aunt DP bought a phone for her with airtime and data."

She was smiling from ear to ear as if the phone was hers.

Nkhono: "Ngoan'a ka bathong, thank you very much may you be given more where you removed."

Dipulelo: “You don’t need to cry Mme because you have been helping mama for years and it is time to help where I could.”

Nkhono: “Thank you very much. Itu I have been receiving calls from the unknown number the whole day.”

Itu: “Is it not there in your phone book? Let me check”

Nkhono: “I don’t have this number.”

I took the phone and checked. It was not any number that I knew. I was about to give back her phone when a message alert. I didn’t mean to but I opened it and my eyes just popped.....

5

I didn’t want my granny to see it because she was going to freak out. I was going to deal with this scumbag myself.

Itu: “It is nothing Nkhono I will try to call the number and hear what they want.”

Dipulelo: “Do not worry Nkhono we will call and bring the phone to you. Just relax and play with other old people.”

We laughed I think DP realised that there was something wrong so she was chasing my granny away.

Nkhono: "You will be old one day and then you will not talk like that."

Dipulelo: "But Nkhono you people are old am I lying?"

Nkhono: "Let me leave I see you want me to tell you where to get off."

We laughed as she went outside.

Lesedi: "What is wrong ausi Itu?"

Oh shiz niz she saw it too. I showed them the message.

Dipulelo: "What the...."

Lesedi: "Do you think its her?"

I wouldn't put it past her but I was not sure just after I told her where to get off which means she didn't hear much.

Lesedi: "Let me use true caller it will tell us who is using this phone."

Dipulelo: "Clever child now I know that I am not wasting my money taking you to school."

Lesedi: "You are not even paying the bursary is covering that."

Dipulelo: "Remind me when you are asking for money for toiletries."

Lesedi: "That's cruelty. Child cruelty."



Itu: “When did it move from child abuse to child cruelty?”

I was laughing at her. I loved their relationship it was rare for a makoti to love the child of the family she was married to and the opposite. Lesedi was lovable she was not a rebellious child.

Dipulelo: “Cruelty of child my wrinkled behind.”

I laughed hard forgetting my predicament. I took the phone and read the message again. Moipone had gone too far. We had blocked her number so she was using another number to torment my granny. It had to end there and then.

“You do not know how to discipline your child now she goes around disrespecting adults. I bet you are the one who killed

my son for your retrials I wouldn't let this past you. You are going to suffer with your family for making me look like a fool. You don't know who my husband is; do you? You messed with the wrong woman.”

I had seen people threaten people. I never thought that I will be one of them.

Dipulelo: “Earth to Itumelang.”

Lesedi: “So what are we going to do about this woman who is too disrespectful?”

Dipulelo: "Please let the older people talk about this because this is serious you know that."

Lesedi: "Okay let me go with my information; I was going to give them the information about the husband and the daughter that they were going to use so that the hag won't trouble them. What do I know when I am not old."

She was mumbling at herself we looked at each other with Dipulelo and rushed to her.

Both: "Wait."

She had a wicked smile the little pervert.

Lesedi: "Why should I wait?"

Itu: "You are not young then. Tell us; what do you have on her. I was planning on visiting her tonight."

Dipulelo: "That makes the two of us."

Lesedi: "This is so cool and I will be the cool kid with the files there doing the talking while you do the beating."

We both looked at her and laughed.

Dipulelo: "Who said anything about beating?"

Itu: "It might not be a bad idea though you see just tying her on that chair and look at her groaning then smile."

Lesedi: "Yes boss."

Dipulelo: "Be serious you two we are not some vigilante; how are we going to get her alone without the family?"

Lesedi: "Simple; the brat stepson is busy gambling his inheritance away. The husband is busy with one of the two mistresses he has and the little girl is always online creating accounts and wooing older guys online."

We looked at each other with our mouths sagging; we looked at her.

Dipulelo: "How the heck do you know all these things and are you sure you don't have a file on me?"

Lesedi: "Which one the Wednesday bowling with....."

Dipulelo: "Geez this kid."

She said closing her mouth looking around us; she even went to the door to check if there was anyone by the door.

Dipulelo: "Who the heck are you?"

Itu: "What is going on?"

Lesedi: "That is not important what is important is that we need to go and deal with the old hag as in now while we have time."

Itu: "Lesedi I....."

Lesedi: “No ausi Itu we will talk about it while on our way. We will use the fence so ausi DP can get the car to the corner.”

This girl had all the things we needed so I was not going to waste my time. I had no leverage that she gave me on a silver platter. She was good real good but I was freaking out on how she got the information it was scary. We just followed her instructions without fail because we were scared that she might make us disappear. No jokes I was scared to death.

Lesedi: “This is so cool; we are like villains in a superhero movie and Moipone’s husband is the superhero who will save his wife because he didn’t find his mistress home.”

Us: “WHAT?!”

Lesedi: “I just wanted your adrenalin to run so that you will reach her house pumped up.”

Dipulelo: “I swear if I come out of this alive I am going to tie you on a chair and remove the truth from you.”

Itu: “I am still in awe I want the truth also.”

Lesedi: “Get ready because one of you needs to get a bag with masking tape and a rope in the boot; just underneath.”

Dipulelo: “What the hell Sedi in my car and what were you doing with those things in my car.”

Lesedi: “Worry not it was for camp last year remember when you bought for me.”

Dipulelo: “Yes but when did you create a compartment in my car?”

Lesedi: “It has always been there ask your husband he is the one who showed me so that I won’t mess up with your space. I am sorry but look it came in handy today.”

Itu: “I do not even want to stress myself with Lesedi anymore because I will never execute the plan well. What I can say is this only happens in movies and I am glad I lived to see it happen in real life.”

I just laughed because it was like I was in a movie.

Lesedi: “Let’s go we have less than 20 minutes.”

Dipulelo: “Don’t we need to hide our faces.”

She laughed at us hard.

Lesedi: “Come on we are not in movies I am just a hacker come let us go.”

She opened their gate with a remote we were not even at liberty to be surprised because she was just good. We had parked around the corner. She was alone in the house as Lesedi said. She was in shock and we had to be fast with her before she screamed.

Lesedi: "Should I start or you will start?"

Dipulelo: "We...are...going...to ...remove....the ...tape...now."

We both laughed with Lesedi it was funny.

Itu: "She is taped on the mouth only not deaf silly."

Dipulelo: "Oh; I wanted to do it like in the movies. Okay Moipone we are going to remove the tape. If you scream we are going to send the message you sent to Nkhono to your husband who is busy screwing Zama his second mistress."

She looked shocked then I peeled it so fast.

Itu: "sorry I was very gentle. Now tell me; what do you want from me because I told you I am not interested in your life or what you call a life."

Moipone: "You humiliated me in front of my family."

Itu: "I was telling the truth so now tell me where does my granny come in?"

Moipone: "I knew you loved her so much so if I hurt her I was going to get a reaction."

Dipulelo: "Not the reaction you expected I guess. Well then I wanted to beat you so bad but to me you are so pathetic. I can never go to jail for someone as pathetic as you are. Lesedi's

information showed me that you are just living a miserable life so I will let life deal with you.”

Lesedi: “Just like that. Well I will release the file because I want her to be miserable like me I was so miserable when they made your life miserable because you are my best person. Now exhibit one. Your husband has an obsession with sex tapes. Let me see should I start from the month you married him or just last month? Well I tell you they come in different shapes and sizes; all of them are prettier than you.”

We looked at each other.

Itu: “Lesedi; no you are not going to watch that.”

Lesedi: “Do not worry I have seen better I think he is cheating to justify is small d.....”

Dipulelo: “Don’t even finish it I will disown you.”

Lesedi: “Well I am not a chi.....Okay ausi I will stop now let me just show her because she will think we are making this up about her precious boyfriend.”

She said showing her the videos as she watched in shock.

Lesedi: “Exhibit number 2; stepson goes wild. You are busy thinking that when hubby dies you will inherit something

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well news flash darling he is done with his inheritance he even started selling your things one at a time.”

She was in tears; the same pain she inflicted in me was shown in her face.

Lesedi: “Number 3 your precious daughter who is always claiming to be studying is busy with older guys online.”

Moipone: “Stop!”

Itu: “Well you have more to lose than me so stay the hell away from me.”

Lesedi: “5minutes and we are out.”

We untied her and left. I felt relieved because I didn't even lift my hands to beat her. We drove in silence. I think DP and I were digesting the information about Lesedi. Such talent needed to be nurtured so that she won't get hurt or arrested. When we got home Nkhono was looking for us.

Nkhono: “Where have you been?”

Itu: “Here is your phone I am digesting what Lesedi just did. I will see you tomorrow.”

Dipulelo: “I can't even breathe.”

Nkhono: “What did you do Lesedi?”



Lesedi: "Aah"

She just had a naughty smile and shrugged her shoulder. I shook my head going to my room. I really needed a rest from being a staring of the day.....

6

When I woke up the following day I was still in awe of what Lesedi did I had to go to their place because I didn't want my granny to hear what happened. She was going to be all over my face. I still respected my granny so what Moipone said was going to strip off her dignity.

Lesedi: "So early in the morning ausi Itu?"

Itu: "Do not even comment because I had nightmares caused by you. Come sit; I will go and call your aunt because I really need to understand what went on yesterday?"

Lesedi: "I just....."

Itu: "No talking today I do the interview and you do the answering."

She just smiled and continued drinking her coffee. I found DP done dressing up.

Dipulelo: "Where are you coming from so early?"

Itu: "Do you think I slept? Maybe you slept well but not me."

Dipulelo: "No I couldn't I wonder what she knows. What if her uncle find out?"

Itu: "What is Wednesday ....."

Dipulelo: "Do not even ask I am not ready to tell people and I am not sure if she told people already."

Itu: "I doubt; if she did don't you think you would have heard something from someone?"

Dipulelo: "You are right. Come let me make tea for you."

Itu: "I am not staying long Nkhono might look for me. I want to talk to Lesedi please come too."

Dipulelo: "Come this side."

Itu: "Lesedi I love you very much you are the sister I never had I wanted...."

Lesedi: "I know I am sensing a 'but' in your statement."

Itu: "I want to know if you are safe because I have seen people go to jail."

Lesedi: "In movies I guess."

I was ashamed because it was the truth.

Itu: "It is not necessary because I do not want to come and visit you in jail."

Dipulelo: "I want to know also because I know you have files on everyone."

Lesedi: "First of all I would love to apologise for scaring you yesterday I know it was a lot to take in. When I discovered the

gift that I had I was scared too. It is something that came natural to me. I know I do not have friends at all so I pass my times researching about this and its dangers. I haven't done anything with the information I got. So technically it is not illegal. It will become illegal when I use the information."

Dipulelo: "We used the information yesterday."

She laughed at us like we were horned aliens.

Lesedi: "Yesterday it was little water because Moipone wanted to swim with the big fishes. I have the information that will change your life but put in jail."

Itu: "what do you mean?"

Lesedi: "I can hack to any department and employ you permanent without them realising that they didn't officially hire you."

Us: "What?"

Lesedi: "I can hack to any system but I chose not to because I know it is illegal

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about yesterday; I heard you complaining about your in-laws so that is when I gathered the information. If it wasn't like that I was never going to compile the information. I know you are a good person I thought you were going to let her go scot free. If

you did I was going to use that information myself to get her to back down."

Itu: "She touched my granny and no one does that because it drives me mad."

Dipulelo: "She also pissed me off"

Itu: "Okay I am leaving. Please make sure you use your gift for the good only because I do not want to see you lose your life and future because of this."

Lesedi: "I promise ausi waka. So what do you say about the job?"

Itu: "Do not tempt me but I will think about it."

Dipulelo: "We are leaving after lunch. I might not see you as we are going to buy mom's groceries now then leave afterwards."

Itu: "Lucky mother in law."

Dipulelo: "You might be lucky next time and have a better mother in law."

Itu: "Not in this life time. I am still saying no man will top what my Lethabo provided for me. With or without money I will still choose him no matter what."

Lesedi: "Lucky guy."

Dipulelo: "Go and bath before I leave you."

Lesedi: "Bye ausi Itu. See you in December because this time around exams are holding me by the nuts."

Itu: "As if you have those nuts."

Lesedi: "Figure of speech."

Itu: "See you then Sedi."

DP took me to the gate. I rushed home and my granny was still sleeping. After breakfast my uncles prepared for the road. They were going back to the normal life and I was going back to what exactly?

When there were many people at home it gave me that sense of belonging and I needed no reminder of the predicament I was facing. They all left one at a time even neighbours were no longer coming to check on how we were holding up. It showed that life was moving forward but I was back to ground zero.

Nkhono: "Do not lose hope my daughter."

I was coming from yet another failed interview. Some of them I never bothered to go to. Some they never bothered to call me at all for the interviews.

Itu: "I am done applying because this is not getting me anywhere. I certify my certificates every weekend in the hope that I will be lucky the next time I apply but no luck at all."

Nkhono: "All good things come to those who wait."

Itu: "Why should I be the only one to wait?"

Nkhono: "Your time will come one day."

Itu: "I am not going to hold my breath at all."

The only thing keeping me going was only my grandmother I didn't have a purpose anymore. Dipulelo asked me to visit them for a while I couldn't bring myself to get into a taxi. I was scared to death. I felt like if I left my granny something bad was going to happen.

Nkhono: "You cannot stay here forever. You have to go out there and get over your fears." She once said.

Itu: "I am not going to let you change my mind. I am not going anywhere."

Nkhono: "I am praying for you and I know once your fears are over then all will be well."

One day one of my former classmates came to see me. I was so surprised because I never spoke to her even when we were at school.

Itu: "What brings you here?"

Betty: "I hear that you are looking for a job and I want to help."

She was known for her job description. I was not a judgemental person so I was not going to entertain her request.

Itu: "I am good I will find a job one day."

Betty: "You are here looking at me as if I killed somebody. We all know that I will never wait for the grant to get toiletries when I want anything I just get it. When I go to the shop the money is not written that I am a stripper."

The first time I heard about that I was surprised that a small village like Qwaqwa had professional strippers.

Betty: "I travel sometime for greener pastures and they don't look at me with disgust like you people do."

It hit me that judging was not for us. When I was looking at it I felt ashamed to have judged her also. People lived their lives differently didn't mean they were less human.

I felt what she might have felt when I was in the bathroom at the mall one day. I kept seeing two ladies looking at me. I used the bathroom and pretended to be gone.

Lady 1: "I hear she killed her family as a ritual. You don't know the church she was always going to just disappeared as soon as she buried the family."

Lady 2: "She thought she was going to be rich like those people from those movies. Shame on her; I would have killed her also if I were the mother in law."

Lady 1: "She was afraid to die too."

They kept talking while I listened to the nonsense. I even sat down and cried to God.

"Whatever I did please forgive me because I cannot take it anymore. Please take me." I am wondering how many people thought I killed my mother.

After they left I went the other direction. It was not my day because I met Moipone. It was too late to change direction.

Moipone: "Itumelang."

Itu: "Not today Satan."

She saw that I was not in the mood. I took a taxi straight home. People do not realise that sometimes their words could send someone to an early grave. I was sent back to the ground by those people.



I had taken a few steps and I was definitely sure that those steps got deleted. I was left wondering what was wrong with me.

Some interviews I was either too qualified or under qualified.

Itu: "Nkhono I am starting to think this working business is not for me."

Nkhono: "Everyone is qualified to do what they want to do. You are also cut out to work only that it is not yet time."

Itu: "I am planning on selling vegetables and fruits here."

Nkhono: "See; you are now using your brain. When do you want to start?"

Itu: "If I had money I was going to start today."

Nkhono: "You are lucky because I have a few rands to spare."

Itu: "Should I be worried?"

Nkhono: "Not at all. Tomorrow please write down what you want and how much they will cost; you have to start somewhere."

My granny was happy but I was bleeding inside. How was I going to start my life over when I was facing so many obstacles.....

“They went to university and thought we were nobodies now they are begging for our money.”

I had gone to look for change in the house I was just by the corner when I heard them talking. They were both from the neighbourhood.

“Going to school these days is useless. Why did she even go to school? She should have invested her money with FEDA look at us living the life.”

“Well my friend my money is coming out next week do you know what I was planning? I want to have a big party and enjoy money. I won’t even buy these rotten vegetables.”

The FEDA they were talking about was a pyramid scheme and I knew it but I was not going to comment. I cleared my throat so that they could hear me. I came and pretended that I didn’t hear them badmouthing me.

Itu: “Here is your change; thank you for coming.”

Lady 1: “You are welcome. We buy here because you have the freshest vegetables ever.”

Lady 2: “I will come and buy bananas for school tomorrow.”

Itu: “Alright.”

I gave them a fake smile while I was bleeding inside. I was feeling down. People were not buying as expected; so the vegetables had to go bad some we had to sell them to the local farmer who had pigs.

Some of granny's friends bought but there was little pensioners can do. I was grateful though that I wasn't going insane. I missed my family so much. Someday I had dreams with my baby girl.

Emotionally I was not coping at all. I had died with them emotionally. When they left I packed my things and went into the house to sleep. It had been a slow week which always led me to self doubt I hated those.

Nkhono: "What happened today?"

Itu: "Nkhono; I am slowly going to the deep hole. Mme wa Thuto and her friend from down the street was talking ill things about me. They were even laughing."

Nkhono: "I thought by now you know them better. My daughter all things come to those who wait."

Itu: "I have waited enough. This is the second year I am trying to cope but nothing is working."

Nkhono: "It is when it hit the hardest my daughter that is when the things will change."

Itu: “Well then I will sleep here and wait to die.”

I just covered my face and cried.

Nkhono: “God please help her. She is the only thing that I am living for. I promise if you change her life I will be your servant forever.”

I could hear her from the other side of the door. It really broke my heart; I just cried harder. I was tired of praying as it was not working. I was thinking of people who said I was supposed to slaughter a sheep and appease my ancestors. Which ancestors when they abandoned me. If they were there then why was I suffering? I was done trusting anything. I was faithless at that time.

I took my phone and read my diary on facebook. I was not living that life but it was better to dream about it. This book had just uplifted me; ‘My Vows Our Vows’ I loved Portia I wish I was lucky like her. I had asked about the author. I loved her work.

I was laughing and crying when my granny told me that she was going to buy bread for the following morning. She was going to the clinic for her monthly check up.

Itu: “Let me go I also want to photocopy my ID and CV that lady from your stokvel said she will give them to her daughter.”

Nkhono: “Who? Sally, her daughter is a snob.”

Itu: "What do you know about snobs?"

Nkhono: "I watch television also. I hope she will take them. That one might burn them I don't trust her."

I laughed alone. She was right but I was going to do it anyway. I didn't want to disappoint Nkhono Sally because if I did they were going to say I didn't want some help.

"Sister can I walk with you?"

I looked at the boy. He had just finished matric and he thought he could score. I laughed at how my life had turned out being pursued by kids.

Itu: "Nhlanhla; I told you before that I am old enough to be your mother."

Nhlanhla: "I know but I like you. I want to remove the misery in your eyes."

Itu: "Who told you I was miserable?"

Nhlanhla: "People talk out here. I do not want to listen but I hear them saying you have a bad omen that might kill all your husbands."

I laughed because of the way he said it. I was used to some talks. I only kept the good things most of the community members were doing for me. The haters were going to jump all I cared.

Itu: "So you want to die young also?"

Nhlanhla: "I can never die because I know they are lying. I will marry you one day."

We both laughed he was a funny kid.

Itu: "Ask me in five years time

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if you still feel this way I will marry you."

Nhlanhla: "Yessssss."

I was not even serious. I knew it was just hormones. I was once in his shoes; fantasising about my teacher. There was this one teacher who was so handsome to my eyes. I could even fight girls mentally who looked at him otherwise. When I looked back and I looked at him at the present time I just laughed at myself. So I knew the boy was going to the university and he was going to look at me and laugh at himself.

Itu: "So you will tell people that I am who."

Nhlanhla: "My wife of course."

Itu: "Okay husband go and photocopy for me so that I can go up there and buy bread."

Nhlanhla: "Anything you need my queen."

We developed a friendship from then. He was a respectful boy I was hoping he was not going to get swallowed by the big city. He was going to University of Johannesburg.

Nkhono: "What was that tsotsi doing with you?"

Itu: "He is only a child Mme and he is not a tsotsi. He is just hanging with the wrong crowd only."

Nkhono: "What do they say ducks with the same feathers float together?"

I laughed at her. She was very serious.

Itu: "Not ducks but birds Mme."

Nkhono: "Same; same because they all have feathers akere?"

I was not going to argue with her.

Itu: "Well for your own information he wants to be your son in law."

Nkhono: "My what?"

Itu: "You heard me; he is going to marry me after five years."

Nkhono: "I do not mean to laugh but he will make a good husband. He will take the wallets from people and give you the money to feed us."





towns. Since the fire I can't leave Qwaqwa without losing breath. Last week I couldn't even get to Kestel."

Lerato: "Ah I am very sorry about this. So what happened when you left for Kestel?"

Itu: "I had to stop the taxi because I had an anxiety attack. The driver had to look for a car coming back home. From then I couldn't even go to Setsing (town) without those flashbacks."

Lerato: "I am so sorry. Have you thought about going to a therapist?"

Itu: "When I can't afford to buy a panty?"

We both laughed.

Lerato: "You can go to Elizabeth Hospital I think they have therapists in government institutions."

Itu: "I will think about it."

I was not going to think about it because I knew what was involved in therapy I was going to be asked to talk about my past and I was not happy as I was not ready to talk about my family. I was okay dreaming about them if I forgot them I was going to lose them forever.

Lesedi: "What are you going to do then?"

Itu: "I will take it one day at a time like I have been doing since."

Lesedi: "It is not healthy you can find a hobby then."

She didn't know I had a hobby already. I would take the magazines and then cut baby pictures and file them with a picture representing Lethabo and I.

Itu: "Worry not about me I am going to be fine, I sent applications already."

Thinking of applications I had to go to Nkhono Sally's place to give her the documents.

Itu: "Listen sputnik I have to go my love can we do this in the afternoon."

Lesedi: "Okay I will do that."

The moment I dropped the call I left the blankets in the speed of lightning. I did my routine in a split second I wasn't going to dress up I only put on a light summer dress and my sandals. My granny had already left for the clinic. Our clinics were always full.

Itu: "Sorry Nkhono Sally I slept late. Am I very late?"

Sally: "Good morning to you too Itumelang."

I laughed, I was even heavily breathing

Itu: "Good morning. I didn't want you to think that I am not serious about this job hunting."

Sally: "I know you are serious. Bophelo is gone but I am going to town later; I will drop those documents in her office."

Itu: "Thank you Nkhono very much I appreciate this."

Sally: "I know you will get the job this time around."

I didn't want to get my hopes high on the other hand I didn't want to show her that I was sceptical.

Itu: "Thank you very much. Let me go to Bolata School it is their day for grant so they might buy some of the stock."

Sally: "You are hard working and God will see you through."

I rushed home as the school was far there were no taxis directly I would have gone to the centre first and then another one to the school which was going to waste my money not forgetting the time also.

When I got home my granny had already packed for me. That is why I loved her so much; she thought of me always; which meant she had packed before leaving for the clinic. I took the things and left. On my way cars were passing me by. Looking at some girls younger than me driving while I looked like a saggy old woman there in the road; I was wondering who I had offended to deserve such a life. Some they didn't care because

the other guy hit a pothole when there was not even an oncoming car which splashed me with water.

Tears always invited themselves on such occasions. When I got to the school someone had taken my spot and there was no time to fight. I needed to sell so I had to go at the far end under the tree. I was watching others getting customers while I got worried that my stock was going to go bad again. Then a gentleman accompanying an old woman in a wheelchair rescued me. It seemed that some people had not realised that I was present that day so they came and my day changed. I sold everything.

When I was about to leave a message alert came through. I read it and re-read it. I couldn't believe what I was reading.

“What the.....”

8

“You have to come right this moment because your friend will be dead right now?”

I didn't know what the message meant; I didn't have that particular number in my contacts. I tried calling the number but it was not going through.

What was going on because I was getting agitated? I went back to my app and sent a message to the person.

“Sorry who is this?”

There was no response even though the message had been read. I packed my things and went home. I was suspecting Moipone because she had played tricks on me two years prior. Speaking of Moipone I was wondering what happened to her and the family because I always saw the so called husband with another young and beautiful partner who had a ring so I guessed it was the wife or maybe one of the women Lesedi talked about.

When I got home granny was still not around. Mostly I rested on the days I had to go to schools far away. Some schools where really far; it was safe to rest. Sometimes I would even sleep sitting down. I knew that granny was going to come late. Our clinics were all like that always packed.

“I would like to know if this is Yusuf.”

Itu: “No; this is not him; this is Itu?”

“I wanted Yusuf to come and collect my useless husband before I murder him.”

I had mixed feelings about the message. I ended up sending laughing emojis I didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

Itu: "where is this Yusuf?"

"I think he is in town. My husband has been a pain in the butt since morning."

Itu: "At least you have one."

I just stopped myself when I had already sent the message.

"Do not even wish for one I tell you. If I had a place where I could exchange this man I would."

I laughed again. Just like that a wrong message we were chatting like friends.

Itu: "I don't think it can be that bad?"

"Trust me it is worse. It was a marriage of convenience then I was left without a choice because there is now a child involved."

Itu: "How so?"

"Story for another day; let me get his offspring ready for her swimming lessons."

Itu: "is it a boy or a girl?"

"A little girl; who is the love of my life."

I felt a lump in my throat. I thought of my little girl.

Itu: "Okay good luck."

I logged out and cleaned a little. I cooked a fresh meal for my granny. When I was done I took my phone and saved her number. I was asking myself where she got my number or was it a mistyped number which often goes to a person that side.

I was smiling alone watching her statues. She was posting every minute what her child was doing. They made a cute combination. The child looked coloured with curly and beautiful hair. She looked vibrant also. My granny came in while I was still smiling alone.

Nkhono: "Those who are in psychiatric hospitals didn't apply for it they started like you some of them."

I laughed

Itu: "Why are you saying that?"

Nkhono: "I have been talking to you for some time and you are busy smiling with your phone. Is it my son in law?"

I laughed hard.

Itu: "Your son in law doesn't have my number."

Nkhono: "Heh manyeo you are cheating on my son in law already?"

She was even being dramatic I laughed while dishing up the food for her.

Itu: "Now you are his number one supporter your tsotsi son in law."

Nkhono: "He is going to school so I will be his number one fan."

Itu: "Chesa Nkhono."

We both laughed as I knelt down giving her the meal.

Itu: "Well for your own information it was a wrong number and this lady started chatting with me."

Nkhono: "Where is she from?"

Itu: "I am not sure but she said we will chat after her daughter's swimming lesson. Look at how cute they are together?"

Nkhono: "They look rich; how did you meet exactly?"

Itu: "She said it was a wrong number."

Nkhono: "Be very careful my baby because out there perverts are real. She might be a 'man' all we know."

Itu: "I will be careful. For now we were just chatting."

Nkhono: "Okay give me my medication before I forget. Today there was that nurse who I am even afraid to say her name



because walls have ears. She was so rude I wished I could burry myself and forget I heard what she was saying.”

Itu: “You have to get used to her Nkhono as you know not all people are like you. You see good in people and you think for them but some people only think about themselves and that they are in power. Believe you me when you are in the clinic your life is in her hands so you have to bow down to her and she knows that; that is why she is controlling people like a small god.”

Nkhono: “You are right my daughter. I am tired those benches are hard and moving from one queue to another messes me up always.”

Itu: “I will wake you up for supper go and rest. I washed your sheets when I got back.”

Nkhono: “What will I be without you?”

Itu: “We are nothing without each other.”

She smiled going to her room. I was so excited when I heard a message alert; only to find a message from Clientèle. You know it was like I have a newly found love I was curious to learn about her life. For the first time after the fire I was excited about something in life.

I cleaned the kitchen and washed the dishes. When I was listening to music a message came through. I smiled because it was from 'unknown' I had saved it like that.

"We are done with swimming the princess is with her dad now."

Itu: "What is your name because my granny was thinking you are a pervert?"

"I am not a pervert my name is Lerato Samatar I stay in Limpopo I am married to a Somalian it was a marriage of convenience."

Itu: "This is interesting."

Lerato: "Nothing is interesting I only saw a handsome man and forgot that some characters are not handsome like the faces."

I laughed hard sending laughing emojis to fill in the page.

Itu: "How did you two meet?"

Lerato: "He was running away from his sugar mummy; who was milking him dry. We married because we wanted him to have a permit to stay here. Wait a minute I might be telling you this and you will be sending this information to your government spies who will arrest us."

I was cracking up with laughter.

Itu: "I would love to be a spy maybe I wouldn't be stuck at home with my degree but selling fruits and vegetables."

Lerato: "Sorry I didn't mean it like that."

Itu: "It's okay. So tell me how is it being married to a foreigner?"

Lerato: "It is okay his family worships the ground I walk on. Although his father passed away leaving the riches to him. He has a stinking attitude."

Itu: "You can't talk about your husband like that?"

Lerato: "Well if he carries on like this he won't be for long."

Itu: "What is happening?"

Lerato: "He is ...let me say...he was not ready for marriage. He loves his daughter very much I don't want to lie but I doubt that he loves me."

Itu: "Did you ask him that question?"

Lerato: "Not at all but his actions say otherwise."

Itu: "What if he says the same that you don't love him enough?"

Lerato: "Well I am not going to speculate. So I am not a pervert and you are not a government spy"

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who are you then?”

Itu: “My name is; Itumelang Mahlaba; I stay in Qwaqwa we are practically neighbours with Lesotho. So when they catch me on my spying I will run away and stay there.”

She sent laughing emojis.

Itu: “Well I am single I was married and now I am jobless too.”

Lerato: “What happened are you divorced?”

Itu: “Story for another time.”

Lerato: “Well now I get to spend my time chatting to you. I am bored to death. People think money can solve everything as for me I would have married anyone who would have made me happy.”

Itu: “Is it a contract or what?”

Lerato: “I haven’t even used the money that was in the deal package but he doesn’t even know.”

This was getting interesting. It was juicier than ‘My vows and Our Vows’ I was going to get a bonus of getting two stories for free. Look at me fantasising about stories. Well at least it was better than thinking about my miserable life.

Itu: “Well the plot thickens.”

Lerato: "Please don't go around writing about me in your diary."

Itu: "I am even thinking of writing a book."

I sent laughing emojis and she did the same.

Lerato: "It will be a very interesting book you can make money."

Itu: "Let me be the judge of it. Know that you are going to tell me the juicier parts."

Lerato: "Not today stranger some other time. The princess and his prince are here."

Itu: "Thank you for your time."

She sent a heart. Just like that I found a soul sister I wasn't even aware I would. If fate had brought her to me then the universe had a way for my healing. The way I thought will help me to heal didn't happen so I was going to trust the Fated Encounter which entrusted her to me.

Itu: "I talked to the pervert while you were sleeping."

Nkhono: "When they harvest yours organs don't tell me. Well how are you going to tell me when you are dead?"

I just laughed.

Itu: “Well she is not a pervert she is a family woman. Her name is Lerato Samatar. She is married to a guy from Somalia and their daughter is called Kalikidan Samatar. She is such a beauty she takes after her father.”

Nkhono: “When are we going to Somalia I don’t have to die before leaving the country?”

Itu: “So now you are not afraid of being organ harvested?”

Nkhono: “As long as I have flown in a plane then I can die a happy lady.”

Itu: “How chameleony you are?”

Nkhono: “There is no such word.”

We laughed as I felt like my life was beginning. Was I going to get through my hurt? Was I going to recover? Only time was going to tell....

9 (A)

I was always happy when I was on the phone with Lerato. She called a lot recently. Nkhono also had the chance to talk to her. They hit it from the word go.

Nkhono: “I am so glad for that wrong message. I believe God sent that wrong message to you on purpose.”

Itu: “That is what Lerato said.”

Nkhono: "All I am glad about is that you are always smiling these days. I think I have my Itu back. I know it might take time but I am happy that you are taking one day at a time."

Itu: "To tell the truth I am so grateful about this encounter because I have a purpose to go on. I am not yet there but I have renewed hope. I know that with time I will be back to my usual self. I am praying to not forget them

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my Lethabo and my babies."

Nkhono: "You will never forget them they are already imprinted in your heart forever. They will always be part of you no matter what."

Itu: "Today I am going to the market but the bakkie guy is not here."

I was changing the subject because I didn't want any depressing news.

Nkhono: "Do you want me to come with you."

Itu: "You have to rest. I will use a taxi but I will need your help to take them from the bus stop."

Nkhono: "I will get the wheelbarrow ready for you. Do not buy too much this week there is no grant and you know people already bought groceries in town."

Itu: "I am only adding more sweets and chips because school kids buy those more since the schools opened."

Nkhono: "It won't be too heavy for you then. Did the truck guy travel to Lesotho again?"

Itu: "Yes, he will bring some of the yellow mealies for me to sell also."

Nkhono: "Have you found buyers?"

Itu: "I will once it is here. You know your friends want to buy what they are looking at. You tell them to pay first for their goods they will think you want to rob them."

She laughed

Nkhono: "We are the current doubting Thomas."

Itu: "Let me rush."

Nkhono: "You need to change your wardrobe you have to dress your age."

Itu: "What is wrong with it?"



Nkhono: "Just go but if I were a suitor I was going to pass you by because you don't look appetising."

I just left wondering if she wanted me to dress like her. I was okay without suitors my way. I wanted my single life prolonged. I was not in a hurry to date again; well I doubt I wanted to even go back to dating again.

A phone call came through while I was still buying

"Hay stranger."

Itu: "You really have a weird timing."

Lerato: "What are you doing?"

Itu: "I am stocking for the week. I am not planning on coming again next week. This is tiring."

Lerato: "You are going to be fine. There is still nothing from the interviews you did last month?"

Itu: "Nothing I am beginning to think no one will ever hire me. How many years have I been doing this?"

Lerato: "it doesn't matter the years; soon you will be working."

Itu: "I know I am grateful for this small business it is helping with the food and extras but I need a salary to make sure I have something guaranteed."

Lerato: "Trust is all you need. You need to trust that you have done your best and now you will have to wait for the things to take shape."

Itu: "I am going to do that but as years pass over I feel like I am heating the hard rock."

Lerato: "If by next month you are still not working I am coming there to open the fruit and vegetable shop you are so reluctant for me to open."

Itu: "I am not going to work for a friend I told you."

Lerato: "You won't be working for me. We will be partners."

Itu: "When I have saved enough money we will then go into a partnership."

Lerato: "Next month I am not hearing any of your excuses."

I just laughed as I dropped the call. I didn't want to enter into business without enough money because it was going to affect our relationship. Money always has a way of separating people; that is why I never fought with Lethabo where money was concerned because I knew it was going to strain our marriage.

When I got home I was really tired. I just rested because I didn't want to strain my body.

Nkhono: "I have been calling you since what are you doing?"



Itu: "Come on Nkhono I haven't even gotten the job yet."

Sally: "The fact that they called you means a lot my girl."

Nkhono: "Tell her. She is always doubtful this one."

Itu: "Thank you very much. Tomorrow from seeing the lady I will come and personally thank her."

Sally: "Okay my girl; let me go."

Itu: "Not before you have a cake and some juice."

I always bought slices of cake from the bakery next to the market. So it always helped when we had visitors.

Nkhono: "Yes please come to the house this weather needs something cool."

They went to the house while I packed the things to place them in the veranda. Outside was always good when we were also outside.

I made food for them; left them chatting while I served the kids who were coming from school. Kids always had a way to make me laugh. They were busy telling me about their day and I was busy smiling and grinning like a retard.

That evening granny prayed a long thanks giving prayer she even cried. I was nervous and happy at the same time. I had my formal clothes ready before I could even cook dinner.

Nkhono: "You are going to do well my baby."

Nkhono even took me to the bus stop. I was grateful for such support a pillar of my straight. I kissed her cheeks and took a taxi. I knew which company they were talking about it was the same building where Bophelo worked. I remembered the lady.

Lady: "Good morning. You are really early."

Itu: "Yes ma'am I was told to come as early as possible."

Lady: "Come in."

I went to her office. The previous time we had been interviewed in a boardroom. She directed me to a seat. I sat and she gave me my cv. What was going on?

Lady: "Please check your contact number there on that cv."

I did and it was an incomplete number. How could I have been so careless? All these years I never even checked that typo. I felt stupid because it showed how unprofessional I had been.

Lady: "When people make professional documents for you it is your duty to crosscheck because they are at work also as long as they get the money. You might not have been hired because your cv has an incomplete number and no references. I know

you never worked but even your relative's reference can do in this situation. Even for your lecturer or teacher because some might still be in the vicinity so they might help."

I felt really stupid. I felt like kicking myself. When those cvs where typed it was the first year after I buried my family so i didn't even bother to crosscheck; it just became a habit of mine to just photocopy and leave the cvs. I now guess for me to go to the interview it was because of Bophelo. Even if she was a snob she had a heart. I had to give it to her.

Itu: "I am so sorry for being unprofessional next time I will be careful."

Lady: "Most of the positions have been filled up. Even the position that was going to be yours but all I am left with is a cleaner position. The salary won't be like the one you were going to get but then it will be a renewable contract which you can renew yearly if you are happy. So it is all up to you is you....."

Itu: "I will take it."

I didn't even want to let her change her mind. I was going to take anything at that time as long as it was going to upgrade my cv. I remembered a joke one person talked about that you only get a job when you are in another job he said it's all physics because they say 'every object in a state of uniform motion will

remain in that state of motion unless an external force acts on it.' I was going to stay in motion till I got a job I had studied for.

Lady: "You don't even know about your package or working hours?"

Itu: "Right now all I want is a job."

Lady: "Okay; I am always out of the province you have supervisors and managers you will work closely with them. If there is a problem you tell your supervisor if he has a problem with that you will take it to the manager. Here is your contract. Please read it and understand it no matter what; I do not need problems in future people taking me to CCMA."

Itu: "Thank you very much. May I please ask if I have queries who do I talk to?"

Lady: "HR and by the way I am Mrs Mphuthi. HR will inform me immediately so please make sure you address it quickly while I am still here."

Itu: "Thank you very much."

Mrs Mphuthi: "Your uniform will be ready for you tomorrow because today the shop is temporally closed. We are renovating so by tomorrow we will be done. Everything else is in the contract."

Itu: "Thank you very much."

I shook her hand and left. I had mixed feelings. I was hurt that I was going to be a cleaner but that was overcome by a feeling that I was going to be employed for the first time since I completed my degree. That was a sad reality that we were faced with. I didn't even wonder around in town I went home to read my contract and get ready for work for the first time.

Nkhono: "How did you go?"

Itu: "I got the job. Even if it's to clean but I am very happy."

Nkhono: "God is so wonderful."

I was going to celebrate because it was a big deal. I went to my bedroom to read the contract while Nkhono was still praying and dancing. The contract was basically what I had expected but the extra advantage was the fact that there were shifts I could work later then take care of my small business. I wanted to build a house for my granny that is why I was saving.

My life was just beginning.....

9(B)

"I was thinking they were going to give you something better, no; this can't be."

I was with Bophelo; I had gone to thank her for her good job.



Itu: "Worry not because I am happy with the working conditions and the package."

Bophelo: "Are you sure about that? I was going to talk to her if...."

Itu: "Please do not worry I am happy. I was jobless last night but today I can proudly say I am working so that is something to celebrate."

Bophelo: "If you say so but please update your CV I have a friend in Bethlehem who can also send them to other companies for you."

Itu: "Thank you very much I don't need to sound ungrateful but how will I leave my granny alone and stay there?"

Bophelo: "People travel to Bethlehem daily you will adjust you can even use a bus which is cheaper."

Itu: "Well the reason I haven't travelled out of Qwaqwa is the fact that I have a phobia of big cities and towns since the fire. I don't even want to scare my granny she doesn't know about it. I am trying my best but I even failed to get to Kestel."

Bophelo: "I am so sorry about that. I know you are scared but when you are pushed to a corner you will overcome everything. Just take your time all will fall in place. We all have our weak moments but what I have to tell you is do not let the

world see your weakness because they would have won. You see people think I don't care but it is just the front I put. I am also vulnerable but I do it at the comfort of my home. Please just put on a show so that people can never see that you are in fear or vulnerable. They feed on your fear and you will always be at their mercy."

She was right I thought she was that person who didn't care. I understood her reasons and I respected them. She was right I was going to take her advice and see where it took me.

Itu: "Thank you very much you don't know how this talk helped me."

Bophelo: "Enough with the sopie stories."

I laughed as I said my goodbyes. My life was changing so I was going to take the advices I think where going to build me not destroy me.

I rushed home as I was late for dinner preparation. Nkhono was still on cloud nine I was smiling as she kept ululating and dancing.

Itu: "You would swear you won lotto."

Nkhono: "To me it feels like this. You don't know how depressing it is to see your child stay at home while others go to work. Some even look down upon you as if you are nothing. So

may I be left alone to rejoice my victory? Even if you work for one day at least you would have worked after graduation.”

I just laughed and it was good because she was genuinely happy for me.

Morning came faster than I thought. I was panicking I didn't even know what to wear or how to dress; for a cleaner I didn't know if it was good to look good or just be myself. I just took simple three quarter skirt with my old jersey.

Nkhono: “Do not tell me you are going to look like that on your first day at work?”

Itu: “Do not worry yourself much; they are going to give me a uniform so I will be wearing a uniform the whole day.”

Nkhono: “If you say so but I say you are not properly dressed.”

I was not going to change it was going to make me late. I wasn't about to be late on my first day at work.

Itu: “I love you Nkhono and I will see you after work. I know I will probably come late because those offices are many and they stretch three floors.”

Nkhono: “You will be fine my love.”

Itu: “I love you.”

I kissed her cheeks and rushed to the stop. I was carrying my lunch box also as I was not at liberty to waste money on expensive food.

Itu: "Good morning; I am here for my first day at work."

I said to the receptionist she looked at me from head to toe. The security guard by the door also looked at me like I was a bagger. I knew it was because of the clothes I was wearing. I was not bothered at all as I was not working for them.

Receptionist: "Are you sure you had the correct company."

Itu: "Yes Mrs Mphuthi gave me the contract yesterday."

Receptionist: "Oh please take the lift to third floor there is HR they will help you there."

I left feeling belittled. I was not going to let them spoil my day I was determined to make this work. The guy from HR was not even looking at me

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he seemed busy

Him: "Sorry my dear even today the uniform shop is closed so you will have to work on your clothes darling. Tomorrow come

to me first so i can take you to the uniform shop. Have a nice day darling."

He was so friendly I felt welcome. He directed me to my supervisor who was a middle aged woman named Veronica.

Veronica: "Finally I was starting to believe that they have neglected me Steve and the rest of the team were doing too many doubles. You are one of the new cleaners isn't it?"

Itu: "Yes ma'am."

Veronica: "Like I said before Vero is fine. The other two are coming in the afternoon so come I will show you the floors we cover. If you can't please make sure Steve covers the rest."

Itu: "Thank you."

I was not going to ask for help. I wanted to work as hard as I could to make sure I was not in trouble. I had worked hard to get a simple cleaning job so I was not going to mess it up.

Veronica: "Steve this is Itumelang she will be joining your team. If you want any changes you can tell me. Itumelang this is Steve he has been here longer than everyone so he knows the ins and outs ask him anything."

Steve: "As long as she can pick up the pace I am not about to work with grannies. How old are you?"

I was not about to answer that I was not going to entertain him. I was going to take Bophelo's advice they didn't need to see that I was bleeding inside.

Veronica: "Be nice; you are not here for that but to show her the ropes. You know I can do it myself if you decide to be a cow."

Steve: "No Mamzo I was just ....."

Veronica: "You have to receive her like you received the other two ladies and that gentleman. The fact that those two you want to get into their pants doesn't make Itu your punching bag."

Steve: "Sorry Mamzo."

Veronica left us standing there he looked at me with hateful eyes I held my stare because I didn't want to be intimidated by someone who was a simple worker like me.

Steve: "You are causing trouble for me on the first day."

Itu: "Are you going to show me or you are going to whine like a little pig?"

Steve: "You are not..... you know what come this side."

His smack told me that I was going to get what was coming to me but I was never going to allow him to bully me.

Steve: "You are cleaning the manager's office and the second floor. All the offices need fresh water daily if you are n morning shift. You clean all the offices."

I wanted to ask that I was going to do it by myself but I kept quiet.

Steve: "This is the storeroom we get supplies from Mamzo but you keep your stuff safe because if you waste yours they take it from your salary."

Okay now I was going to have to change the lock to my locker I was not going to lose money over petty things.

Itu: "Thank you very much may I please start?"

Steve: "Okay granny you may."

He laughed leaving me in the storeroom. I placed my face in my hands but I was not going to cry I was stronger than that.

I started with the offices on second floor because they were many. People were looking at me weirdly because of my dressing. I wish I had listened to my granny in the morning. I was the talk of the office. Some said it to my face that I was taken from a homeless shelter. I was not going to break down never.

I was in the manager's office when he got in. I knew him from somewhere but I was not granted the opportunity because he barked.

Manager: "What are you doing in my office?"

Itu: "I am a new cleaner."

Manager: "Didn't they tell you that I like my privacy?"

Itu: "Who was supposed to tell me?"

Manager: "Do not be cheeky with me. You clean my office first then do the rest later because they are not important people I am the important one."

Okay I was going to have a problem with grumpy so I cleaned fast without further annoying him and left.

When I got to the storeroom they were definitely talking about me Steve and other ladies. They didn't seem new because they were casual to each other. I just passed them and took my lunch box from the locker. I was not going to eat next to them.

When I was eating in the back stairway I saw the manager smoking. I hid myself till he was done. I was not going to step on his toes again. I was still cracking my head on where I saw him. After eating I was supposed to clean the kitchen and the toilets. I was not going to entertain low life people.



Steve: "Next time start in the manager's office because I do not want to be blamed for your mistakes."

Itu: "Who was supposed to clean his office in the first place?"

Veronica: "Yes Steve answer who was supposed to clean the office?"

Steve: "Mamzo I said she should clean it so...."

Veronica: "So she cleaned the second floor and the manager's office with its boardroom, kitchen and bathroom."

Steve: "I...."

Veronica: "You see you are making me regret my decision. You want to be suspended again."

Itu: "There is no need for that I have no problem with that."

I defended him I don't know why I did that but I didn't want him to lose his job he might have a family so I didn't want his kids to suffer.

Veronica: "Okay let me clarify this. Itu you and Sibongile she is not in today you will do the second floor when you are in the afternoon duty you do the ground floor."

Itu: "Okay."

Veronica: "Please; Steve; I am busy with the stock taking do not make my life miserable because you will regret it."

Steve: "Sorry Mamzo."

She took off I didn't want to wait I left with her. I was not going to be insulted by Steve again. I finished cleaning I wanted to make sure that by two pm I was at home as tired a worn out shoe.

Nkhono: "You are back in one piece; how was your day?"

Itu: "I was only at work not at a slaughter house to be murder."

We laughed then I relayed my day's events with her laughing at me telling me that the first cut is the deepest. She was right because from that day everyone called me granny at work.

I was getting used to working mostly I worked afternoon during grants at schools so that I could sell my stuff at schools. Steve was easy to avoid because I was always an early bird.

One day I was surprised when Veronica called me.

Veronica: "How are you holding up?"

Itu: "I am good and you?"

Veronica: "I am good. I wanted to ask; when was the last time you cleaned the manager's office."

Itu: "The first day I started working here; why?"

My heart was beating so fast I was so scared I didn't want to lose my job. What was happening?

Veronica: "He needs to see you in his office on Monday."

It was a Friday so that was going to be the longest weekend of my life. I was shaking to the point that tears just came uninvited.....

10

"I am confused Nkhono I only cleaned his office once."

I had told my granny about the message Veronica relayed. She was not even convincing herself. I had worked hard to get the job I was not going to let anything happen.

"Just relax Itu nothing will happen."

I went to my room and sent a text to Lerato who had been quiet on me.

Itu: "Stranger are you okay?"

I went to cook dinner although I was not in the mood I had to eat as I was hungry. Working hard forced me to eat properly.

"Your phone is ringing."

I was wiping the dishes when Nkhono told me that. I ran to the room and answered it.

Itu: "Where have you been I have been looking for you?"

Lerato: "I needed 'me' time. I think I am tired of this man give me some advice what should I do?"

Itu: "I might be able to help you if you tell me what is wrong."

Lerato: "As I told you that our marriage was a marriage of convenience. We were okay living our lives as business partners. I loved him from the start that is why I agreed to this

marriage of convenience. He offered a lot of money to make sure he stayed in the country.

Well we were okay I was advising him business wise then one day his sugar mommy came I don't know how she found him but she did. When she came she threatened to expose our sham of the marriage. Nadifa was devastated then I told him that I was ready to start a family because a family was going to endorsed it. He agreed the sugar mommy didn't win her case because when I was interviewed I was already pregnant and she was deemed the bitter ex. We were happy but things changed after that. He had less time for us and more time for his business and his friends.

Do you know I gave birth on my way to the hospital when he had said that he was going to be 5minutes away? It was after 24hours when I left home. He came to the hospital and never

apologised he just looked and his daughter and talked to her in their language.”

She was crying I could hear her. I couldn't even imagine giving birth alone because my Lethabo was there although pacing outside the room but he was there all the way. I remember him helping me after they arrived till my granny came to help us.

Itu: “I am so sorry about that. So why are you still with him?”

Lerato: “For some strange reasons I believe he will feel cheated on his money.”

Itu: “But you told me that you haven't used his money?”

Lerato: “From my side I haven't used it but my mom used it to rescue the business and also to hire a lawyer and that lawyer is the best we are happy with her. Nolo she is a distant part of the family. Was mentored by the best; Mr Klaas; so she is the best. Mom's business is booming now so she can't afford to lose it.”

Itu: “What if you can pay him back. Are you not working?”

Lerato: “I worked for mom but quit later on; I am planning on going back to work but at a different company. I have to pay back his money no matter what.”

Itu: “What if he doesn't want his money back?”

Lerato: "It will be his baby to nurse; I do not want that looming over me. He is not a warm person when he is angry he usually has verbal diarrhoea when he is angry."

Itu: "That is difficult. So what happened when the child was born?"

Lerato: "Story for another day; tell me what have you been up to?"

Itu: "I am working now as a cleaner thought."

Then she screamed in my ear. I had to remove the phone from my ear.

Lerato: "When did his happen? Why didn't you tell me?"

Itu: "How was I going to tell you when you were mia on me?"

Lerato: "Sorry I was sorting out some personal issues away from civilisation and people. There is something I am on to with Nolo so that it won't bite me at the back."

Itu: "Okay then; I am working now."

I relayed the whole story.

Lerato: "I am happy that you are now working. Please keep pushing as I push on my side. Women need to join hands. Without supporting each other we will not make it in life. I like what Nolo is doing. She won a case when they sued the

government for wrongful arrest so that money she is using it to help fellow women who are wrongfully accused. She is really good at her work and she gets high class clients; their partnership with her mentor is unstoppable.”

Itu: “I like to meet her one day. I would like such support from fellow women. I do not have anyone to support me except you and my granny of course.”

Lerato: “So hang in there one day you will laugh about it you know that.”

Itu: “I can’t wait for that day. Now let me rest I am so tired.”

Lerato: “Rest we will chat tomorrow. Say hie to granny tell her I will visit one day.”

Itu: “Why not visit me but her?”

Lerato: “Do not be a sour loser.”

We both laughed as I dropped the call. I rested but on Saturday it was back to my side hustle I had to wake up early and go to the market. To make matters worse I met Steve while I was wearing market clothes. One can’t dress to kill when going to the market. At least I always woke up in the morning to a bath no matter what. The fire taught me to always leave the house clean and ready.

Nkhono: "I have been praying the whole weekend for the issue you brought home on Friday."

Itu: "I am not a believer anymore."

Nkhono: "Do not even say this. I know you are getting your footing now soon all will be well."

Itu: "I will keep calm granny and try not to over think. For now I am ready for anything. Bophelo sent some of my CVs to Bethlehem so I am positive if I lose this one I will get another one."

Nkhono: "That's my girl now go before you miss your taxi."

I had joined other workers who lived in my area to pay for transport. It was easy because I never had to keep money with me. I saved a lot. So transport took us to town then proceeded to drop people in the old firms (Defemang).

When I got to work I cleaned my floor with Sibongile who was very quiet. She was not much of a talker but a fast worker I was happy I was paired with her. The only thing I discovered with her was that there was something going on between Steve and her.

Veronica came to call me when the manager was available. When I got in his office was clean and he was busy on his desktop.



Manager: "Please sit down Ms Mahlaba. I am formerly introducing myself. I am Mr Ofentse Ntai I am the manager. Ma'am Veronica told me that you were the one who cleaned my office."

He was not even smiling I was so sure I was fired because he didn't even blink. I was even thinking back to last week or maybe he thinks I took something from him."

Itu: "Yes I did."

It was more like a whisper as I was not sure if I was incriminating myself or what.

Mr Ntai: "Okay then my office was organised in a way that made it simple for me to find my things. How did you learn to organise like that?"

There was a sigh of relief from my side that even surprised me.

Itu: "I did a short course that is when they taught us office organisations."

Mr Ntai: "Thank you very much. I have a request that you make sure that my office is that organised on Friday before you knock off or you can clean on Monday morning."

Itu: "So what will I do with the other offices I am cleaning?"

I was hoping I didn't sound rude because as much as he needed my services I had to respect him.

Mr Ntai: "I will see what to do. I will ask Veronica I think even if it's my office only not the boardroom and the other offices in my floor."

Itu: "I can work with that; anymore specifics that you need done in the office?"

Mr Ntai: "Not at all that will be all."

Itu: "Okay; may I be excused?"

I said leaving the desk going for the door.

Mr Ntai: "Sorry if I may ask; do I know you from somewhere?"

Itu: "I am not sure I think I know you from somewhere also. I will keep thinking."

Mr Ntai: "Thank you for your time Ms Mahlaba."

I left; I felt relieved even my lunch was tasty on that day. I was relieved I even called Lerato to tell her. She reprimanded me for being irrational. I just laughed at her. Lesedi called when I was about to knock off.

Lesedi: "So I am the last one to hear about your job when I was about to hire you?"

I laughed hard she was too dramatic for me.

Itu: "Hello Lesedi. I was going to call you when I was sure that I am really hired. Yes my baby I am working now. As a cleaner though."

Lesedi: "You didn't want me to hire you"

Itu: "Do not even think about it."

Lesedi: "Well when am I getting my cut? When is payday so that I can skip classes here?"

Itu: "You are not skipping classes because I need to see you passing there."

Lesedi: "You are always pooping in my party."

Itu: "When are you coming home?"

Lesedi: "On your payday."

Itu: "Nice try honey."

Then it dawned to me. I had to; why didn't I think of that..

Itu: "Sedi I need to go. I will see you when you come home on month end."

I dropped the call and ran hoping people were still around. They were gone I was going to find out the following day then.....

I had to tell Veronica that I was going to be tied up the following week I needed to go and sell to the grannies at the school. I was going to request for the afternoon shifts.

I was scared to tell Mr Ntai where I knew him from. I was scared to even make conversations with most of the people. I didn't trust my social skills because I was not going to let them walk all over me no matter what. On the other hand I was not going to start the conversation that was going to cause fights.

Itu: "If it is not a problem yes I would love to do the afternoon shifts every two weeks after month end."

Veronica: "I do not mind as long as my work is done."

Itu: "Thank you very much. So will I continue with Sibongile or what will happen?"

Veronica: "I will give you Clara she is new so she won't give you trouble also."

Itu: "Thank you very much."

Veronica: "Keep working hard and soon you will be cleaning for the director or even more."

Itu: "Thank you I love my job and I will do my best."

The advantage with my job was that as much as my co-workers were mean I never met the other workers who worked in office often. So I was always out of site working to avoid trouble.”

Veronica had that motherly touch. She was always busy up and down but she made sure that she gave you the time of the day when you asked for it from her.

When I got to my locker my lock was picked when I opened some of my cleaning stuffs were gone I rechecked. Truly I was being tested I was going to start on a bad note. Payday was a few days away I was not going to get part of my salary deducted; I had planned on taking Lesedi and Nkhono out for a treat as a thank you. Dipulelo was tied up at work she had sent Lesedi I was going to buy a present that Lesedi was going to take with her when she went back.

I ran to Veronica’s office hoping to find her. I met Steve on the corridor.

Steve: “What is the matter princess is the house on fire.”

Itu: “Get a life please.”

Steve: “You know for someone who is going to be paid half you have the nerve.”

Itu: “What did you just say?”

How did he know that I was going to be paid half? When I turned he was gone. I was conflicted on going after him or going to Veronica. I finally went to Veronica.

Itu: "Ma'aqm someone picked my lock and took my cleaning stuff."

Veronica: "When was that?"

Itu: "I am not sure because in the morning I signed for them so it was for two weeks."

Veronica: "You need to change it and look for the heavy one because these cheap ones that can be picked will cost you."

Itu: "In the mean time what do I do?"

Veronica: "For now you can remove the rest of the stuff."

Itu: "There is nothing left only my other uniform. I think it is Steve."

Veronica: "Do you have proof?"

Itu: "He said it himself."

Veronica: "Did you record him or did you have proof." I was getting irritated by the minute whose side was she on? I think she saw that because she said. "I know you may think I am being harsh my child but I have been there and you will never win. You will be asked questions and even asked to produce

evidence but if you don't then they will say it was a witch hunt. They will think that you have a vendetta with him which will be bad for you."

I felt like crying I was going to pay half of the money that I was going to get. I was not going to get my wish.

Veronica: "I know it is painful but so is life, you will be fine; don't worry."

My hatred for Steve just sky rocketed. I never hated anyone like I hated Themba but with him at least I hated him because he killed my family.

Itu: "Thank you very much I will see what to do."

Veronica: "Always take care of number one

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yourself first then others will come last. This is a work place people will never take care of you so do the same and take care of yourself.

Itu: "Thank you very much."

I left going to my locker but diverted to the toilet I locked myself there and cried. God knows I was trying but this was too much. What I knew was the fact that I was going to take

Lesedi and Nkhono out. Bophelo and her granny were going to be lucky the following month.

I felt stupid like in high school. Who had the time to torture other workers as if they were in kindergarten? I cried myself out then cleaned my face. I had made up my decision to ignore him as if he didn't exist. I was going to treat him like I treated strangers in the streets.

I got to my locker and removed everything. I was going to devise a plan as I was going to be cleaning Mr Ntai's office.

When I was going home I passed him next to the bus stop. He tried to give me a smirked face but I just looked the other way and smiled to the woman who was in my taxi. She was a loud person so I was not going to be depressed. I just laughed with her at her so not funny jokes. Some were funny to be honest so I was not complaining because she helped me.

When I got home I didn't want to tell my granny because she was going to be hurt. The following day I was going to put my plan in motion I didn't want those people to think I was a walk over. There was no proof I was going to give them that proof. I didn't do science for nothing at school.

Veronica: "Do you have cleaning stuff or should I add?"



Itu: "Please add because they are going to take away from my pay so there is no need for me to shy away from them."

Steve: "Why are you giving her some more when you gave us two days back?"

Veronica looked at him and just turned away. I took them with me and left. He laughed with his friends and I was like we will see whether they will be laughing next week.

I always spent my lunches and breakfasts on the stairway. I had a way to avoid Mr Ntai as he used them to smoke. I knew his timetable very well so I avoided him.

When I got to the lockers just a day after payday there was commotion. It was just after my fresh air by the stairs.

Steve: "There she is what did you do?"

I had left my locker without a new lock then added an odourless colourless tint. It only changed on impact with the floor or any surface.

Veronica came also furiously looking for Steve.

Itu: "What did I do?"

Veronica: "Did you see all the floors and glasses on the first floor?"

Steve: "That's her. She is the one who made me mess that up."

Veronica: "Really Steve. Isn't this girl working on the upper floors?"

Itu: "No ma'am Veronica let him explain himself or I am working all the floors now?"

Steve: "Nothing I will make a plan and fix it."

Veronica: "Are you aware that the boss has a meeting with some board members tomorrow morning."

Steve: "Ish, I am dead you see I am going to lose my job because of you."

Itu: "Okay I am really tired of this you are now pissing me off. You mess up my locker because I do not have proof I let it be. After that I excused myself from these shenanigans then you come here and swear at me what have I really done to you?"

Veronica: "We are listening Steve."

He looked all over the place and I was not going to say it I wanted him to say it with his own mouth.

Steve: "Well....."

Veronica: "Talk I am listening."

Steve: "I took Itumelang's cleaning materials today from her locker."

Veronica: "You did what?"

Itu: "So why are you saying I messed up your things because I never sent you to my locker. It is not locked because it is useless to me. I now carry my material with me daily when I clean."

This was a lie I had found a hiding spot that I cleaned; as I was not going to use it to hide my stuff.

Steve: "So what was in your locker?"

Veronica: "What were you doing in her locker to begin with?"

Sibongile: "So you are the one who took mine too last month?"

Steve: "Baby. I didn't."

So I was right they were an item but I didn't care because I was busy with my handy work.

Veronica: "Now how are you going to clean that?"

Itu: "What was in my locker was my paint I wanted to use it. I bought it because I didn't have a container I placed my cleaning detergents somewhere safe to use the container. Now tell me; where will I get the money to buy it as I was paid half my salary two days back because of the detergents that went missing in my locker. What I have to tell you is grow up because this is getting to my nerves what are we? Are we in high school here?"

Leave me alone because I am here to work for my family. I do not know what you are here for because I know I am not going to play the games you are playing. If your colleagues allowed you to terrorise them I am not going to allow it. Everyone here is not playing, you might have a plan B but some of us have this as a plan A and a final plan. Please let me be I don't want to be part of your reliving high school days sham. From today

onwards if ever you touch my lock then it means you are fighting with me personal and no one does that without getting burnt.

Veronica: "You have no shame. This is your final warning you know that and if you can't get that one cleaned then I am afraid the boss will know about this. I am trying my best for you people to keep your jobs as I keep mine but you are making my job difficult. Hell you are even worse than my teenagers."

She left in her anger. There was commotion but I was not going to entertain them. My job was done and I knew no one was ever going to mess with me.

"So you took your money and bought those things to revenge?"

Nkhono was still laughing about the events.

Itu: "Thanks to Dipulelo I have enough data to research I did and I was lucky Bophelo bought that tint for me in Bethlehem."

Nkhono: "You have time."

Itu: "I am not going to have people mess with my life when I worked hard for this."

We talked about other things. When I got to work the following day everything was back to normal. This meant he had found ways of cleaning the glass and part of the floor that was messed up; saves him right for messing with the wrong woman. He

didn't even acknowledge me which was good riddance from my side. He looked so tired I assumed he worked the whole night to clean.

That weekend I managed to take my granny and Lesedi out. She went back with Dipulelo's present. On Monday it was going to be grant at the stadium I went there first before going to work. I was going to do that till Thursday as I was going to different schools also.

On Thursday it was my time to go to Bolata. I went early so I was in my spot without any disturbance. When I was saving customers I turned to look on my right

"You....."

My eyes just dropped.....

I didn't know that he was going to come for the grant with his mother. But she looked old to be his mother unless she got him at her late stages in life; even though it didn't make sense.

Itu: "Good morning Mr Ntai."

Mr Ntai: "You can call me Ofenste when we are not at work."

Itu: "It is okay Mr Ntai. Yes I remembered that I knew you from the pay in Bolata."

Ofenste: "Why didn't you tell me then?"

Itu: "I didn't think it was necessary so I let it be."

Ofenste: "So are you not going to work today?"

Itu: "I am going in the afternoon for the late shift."

Ofenste: "Okay; let me be on my way. I was bringing my grandmother here. She is my father's mother."

Granny: "I love your fried potato patty. If you are not here I feel like I was robbed and I didn't get my grant money."

Itu: "Thank you for your vote of confidence."

Granny: "My grandson also loves them but pride won't allow him to say so. I seen how he eats it when he thinks I am not looking. You know he can use some more meat you see how

tiny he is now that he is staying alone. This is the shadow of what Ofenste used to look like. If you can cook for him and.....”

Ofenste: “Wowowowo too much information let us go nana.”

She smiled winked at me and I was left smiling to myself. She was on a wheelchair but she commanded attention without even trying. Ofenste just waved at me and helped her to the car. For a manager he dressed like a common employee and the car he was driving was neither old nor new but not fit for a manager. I couldn't help it; bur...or was I being judgemental?

My day went better than I expected as it turned out by 10am I was done without any single item left in my basket. I rushed home as I was left with an hour and some minutes to spare. When I got home my granny was ironing my uniform.

Itu: “You shouldn't have.”

Nkhono: “I want to. You are always working hard so I wanted you to stress less. I packed your fruits and lunch already.”

I was emotional I had nothing but my granny made me feel like I was in possession of millions. I hugged her without a word and left for my room. I wiped the tears and packed my changing shoes.

Itu: "Do not cook today I made some profit so I will bring some food."

Nkhono: "God is great. I will go and see Sally then."

Itu: "Alright I will see you when I come back."

Nkhono: "Do not forget to pack your lunch."

Itu: "Never; not in this life-time. I love you."

I kissed her cheeks while I went to the bus stop to wait for a taxi. In the afternoon he was never on time because he was always on duty picking up some passengers. In some days they thought I just didn't want to pay when I would try to explain to people he would stop me. He always said:

"Itumelang you do not owe anyone any explanation as long as you know the truth. People will never even believe that truth even if it hit them in the face. My wife knows that you are one of my customers those who think that you are my girlfriend are just bitter human being."

He was right I didn't have that energy. I respected him; he was like a brother to me. His wife was a well respected principal who didn't give a care in the world of what people thought or said.

Driver: "I know I am late today I was stuck by the hospital there was an accident."



Itu: "Do not worry; I will work an extra hour to cover up."

Driver: "Thank you for understanding. Before I forget my wife sent your container it is behind my chair don't forget it please. She said you should give her cooking lessons."

I laughed because it was the second person in the same day who complimented my cooking.

Itu: "Thank you; tell her if she has the money then I will do so. Nothing is for free nowadays."

He laughed looking at me through the review mirror.

Driver: "I am increasing the taxi fare from today."

Itu: "Such a sour loser I wonder what your wife will say when she hears that you are robbing us good customers."

We had small talks before we knew it we were in town. I didn't even care about the stares I was getting I was only worried about the fact that I was already late.

Before knocking off I called 'Mama's Chicken' they usually delivered so I knew I was not going to waste time queuing.

I was dog tired I didn't even hear Lerato's call coming through I only saw missed calls in the morning. I had airtime so I called her immediately.

Lerato: "Ladies and gentlemen she is alive."

I laughed at her.

Itu: "I have been alive. Sorry I was very tired yesterday you know this week and next week I start from schools. Yesterday I was in Bolata and you know I walk a long distance and walk back. From then I had to work an extra hour because my transport came late."

Lerato: "Sorry love one day you will be rich and you will forget about this."

Itu: "This is my fate I have accepted it what I need is to make sure that my ride is comfortable."

Lerato: "Do not say that. I hate it when you sound like someone who has lost hope. Listen I wanted to tell you that I might be coming with Kali to get some fresh air."

Itu: "What is happening Lerato?"

Lerato: "I do not want to talk about it over the phone."

Itu: "Please do not run away from the problem if you have a problem please face it do not just push it aside I am talking from experience. By the time you want to face it there will be innocent people involved then you will hurt them unintentional."

Lerato: "It it easy to say this because you are not in my shoes. Your life is on track right now."

Itu: "I am not trying to act as if I am better I am just saying face the problems."

Lerato: "Your problems are not the same as mine so you don't know what I am talking about."

Itu: "I am not saying....."

Lerato: "If you don't want to accommodate us then its fine we will go somewhere else."

Then there was a tone. "Hebana" What just happened? I looked at the phone. I had just told her that I lost my family I had not told her how I lost them and why I wanted her to face her fears. That is why I was not good with friendship things. I sent the longest message ever. When I was sure that she was reading it I blocked her from social media and calls.

Nkhono: "Why are you like this today?"

I told her the whole story.

Itu: "See why I do not make friends."

Nkhono: "Do we not fight sometimes?"

Itu: "What?"

Nkhono: "I just asked a simple questing ngoan'a aka why don't you answer it."

Itu: "Yes we do fight."

Nkhono: "Some time last year I tried to advise you did you not stay for a week without talking to me."

I looked down because I couldn't answer her.

Nkhono: "All relationships are like that. Not everyone takes some advice positively so as much as she is wrong she also has the right to be angry."

Itu: "I am angry too."

Nkhono: "Good for your two. So do not involve me in your things. I am too happy to be involved with 5year olds fighting."

She took her tea and left me angrier she was supposed to understand my side of the story. I cooked breakfast as I was not going to any school. On Fridays they never had those pay. There were a few very old people and disabled who still used schools and some community places to get their grants.

I went to work irritated.

Veronica: "Itumelang I can see you covered for the hours of late coming yesterday."

Itu: "Yes ma'am

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I need those hours for my leave days I do not want those hours to accumulate to days.”

Veronica: “Clever thinking. Have you encountered any problems again about your cleaning detergent?”

Itu: “Not at all. They are now even scared to touch my locker. Steve doesn’t talk to me but that is not a train smash.”

Veronica: “You will be fine. Please you have to go and see Mr Ntai before he goes home. He was looking for you.”

I was scared again. Was I not cleaning his office well?

Itu: “Yes ma’am I will.

I cleaned faster on the other hand in the panic mode. Cleaning the first floor was always a hustle as it had so many tiny things that needed so much attention.

When I was done it was time for Mr Ntai to knock off. I rushed to his office. Itu: “Sir you called for me.”

Mr Ntai: “Yes I called for you. I didn’t want to be nosy and take your number because it was going to be unprofessional of me.”

My heart was beating so fast that it was about to leave the ribcage. I didn’t say anything.

Mr Ntai: “I wanted to ask if you would like to make extra money.”

I was not expecting that question so I just looked at him blankly. Wait a minute what did he mean?

Itu: "Wait a minute is it legal. Are you not going to put me into trouble?"

He laughed and for the first time I saw his beautifully handsome smile. His smile looked like his granny's.

Mr Ntai: "Nothing illegal we will have it on paper."

Itu: "How much extra are we talking about?"

Mr Ntai: "R5k extra a month."

Itu: "Wait a minute are you sure it is nothing illegal. How could you pay me such money a month when you can't even....."

I didn't finish it because it was going to be insensitive of me.

Mr Ntai: "You can say it I know some talk behind my back but I am used to it."

I felt bad because I knew the feeling of being looked down upon. I looked down Itu: "I am so sorry.

Mr Ntai: "It's okay, now back to business. Are you in or out?"

Itu: "Let us hear the proposal before I make any hasty decisions."

He told me everything I had my mouth hanging.

“What the.....?”

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“Please come again. I want to hear this clearly; I would want to know if I am not signing my death warrant as I have heard countless times that baby mamas can kill you to death.”

He laughed his laugh was weird.

Ofenste: “There is no such phrase as killing to death.”

Itu: “There is especially when someone kills you to make sure that you are really dead.”

Ofenste: “Okay I get you so are you in?”

Itu: “Let me rephrase and see if I heard you correctly. You want me to be paid, no point of correction you want to pay me so that I can pretend to be your girlfriend.”

Ofenste: “Yes till I win the custody of my kids.”

Itu: “Why did you lose it in the first place?”

Ofenste: “I didn’t even fight for it because I thought there was a chance I was going back together with their mother.”

Itu: “So what is the hold up?”

Ofenste: "Their mother is controlling everything. I am getting little money here that is why I can't even afford to buy things for myself. The money I pay her for the kids is too much."

Itu: "Are you aware that fathers can get full custody nowadays?"

Ofenste: "Yes I am aware that's why I want to fight this."

Itu: "Okay so if I agree when do I start with this acting job?"

He laughed at me like I had spoken in Greek.

Ofenste: "You are saying this is an acting job."

Itu: "It is true I am going to have to change to be a girlfriend character while I am amongst your people isn't it. I have to be a jealous and mean girlfriend which needs a script so that I can stay in character."

Ofenste: "Okay yes I will be paying you for that."

Itu: "So you are telling me that you get little money how are we going to get the money to pay me for operation remove baby mama?"

He laughed at me again.

Ofenste: "It is not operation remove baby mama it is operation get my kids. I want to get them because the young one



is.....hell it's not even necessary the thing is I will speak to my boss to say she has demoted me so that we reduce the maintenance money then I will also dig into my savings for the rest."

Itu: "How long will this have to go on?"

Ofenste: "Six to 12 months."

Itu: "Almost a year; how big are your savings?"

Ofenste: "Very big but that's all you have to know. So are you in?"

Itu: "One more question then. Why me?"

Ofenste: "I have observed; you are someone who is not a gold digger. You are also composed so I know this won't be the talk of the office as it will ruin the little of what is left of my reputation."

Itu: "Okay can I go and sleep on it?"

Ofenste: "I was expecting that I even drafted a contract."

Itu: "Wowowowo so it is really an acting job."

Ofenste: "No it is not an acting job."

Itu: "Whatever you call it. Please do not rush me I will have to make a sound decision."

Ofenste: "Okay then."

Itu: "Thank you Mr Ntai; see you on Monday."

I said standing up with my folded contract going to finish up my work. I was not even at liberty to react because cats had gotten my tongue; literally I mean.

Ma'am Veronica asked me if I had gone to see Mr Ntai. I replied her. She was not a nosey person so she left it at that and went home.

I cleaned thinking about the proposal. I was even thinking of going to Cashbuild and Buildit the following morning to ask for a building quotation. I was not going to touch that money I was going to build a house for my granny.

When I got home I was in a happy mood. I had even daydreamt about the house I wanted built.

Itu: "Nkhono dearest."

I said kissing her cheeks.

Nkhono: "So you are no longer angry at me?"

Itu: "What?"

Or snap I forgot I was angry when I left. I was not going to ruin my mood. When I was happy I forgot the anger.

Itu: "Ah don't worry about that I have good news."

Nkhono: "Good news can make me smile."

Itu: "I hope you will still be smiling after hearing what I have to say."

I told her everything and her face looked sour I was sceptical.

Nkhono: "So what happens if you find someone you love while you are in this façade of a relationship?"

Itu: "I think I have established that I am okay as single as I am. I am not going to replace my family for now and some few years to come I am good to go."

Nkhono: "Okay then; what happens when you want out of the contract and he has already paid you that kind of money?"

Itu: "I am yet to read the whole contract but the money comes monthly surely they can stop it. He will not pay me I guess."

Nkhono: "I know you might think I am being difficult but we have to think for tomorrow. Money is tempting but also some of the end results. Have you thought about the emotions involved in this whole thing? Remember the wife also has her own demons even this Mr Ntai has his own ghost haunting him."

Itu: "I haven't signed the contract I will make time to read it."

Nkhono: "Please read it with a clear mind not with the rand sign in your mind."

Itu: "I wasn't even thinking about the money I was thinking about the building material."

I wasn't supposed to tell her it was supposed to be a surprise.

Nkhono: "As long as you will read and I do not want you to get hurt. You are still emotionally bruised so you need to tread carefully when it comes to that. I know baby mamas who do not want to let go. This one looks like someone who doesn't want to let go because if she does she should have not even fought him."

Itu: "I know and her problem is that she knows Mr Ntai loves her so much so she can manipulate him anyhow."

Nkhono: "You are not going to call him like that."

Itu: "What do you mean?"

Nkhono: "You have to call him sweetheart; love; baby; pumpkin or mango."

I was literally cracking my ribs my granny was so not fair.

Itu: "Mango can you imagine? You are right I will call him my mango."

We both laughed. I was not even sure I wanted to do that. My granny pointed out so many crucial things that got me thinking. I didn't think I was ready to be exposed like that.

The following week was the same with me going to the rest of the schools and going to work. I was happy when I didn't meet Mr Ntai as I was avoiding him like a plague. It was another Friday I was done with the afternoon shift the following week I was going to go to my normal time. It was going to be hard to avoid Mr Ntai.

There was a call that came through when I was about to go to bed. I had avoided unknown numbers because I knew it was Lerato

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she had stopped calling so I sceptically answered.

"Hello" I answered

Voice: "Hello you are speaking to Nadifa my daughter wants to speak to you."

I panicked what if something had happened to Lerato?

Itu: "Please give her the phone."

Nadifa: "Okay."

His voice was so deep and scary I was going to be scared of him too if I were Lerato.

Voice: "Hello, I am Kali, my mom has been depressed. She said you do not want to talk to her. I stole your number from her because I wanted to talk to you."

Her speech was fluent I fell in love with her voice.

Itu: "I am sorry I was angry at her but I am not angry at her anymore. I was just sad only."

Kali: "She told me that your children and your daddy went to heaven."

Tears just ran down my cheeks. I was imagining my little girl.

Itu: "It is not my father it is their father."

Kali: "Yes that is what I said."

I just laughed through my tears.

Itu: "Where is mommy now?"

Kali: "She went to see my granny that is why I am calling because she was going to shout at me. She shouts a lot these days."

There was a lump in my throat.

Itu: "Okay my girl I will call mommy and she will not shout at you she will be happy again."

Kali: "You promise."

Itu: "Pinkie promise; my love."

Kali: "Yeeeeees. Bye."

Just like that the call was dropped. I unblocked Lerato and called her. She didn't answer at first till it went to voicemail. I called again she answered.

Lerato: "I thought you were pranking me; what's up?"

Itu: "I am good and you? Kali just called me now."

Lerato: "What? This child; can I call you back I am driving."

Itu: "Okay no problem."

She called after an hour apologising for been irrational when I was giving her some advice. She said she was sorry about my family. I told her that I was not ready to talk about it. We were on talking terms which was a good thing so we were going to take it one step at a time.

A month passed after the Mr Ntai proposal. I had managed to elude him. Don't even ask me how because I had my ways to avoid people. I had thought about his proposal I was ready to give him his answer. If he was in a hurry it was not my problem.

I had read the contract a thousand times but I was afraid it was.....

Mr Ntai: "Come in."

Oh I had knocked a long time I guess I even didn't hear his 'come in'. It was loud the one I heard which might have meant that he was irritated.

Itu: "I am so sorry about that."

Mr Ntai: "Oh so you are alive. I was beginning to think maybe you are working somewhere else."

Itu: "I am still here. I have been avoiding you."

Mr Ntai: "You did a good job I tell you."

I just looked down. I was nervous I hope he was not going to .....

Mr Ntai: "Are you here on work related issues or our matter?"

Itu: "I am here on that matter. I have made my decision. I....."

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Itu: "I am here on that matter. I have made my decision. I....."

Ofentse: "Please you are my last hope."



Itu: "I am so sorry I can't be emotionally involved in this. I am still trying to get my life together."

Ofenste: "I know I am just desperate here."

Itu: "You said you were not going to push me. Please this is my decision."

Ofenste: "Thank you very much."

Itu: "Okay good luck. I really needed the money but I can't."

Ofenste: "It is okay no need to apologise."

I excused myself. If I was doing the right thing why was I not happy? I was not okay because I had lost the chance of building the house for my granny as fast as I could.

I left going for lunch on that day I was not going to eat at work. I felt like I needed fresh air. I was sitting at 'Mama's Chicken' it was my best spot at the time. It didn't have many people. There were corners reserved for people who usually met for business.

I chose the far end corner as it had a very long glass window showing people passing by. I was even looking at their steps when they were walking. I looked at the far end there were a pair at footsteps I thought I knew. I looked up he was looking the other way.

I ran leaving my half eaten food running after him.

“Lethabo!”

I ran like a mad person.

“Lethabo!”

When I reached him I was panting I tapped his shoulders calling his name.

“Lethabo”

“Huh what do you want from me?”

It was not him. Why was I thinking of him. What made me think it was him?

“I am so sorry you walked like someone I know.”

The fact that I said it in present tense troubled me.

“Do not go around comparing us to your boyfriends.”

He was very angry not something my Lethabo would have never spoken like that to a lady.

“Sorry sir.”

I walked away disappointed. What did I expect? I had buried him. The incident opened some closed wounds. I was on an autopilot when I went back to work. Why was life so unfair?

When I got home I was still down.

Nkhono: "What is wrong ngoan'a ka?"

Itu: "Things are not going well for me"

Nkhono: "What do you mean?"

Itu: "I turned down Mr Ntai so no house for some time. When I was eating lunch I saw someone who looked like Lethabo."

Nkhono: "Oh"

That was a disappointed 'oh'. Then her facial expression changed. I think it was because of the fact that I talked about Lethabo.

Nkhono: "My daughter I will not force you to heal. It's been two years and some month. What I can tell you is that there is no manual or timeframe for grieving so I do not blame you for thinking your husband is still out there. Do not even blame yourself. Am I disappointed? Yes I am very much disappointed that you turned down an opportunity to make money. Will I hold it against you? Hell no we will make our own money somehow."

Itu: "Thank you I was scared that you will think that I am a spoilt brat who doesn't utilise the opportunity presented to her on a silver platter."

Nkhono: "I love you so much I will never do anything or say anything that will make you feel uncomfortable."

Itu: "Thank you very much."

The weeks that followed were difficult. You see when you are trying to save and then troubles come flooding. When I was not working it was minor things but when I was working it was bigger problems.

I had to also take my granny to the doctor because of her knee that kept troubling her. I even had to take her to a private doctor.

The roof also started leaking I had to hire someone to fix it. Maybe it was a sign. I just laughed at myself for thinking about weird stuffs like that.

At work things had normalised as they never picked on me and my dressing. I was the same old person.

Lerato's call disrupted me.

Itu: "Hay stranger."

Lerato: "You have been quiet these days."

Itu: "You know I have been up and down with Nkhono and also fixing the roof."

Lerato: "Speaking of Nkhono

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how is she feeling now?"

Itu: "Cranky because she can't move around. Her friends keep complaining that she doesn't visit anymore as if they don't know about her knee."

She laughed.

Lerato: "They don't have entertainment except to entertain themselves."

It was my turn to laugh.

Itu: "Well how are things between your husband and you?"

Lerato: "I talked to him and he seemed to understand my grief but the jury is still on."

Itu: "Do you think he will change?"

Lerato: "I am not holding my breath."

Itu: "Why does it feel like you have given up on this marriage?"

Lerato: "I am at a point where I say come what may come. I love him but sometimes love is never enough."

Itu: "Don't you think it's time you told him that you loved him?"

Lerato: "I am scared. I have practised countless times in my mind on what I will say to him but the moment he comes all goes over because it will be either what he did or said overpowers my need to talk then we end up fighting."

Itu: "I am sorry about that."

Lerato: "It's okay love worry not. So how did you go with your quest to Kestel?"

Itu: "I was scared at first but the moment I started with the breathing exercises we do it became better."

Lerato: "I must charge you now."

Itu: "Put it on my tab."

Lerato: "What tab?" We both laughed. "What about Bethlehem?"

Itu: "That one the jury is still on."

Lerato: "You took my words from my mouth."

We laughed and spoke about other things. She was going to come and visit us the following month. They wanted to spend a weekend as schools were open.

"When did you get here?"

"I got here yesterday Nkhono."

It was Lesedi; I was surprised why she came when schools were open. The most disturbing thing was the fact that she didn't come to see me.

Itu: "When did you get home?"

I said sitting next to her on the sofa.

Lesedi: "Before you shout I came in late so I didn't want to wake you up.

Itu: "If you say so."

Nkhono excused herself. I knew that she saw it too what I was seeing in Lesedi's eyes.

Itu: "Are you okay?"

Lesedi: "I am okay ausi waka why would I not be?"

Itu: "Nice try, let us try again. What is troubling you Lesedi"

Lesedi: "I am in trouble."

Itu: "Talk to me."

Lesedi: "You see I....."

Well I was not going to spill her secret to Nkhono I promised her.

Things went back to normal. I was still selling at grant points and schools. I was starting again to save a little especially from

the sales. I had upgraded to selling even some few clothing items. It was not that big.

One day when I was cleaning Mr Ntai's office as he was gone. I was on an afternoon shift so I was sure he was not around.

His drawer was not closed which was strange because he was a very careful person. Curiosity got to me. I opened it wide. I took one piece of paper written there.

I opened further and these things were as many and scary.

I read the name I tried to think of a logical explanation. The last package got my attention. I took it with shaking hands.

“What the.....”

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I went to the door to check if there was no one there. It was clear I went back inside making sure to lock the door behind me. I then removed the key from the hole. I went back to the drawer sat down then went through the medication. I read the name and the types of medication. Could it be what I thought it was? I don't know what made me look at the window I did and I saw Mr Ntai leaving the parking lot coming up. I closed the drawer tidied up then left the office before he came back in.

I called Lerato while I was cleaning the kitchen which was in the far end. I told her everything.



Lerato: "So what do you think is going on?"

Itu: "I am not even sure. I think I will have to find out."

Lerato: "How are you going to do that?"

Itu: "I will reconsider my decision."

Lerato: "Well how are you going to deal with the wife?"

Itu: "Ex-wife and I will cross that bridge when I get there because when a child is involved I need to reconsider."

Lerato: "He will ask about how you found out."

Itu: "I will never reveal that."

Lerato: "What did you do about Lesedi's issue?"

Itu: "I told her never to help those people because they will keep on coming for more. Once they milk that cow they are bound to come back."

Lerato: "You are right. How did they find out that she is good with hacking in the first place?"

Itu: "She trusted a wrong person. I told her to keep it to herself but I guess she wanted to have at least one friend."

Lerato: "Do you know that if they get caught she will be arrested?"

Itu: "I know and I am scared. She can't even tell Dipulelo because her uncle will know. The problem is that the guy is old and he had been robbing people for long he can hurt her."

Lerato: "So what do you suggest?"

Itu: "I told her if they persist she can go to the police."

Lerato: "She will incriminate herself also."

Itu: "I know that. I wanted you to ask Nolo for me on what to do in a situation like this. This can ruin her future but who knows; she can get away with a warning this time around as the crime has not been committed yet."

Lerato: "You are right my love let me talk to her; she will be visiting with Wani this weekend. Call her and tell her not to do anything irrational."

Itu: "Thank you very much for your help. You still owe me I am waiting for the reply your hubby gave you."

Lerato: "We will talk later."

I knew she was not going to get back to me. I was giving her time to digest. She was going to tell me when she was comfortable about the whole issue.

When I left the kitchen to lock the offices; as I was done; Sibongile was cleaning the first floor with the other ladies on

the second floor. We divided the offices with Sibongile so that we could do it faster. I heard some augments.

Ofenste: "You will not take away my kids from me Puleng. You know that I am going to fight you till the end."

Voice: "With what money?"

Ofenste: "Do not ask me with what money as if you know my pocket. Puleng I am warning you, this time around you will never win."

I was guessing it was the wife or ex-wife.

Puleng: "You are nothing without me you have to know that I am not signing those divorce papers because we belong together."

Ofenste: "You decided that you do not need me when you ran off with the mayor's son."

Puleng: "It was a lie we were just friend."

Ofenste: "Tell that lie over and over again maybe you will believe it yourself. My mother believes you because she thinks you are the best thing that ever happened since the slice of bread."

Puleng: "You also believed I was the best thing."

Ofenste: "When I was a naive college graduate not after learning the true you."

Puleng: "You can still love me."

Ofenste: "Over my dead body."

Puleng: "Then you will be poor and loveless till the end of time."

Ofenste: "In your dreams."

I thought it was the good time to come and surprise her. I had changed to my simple summer dress that revealed my thighs and my caves were in the right places. I had the triplets to thank because before I was a little shapeless. Don't laugh because at the end of the day I was attractive enough for my Lethabo. I cleared my throat as I entered.

Itu: "Honey; I have been waiting for you downstairs what is taking you so long?"

I winked at him and looked at this lady who had heavy makeup and boobs that looked as if she was the African Pamela Anderson. She was definitely a self made yellow bone when I looked at her knuckles. She looked at me and I gave her my killer Colgate smile that I have never given anyone since I lost my family.

Itu: "Hello there. Sorry I didn't know you had company. Love; can I wait for you in the car?"

I was crossing my tiny fingers at the back hoping that he was not going to disappoint me.

Ofenste: "Do not worry she is leaving and remember you promised that we will be naughty on top of this well polished table."

I blushed which was not an act but it work.

Itu: "Not now honey we have a guest."

Ofenste: "An uninvited one if you can ask me. Are we done here Puleng?"

Puleng: "You sure know how to pick them. Where did you get this one? From TnT bottle store in Phuthaditjhaba?"

She laughed and I pretended to be offended.

Itu: "Do not worry honey he was tired of the African Pamela Anderson wanna be so he looked for an original African

maiden. Are you done insulting us because I am horny as we speak?"

Puleng: "This is not the last you are hearing from me Ofenste."

Ofenste: "I expected that from you. I will be waiting; for now please excuse us we have somewhere to be."

She took her handbag and left we could hear the echo of the heel from afar.

Ofenste: "I am horny; really."

We both laughed.

Itu: "It worked didn't it. Did you see her face turning red? Well you owe me my R5000 first salary."

Ofenste: "So does it mean that you will take me up on the offer?"

Itu: "I will help you. I hope I am not going to regret this."

Ofenste: "I promise you will never regret this. Come I will drop you off. Thank you very much. Well next weekend we have a family gathering you have to be up to it. Prepare because my uncles and my mom are not easy people to impress."

Just like that I was hired for my new job as an actor. I was ready for operation remove baby mama. I was in for a rollercoaster ride I knew what I was signing up for.

Itu: "Okay I will."

Ofenste: "What made you change your mind if I may ask?"

I was not going to tell him about the medication I saw in his drawer.

Itu: "I was about to tell you today when I heard you arguing with your wife."

Ofenste: "Ex-wife."

Itu: "She will be ex-wife once the papers have been signed."

He didn't answer. When he reached the car there was a bank notification in my phone.

Itu: "You have paid already?"

Ofenste: "I am not taking any chances I am not letting you change your mind again."

Itu: "Well I am not going to change my mind."

I was telling the truth I needed the money but above all I wanted to help his daughter too.

Itu: "Thank you very much you may drop me off here."

Ofenste: "Okay then see you at work on Monday."

He didn't even ask to drop me by the gate. Well we were not lovers we were just acting.

"Sister I go for a few weeks and you are already cheating on me."

I turned it was my husband. I laughed at him.

Itu: "I will never cheat on you. That was my manager. Why are you not at school?"

Nhlanhla: "Well tell your manager that you are taken."

Itu: "He knows." We both laughed. "Answer my question; do you want to be a location defender like your friends how are you going to support me then?"

Nhlanhla: "Never I came for my things. It was registration and orientation month last month so from Monday its serious business. Yoh sister Jozi is so big and fun."

Itu: "Please do not let it swallow you. Your siblings and your granny look up to you so do not, I repeat do not disappoint."

Nhlanhla: "I am going to make everyone proud wait and see."

He went his way when we reached our gate.

Nkhono: "So my son in law picks you up from work now?"

I just laughed

Itu: "He was just coming from the tuck-shop. Don't worry soon he will be driving me to work you see he will be a graduate now."

We laughed while I helped her pack up the stuff it was late.



Itu: "Well I have news for you. I decided to take Mr Ntai upon his offer."

She was very happy then I wondered why she never pressured me to take the job.

Itu: "He paid me already for the first month so tomorrow we are going to MICA because they are the only ones with an affordable quotation. We will deposit R4000 then we leave it there till we finish all the payment so that we will start the building with enough material."

Nkhono: "I am so happy my child."

Itu: "The other R1000 I want to take you shopping you need new shoes and I need to spoil you."

She had tears in her eyes while she gave me a bone crushing hug. We were interrupted by my ringing phone.

"Hello"

What the.....

16

"Dipulelo please calm down what is the matter?"

Dipulelo: "They beat Lesedi to a pub she asked for you before she passed out she has been in surgery since 1hour ago."

Itu: "What? What happened?"

Dipulelo: "She just told me that she wants you. Her uncle is on his way to get you. Please do not say no. I know you have work on Monday but I would love for you to help her."

Itu: "Okay calm down. I am not leaving my granny alone let me pack an overnight bag for us. Please try to calm down because if you are panicking and asking questions she is not going to answer."

Dipulelo: "Okay; they said they will sedate her after the surgery I hope she will come out fine. Or else my mother in law will kill us."

Itu: "Do not go there she will be fine."

Dipulelo: "Thank you. Please assure my mother in law. She is coming with you."

Itu: "Did you call her mother?"

Dipulelo: "Yes I did as always she was too busy."

Itu: "Her lose then. I am coming don't worry. My granny is a prayerful person she will pray for her all the way."

Dipulelo: "Thank you."

Nkhono had already picked up from the conversation what we were talking about.

Nkhono: "Let us go and pray before we pack our bag."

Itu: "Okay."

We went to her bedroom she took the bible held it on her hands as she prayed. I always thought it was weird. I was just listening as she praying on the other hand hoping she was okay. When we were done I gave her the bag to pack on the other side while I went to my room to call Lerato. I explained everything.

Lerato: "You just missed her. They were at the lodge with my mom, Zee and Wani. Its Friday today; so probably their phones are already off. They say it's the Sabbath."

Itu: "What is that? Why will they switch off their phones?"

Lerato: "They observe the bible's Sabbath so they start from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. They don't do anything during those hours except engage in religious stuffs."

Okay for the first time I felt like I was hearing Greek from her.

Itu: "So they don't go to the shops and they don't drink at this hour because Fridays here in Bolata its happening."

Lerato: "What do you know

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on a serious note? They don't even drink at all. I know it's weird to you; it was to me till I met them they are very cool people."

Itu: "Some of my neighbours will never survive. They drink from Friday till early hours Sunday then they wipe the sweat and go to church."

Lerato: "Well I will tell her to call you. I already briefed her and gave her your numbers."

Itu: "Thank you very much let me go and pack. Keep me posted and your fingers should be crossed I will be travelling a long distance for the first time."

Lerato: "Do not worry you will be fine."

Lesedi's uncle came he was stressed you could tell. I sat at the back with Nkhono. I was holding her hand for my dear life she might have thought I was praying for Lesedi while on the contrary I was as scared as hell. Lucky enough her uncle was a good and a moderate driver. We arrived in time.

Dipulelo: "Thank you very much for coming."

She said hugging me and I hugged her back.

Dipulelo: "Can we talk in private after this?"

She was whispering I knew she didn't want others to hear. I just nodded and replied to her initial statement.

Itu: "There is no need to thank me. I know you would have done the same for me."

The grannies prayed for her even if we were not yet inside her ward. She was in ICU I was really scared for her. We went to sleep at Dipulelo's place. Their house was to die for. It was so big with five bedrooms the other ones were not that big; but a reasonable size. Their bathroom was as big as my bedroom my granny's and our kitchen combined.

I laughed at myself as I sat on the toilet seat. On my left there was a mirror from top to bottom. This meant that the person who designed this had in mind that people needed to see their faces while in the loo. I laughed aloud shaking my head. Rich people had money to waste. I know it was their money and they were generous but still I couldn't help think that the expensive unnecessary mirror would have bought about 10 pairs of school shoes for our disadvantaged learners who walked to school with tone shoes.

Itu: "So you want people to watch their faces when they are taking a dunk in the loo. Who came up with the stupid idea?"

I was in the kitchen with Dipulelo cooking a light meal. She laughed hard.

Dipulelo: "My husband has so many crazy ideas so I let him experiment I do not want him saying I prevent him from doing what he wants in his house."

Itu: "What about you?"

Dipulelo: "Well I do the decorations. All these ideas are mine."

Itu: "The decoration is unique and I love it."

I was telling the truth she had a unique, exquisite and expensive taste.

Dipulelo: "I wanted to tell you that my husband and mother in law don't know about the blackmail. They think it is a robbery gone wrong. She asked me not to mention anything. So please make sure they are not going to find out."

Itu: "Are you hiding this because of the fact that she is keeping your secret?"

Dipulelo: "What? No how can you think of that. I confessed already. My Wednesday was a club where I went with my friends for gambling so I was becoming addicted I had to confess as I had lost a lot of my savings."

Itu: "I had to check and I am so sorry about that."

Dipulelo: "If her uncle finds out he will ground her and make her commute from home. She had started making friends and she was doing well."

Itu: "They will never find out. Even Nkhono I never told her what happened I only told her we will find out when we reach there."

Dipulelo: "Thank you very much. Lesedi is not a troublesome child. Even though she doesn't show it she is hurt by the fact that her mother always chose other people or her job over her. It is like she is punishing her for her father's sins. I wonder why she kept her."

Itu: "I am so sorry. Where is her father?"

Dipulelo: "Her father is alive but he said he doesn't want anything to do with a child as he had told the mother not to have kids. I think she thought she will change him. Unfortunately he can never be changed because as soon as there was male prevention he jumped to it. He doesn't want kids with his whole heart. Lesedi had made peace with that so she had hoped that her mother was going to be different."

Itu: "What I am grateful for is the fact that you are a mother figure to her. Please do not change even if you have children of your own she is your first born."

Dipulelo: “I am grateful because I was never given children. One day we might get ours but Lesedi will always be ours. She doesn’t want to work here when she is done she wants to stay with my mother in law and I am supporting her in everything she wants because the more you support her the more she reveals her potential and her happy self.”

Itu: “Do not worry I will look after her when she moves back home. For now I do not know how we will hide this because there is a lady I know who said she will ask her friend who is a lawyer to help her.”

Dipulelo: “Do not worry my cousin is a police officer she is sorting that out already. I will pay for a lawyer if need be. For now keep her on standby if need be I will contact you.”

Itu: “No problem then. Was she done with her exams?”

Dipulelo: “Fortunately she was done with exams.”

Itu: “That is great.”

We finished preparing food then we served the elders. I was still speechless about her decoration she had a very good taste.

We shared a room with my granny. It had too beds at least. My granny always said I didn’t know how to sleep but I was wondering why Lethabo never complained. Or was it true that when people are in love they never notice the bad traits of their partners.



In the morning we went to see Lesedi. There was no change she was still breathing through the tubes. We were going to take a taxi back late with my granny because her granny was going to spend a little time with her till she recovered.

She was not even showing signs of waking up. We spent the morning there. In the afternoon we came after lunch because visiting hours were three to five over the weekend. In the late hour of four Nkhono prayed and we left for the taxi rank. We were lucky because the last taxi was leaving at five regardless the number of passengers.

I slept all the way as I didn't want to have a panic attack. I was slowly but surely getting there only a matter of time before my phobia went away. We got home with luck on our side as the driver was going to pass by Bolata going to his home. We then saved money for a special taxi.

The following morning it was a Sunday so most shops were closed I had to do the laundry. I didn't want to use the money. I finished doing the laundry and rested. We didn't even open the stall. There was a guy who had helped us build a medium size shack for our stall it was convenient.

The following morning I was on morning duty after work I went to MICA to deposit the money for my building material. I

then looked around to find a few clothes for her. I managed to even buy a set of pots which she liked so much.

The weekend came and Mr Ntai came to pick me up. His family stayed the other side of town which was a little far. He stayed in Phuthaditjhaba.

Itu: "Good morning Mr Ntai."

Ofenste: "Are you going to call me like this in front of my family?"

Itu: "Relax I can get into the character at the blink of an eye. So what is happening at your place?"

Ofenste: "Is that necessary?"

Itu: "Not at all well I will tell you about myself. I am....."

Ofenste: "What is this? Oprah Winfrey."

Okay that was harsh but I knew my place. I kept quiet but I knew it was going to be a disaster. I took out my phone and logged in on my social media; Lerato was online I chatted with her.

I was smiling at their faces with Kali they were so beautiful together.

Ofenste: "You can't be smiling with other men while I am here at least pretend to be present; emotional."

Itu: "Okay."

I continued with my chat. I had concluded that this Puleng woman damaged him. He was so just like a robot without any feelings. I was going to do what I was paid for then leave. I was not emotionally ready either.

Ofenste: "We are here. You look good by the way."

Itu: "Thank you. You look better in your casual clothes."

I was not pulling his leg I was telling the truth. His formal clothes made him look like a bagger.

"My son you are here. Come let me feed you. You are getting thinner every day. If Puleng was home you were going to gain your weight back."

Okay she was the cheerleader for the wife this was going to be another Moipone saga. My heart sank.

Ofenste: "Mom; I am fine she is the one who is refusing with my kids that's why I am this stressed. Well we are here for the gathering not to talk about my marriage."

"It's a good thing Puleng is here she will make sure that you are well fed."

Okay I was beyond frustrated.

Ofenste: "There is no need my love here will make food for me. Mom this is Itumelang Mahlaba my girlfriend soon to be fiancée and my sweet cheeks this is my mom."

I smiled at sweet cheeks. I was going to laugh at him when we were alone.

Itu: "Nice to meet you ma'am."

I placed my hand in front of me and she just looked at it and left.

Well that went well I thought to myself.

17

"Why would Ofenste bring a girlfriend in a family function?"

"Did you see how short her dress is? She wanted us to see her legs as if they are beautiful."

"You girls are jealous she has beautiful legs although she can't be compared to Puleng facially she has a beautiful body."

I was still standing outside the kitchen door listening. I was contemplating on going in.

"Who are you and why are you standing here?"

His voice was so deep and scary coming from behind me. I turned and he was even scarier than his voice.

“I am sorry I need to wash my hands.”

It was a white lie I was never going to go inside with those ladies talking about me.

Him: “Who are you; that’s my question.”

“Oh Malome this is Ofenste’s girlfriend. Didn’t he introduce her to you already?”

Why was I not surprised it was Miss African Pamela.

Him: “This boy is not okay upstairs. Aren’t you fixing things with him? Why is he bringing his mistress to a family gathering?”

The ladies in the kitchen were looking through the windows. I didn’t even know what to say I was hoping that Ofenste will come to my rescue. I was not at liberty of answering them as I didn’t know how influential the uncle was in the case. What if I made things worse for him? This was harder than I thought my granny was right I was half prepared for this.

“Ngwananyana I am talking to you.”

It was an insult to me because the way he said it was like a little girl who wanted to destroy a marriage.

“I am so sorry but Ofenste is the one who invited me I didn’t know that he was expecting to find his ex-wife here.”

It was like I had fuelled the fire.

Puleng: "You see Malome what I was telling you that if I give Ofenste time he will get too much freedom. Look now it is as if I encourage him to do these things."

Was I being tested or was I in a messed up lie from Mr Ntai.

Him: "I will have to talk to your husband makoti."

Puleng: "Okay Malome."

The smirk she gave me I wanted the earth to open up and swallow me.

Him: "Little girl I will tell you once we paid lobola for only her so whatever you are doing or you think you are doing has to stop right now."

Itu: "Yes sir."

I said that turning without wasting anytime. I was going home with or without my so called "boyfriend". I left them talking about me. I didn't care anymore.

When I was about to leave the gate the monster in law called me.

Her: "We are about to eat come and help us to dish up. You can't expect us to cook and serve you."

Okay I was confused didn't she say Puleng was going to take care of that.

"Honey I am here were you looking for me?"

I was never going to admit that I wanted to run away from his family.

Itu: "Yes I was looking for you. I wanted to ask if you are hungry"

Mom: "Hungry who cooked for him. His wife will serve him because she cooked his favourite."

Ofenste: "I think my Itu is capable of doing that mom. If you don't want I can do it yourself. I know you wouldn't want anyone touching your utensils."

Mom: "I didn't say that she cannot touch my things."

Ofenste: "Okay mom fine then I will go with her to the kitchen to show her my favourite meal."

Mom: "Up until now she doesn't know your favourite meal. What do you eat then; at least your wife knows."

Ofenste: "Mom let us not go there."

Mom: "I was just saying."

Ofenste: "Come; my love."

He took my hand and led me to the kitchen where Puleng and her minions were. I say her minions because they were her number one cheerleaders.

Puleng: "Do not worry Ofe we are about to dish up."

Ofenste: "Do not worry we are on diet with my love here so we will dish up for ourselves."

Puleng: "So we cook and Mrs just eats without helping."

Ofentse: "We can as well go and get some take aways."

Itu: "I am not even hungry dear we can pick up something on our way home."

Puleng: "I didn't say you mustn't eat."

I was not going to eat the food when they were complaining about it.

Mom: "Who wants to eat take aways?"

Ofenste: "No one we are making food."

Mom: "Let me make plates for you two you may go and sit with others in the shed."

We left but I had a heavy heart. I was not going to eat their food. Why was she suddenly eager to make food for us?



In the shed there were couples his age he said they are his cousins.

Cousin: "You know how to pick man. I hope this one stays because I like her."

Wife: "Where is Puleng I saw her here. What is she even doing here? I will never stoop so low."

Ofenste: "Sssshhhhhh the cheerleaders are around."

They all laughed. From my observations they didn't like Puleng.

Cousin2: "I do not care because I never liked her. She thinks because her family has money then she can control everyone."

Okay I was slowly putting the puzzles together. If she had money why then was she forcing her way back to his ex's life?

Mom: "Here is the food."

She was all smiles; that was a negative for me.

Cousin: "Why is mamzo so happy all of a suddenly?"

I was asking the same question to myself. My heart was still not in the food. They all came; even the uncle who had been mean to me.

Puleng: "Let us say grace."

It seemed to me that she had power over them. I was going to find out what it was. She prayed and they said we should eat. I was busy listening to the cousins who had so many stories to tell from politics to entertainment. They were entertaining indeed.

Mom: "Are you not eating Itumelang?"

I was startled by her voice. I was engulfed in stories that I wasn't aware she was looking at me.

Ofenste: "You can get my plate its small my love."

He said giving me his place which was already half eaten. The way his mother flew up to him.

Mom: "No you can't eat that food."

She even tripped and fell the plate broke down and everyone just looked.

Mom: "Sorry; look what I have done. I will give you another plate."

I was still in a trance; when I heard one of the cousin's wife screamed.

Wife: "The puppy."

I didn't know they had puppies. The puppy was having fits I was wondering to myself that the fits were going to be happening to me if I had eaten the food.

Everyone was speechless.

Ofenste: "It ate something on the floor. What was on the floor?"

Really was that guy slow or what?

Mom: "We always poison the rats around here; so maybe the puppy ate that."

I was defeated my appetite went through the window. So I was going to die as if nothing happened. The cousin who was older and mature looked at me with pitiful eyes. I just sat there like a statue.

Malome: "So Itumelang were you married before."

It was some time after the incident and Ofenste still believed that the puppy ate poison by mistake.

Ofenste: "No."

Itu: "Yes"

Mom: "So which one is which."

Malome: "They don't even know each other this is a circus."

Malome: "Do you have kids."

Itu: "No."

Ofenste: "Yes."

What was wrong with this man? I wanted to tell him about myself in the car and he asked me if we were in Oprah Winfrey. I knew this was bound to happen.

The others laughed.

Puleng: "What do you know about each other?"

To say I was embarrassed it was an understatement. I just looked at Ofenste expecting him to say something.

Malome: "You have to stop this madness and come back home to your wife. This has gone too far."

I was fade up I wanted to go home. I was not ready for this.

Itu: "Oh don't worry the madness you are talking about is not lasting long. Thank you for your hospitality."

I said going to the car. If he was not coming I was going to take a taxi. I wanted the money but the next time we were doing this thing my way. He took some time with his uncle and mother. I think they were arguing I didn't care. I was going home to re-evaluate my game plan.

He came back to the car. I was on my phone all the way home. I needed to breathe first before I accessed every possible avenue.

I never even said goodbye when he dropped me. He didn't push it I was good with it otherwise I was going to murderise him. If ever there was such a word.

Nkhono: "How did you go with your in-laws?"

She was laughing while I was boiling.

Itu: "It was a disaster and don't even think about it."

She laughed hard going to take my phone from the kitchen table. I had left it there going to the sitting room.

"Hello...what...what police...." .....

18

"Who am I talking to if I may ask?"

"Itu, I was your landlady so the police were looking for you."

"Okay back up a little bit why will they look for me after all these years and why at your place?"

"I think it is because you used my address when you were applying for the plot of land. They say there is fraud committed surrounding your plot someone opened a case for a Moipone if

I am not mistaken and when they check their record you are the owner of that plot.”

I had even forgotten about the land that Lethabo bought for me. I wasn't aware that Moipone knew about it; I was even shocked how she knew the exact location.

“If they want to sue Moipone let then sue her. I am not selling that land and I will never sell it. I am surprised you got my new number and called me. Why didn't you give it to the police then?”

“I got it today from the lady who once visited your family. She said you are her neighbour back home.”

I couldn't even remember which lady but I knew it was from Moipone's side of the family because from my side people who

had my number were hardly talkative people and they didn't know my former landlady.

“I do not want to sound rude but my ex mother in law is a grown up lady she can take care of herself. Sorry there is another call coming through.”

I was not being dismissive DP was calling me.

Dipulelo: “Hello

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I was about to hang up.”

Itu: “Sorry I was on another call. Moipone is at it again.”

Dipulelo: “What has she done now? You know I am not a spiteful person but I wish a brick can fall out of the sky like in horror movies and hit her hard.”

We both laughed

Itu: “Do not wish her bad she is still my mother in law.”

Dipulelo: “Ex you mean; and a monster in law.”

Itu: “Leave her alone. Well I had a day from hell what’s up?”

Dipulelo: “Lesedi just woke up she can’t talk for now her voice is stuck because her throat have sores.”

Itu: “Thank God I was beginning to worry. The sores will heal soon as long as she is awake.”

Dipulelo: “That is exactly what the doctor said to us.”

Itu: “I wish I could come but work and money.”

Dipulelo: “Do not worry she will be coming at home soon you know Basotho a small incident they slaughter a sheep. The granny said that it was a bad omen so they need to come home and slaughter a sheep for her to remove the bad luck.”

I laughed at her.

Itu: "You are a Mosotho also. Well I will see her then. What happened to those guys?"

Dipulelo: "We talked to the station commander next to us and he even gave them a restraining order."

Itu: "Do you think they will back down?"

Dipulelo: "Not when they might get criminal records they will. They even apologised to me. Hubby still thinks it is a robbery gone wrong."

Itu: "What about Lesedi didn't they think she will hack them also?"

Dipulelo: "She is just a small fish they said they will set a trap for her if ever she tries. But I doubt she will do it she only

gathers information about people so it was not a criminal offence without evidence."

Itu: "I hope she can be groomed well because next time she won't be this lucky."

Dipulelo: "The other detective said she needs to apply to the programme "Cheaters" she will be useful there."

Itu: "He is crazy but on a serious note she needs to use her talent wisely."



We spoke about other issues as I told her about my day. She also said Ofenste was a fool.

I told my granny about Lesedi she ululated and went to her room to pray. I didn't understand her faith; I was not going to judge.

Lerato called me when I was about to sleep.

Itu: "Today I am lucky I receive calls left; right and centre."

Lerato: "Do you have boyfriends that I don't know about?"

Itu: "Why would you assume I was talking to boys? Well for your own information Lesedi is awake and I am happy so you will never spoil my fun. How are Kali and his father?"

Lerato: "I am not sure about the father he went home and he is only calling his daughter."

Itu: "Do you know it's not healthy what you two are doing?"

Lerato: "Trust me I know that is why I am leaving him."

Itu: "Just talk that's all and I don't mean make love because that is the talking you know."

Lerato: "I am not going to answer to that. Well I will call you tomorrow. You should put those people into their place you too."

I had told her about my encounter with the Ntais.

Itu: "Trust me it was the first and the last I am not going to let them walk all over me. Even Ofenste needs to know that I am not going to be a walk over. He is paying me to be his girlfriend then I will be his girlfriend."

Lerato: "That's my girl now let's do this thing."

I laughed at her it was as if there was something she was going to do in particular.

Itu: "Okay Lerato laka I will keep you posted."

I was feeling better after the good news. We had an early evening with my granny. When Ofenste called I rejected his calls I was planning my game plan well. Monday came I was ready to face him.

Ofenste: "I have been calling you yesterday because my mother wanted us to come and get the kids."

He was really going to be in for a bumpy ride.

Itu: "First of you do not even ask me how I am feeling after the failed murder attempt on me. You don't even ask me how my weekend was. I am traumatised where I am. You may act oblivious but it happened your mother tried to kill me and blamed the rat poison on it."

Ofenste: "What are you talking about?"

Itu: “Well it’s either you are dumb or you are acting dumb. If you are going to pay me for this job then let me do my job. What I am not going to do is lose my life in the process of helping you.”

Ofenste: “I will get to the bottom of this.”

Itu: “The other thing, if you want to be a fool in front of your family do it alone I am not going to let your family roast me. I wanted to tell you about myself and you thought that I was on an Oprah Winfrey show so well suit yourself I will answer the questions they ask. I am not going to eat anything cooked when I was not there. I will make it a mission to learn about you. You need to man up and tell your family the truth about your breakup because now I will be the devil with the horns while Puleng is the good wife who is cheated on.

When all this is out of the way then we can deal with her through the law. I am a civilised person I hate cat fights. I can manage them well but I am too smart to be involved in cat fights. Now if you can’t put your so called love for her aside then let me be do not use me to get her back. Man up and ask her to be your wife again. I need this money if you really need this divorce then act like it.”

I was breathing fire. He was even surprised to see me like that.

Ofenste: "I do not know what to say."

Itu: "Man up and digest what I said now."

Ofenste: "You keep saying man up.... a lot..."

He smiled his rare and expensive smile. I softened a little.

Itu: "If there is nothing more can I be excused sir."

I was back to formal self.

Ofenste: "We will discuss after work because you said a mouthful and I have to digest."

He smiled I was back to my serious face I just stood up and left I laughed when I was outside. I was done being Miss goody two shoes.

I worked as usual I avoided the stairway that day because I knew I was going to bump into him; I even ate in the storeroom

which I hated. After work I was not surprised when Veronica said I was needed in the manager's office.

Itu: "You called for me."

Ofenste: "Yes please sit."

I sat down I was crossing my fingers that he doesn't cancel our contract because I really needed the money to build a house for

my granny and I really needed to do something worthwhile for her.

Ofenste: "I thought about what you said in the morning and it was a mouthful. I talked to Paballo my oldest cousin who was there over the weekend. I didn't want to confront my mother so when I called him he had a field day with me. He said I was stupid to not have seen that my mother or my ex wife tried to kill you. I am so sorry about that.

Secondly he said the very same thing that I need to tell my family the truth. On that one I know you may think that I still love her; the answer is no, I do not love her at all my love for her died the moment she chose to break our vow. So; on that note I am protecting her because she is still the mother of my kids and our kids need to respect her the way they respect me. On that one I need time will you give me time?"

I was not going to be mean so I understood where he was coming from that is why I always protected Lethabo from my family.

Itu: "I understand you very well. I am going to give you time. It is not my place to say anything after-all so I will definitely give you time as long as she respects me enough not to cause any fights."

Ofenste: "I get you. I will make sure that won't happen. So now that I have seen my mistakes I will work on that. May you please make time for this weekend to meet the kids?"

Itu: "That will not be a problem I need to know them so that they will get used to me. Social workers might interview them."

Ofenste: "Thank you for not giving up on me."

Itu: "The jury is still on."

I laughed going outside. I was going to have to suck it up when it came to kids. I knew what to expect I knew they loved their mother so I was in for a long ride. Worse with a mother like theirs I wouldn't expect anything less than the lies she was going to feed them.

Nkhono: "So you are not quitting your job?"

I laughed at her.

Itu: "Never I was not raised by a quieter so why would I start now to chicken out."

She laughed at me. I was doing that for us. We needed a decent house.

Nkhono: "That's my girl. You need to pray hard; I know you will not so I will pray for you."

Itu: "Thank you very much."

The weekend came; I had to go to his house. It was my first time there.

Ofenste: "I am going to the tuck-shop they are coming after an hour my cousin is dropping them; I will be back."

Itu: "Okay may you please buy a cold drink for me."

Ofenste: "Where is the money?"

Itu: "What. I don't have."

"I am paying her and she is busy using me again." He said going out as I laughed at him. Before long there was a knock.

Itu: "Don't you have a key? What did you forget this time?"

I opened the door then boom

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I was so surprised to see his cousin with the kids and the granny. I respected her so much and I never wanted her to be the part of the sham of a relationship. Ofenste had told me that they will come later so I was not even mentally prepared for them.

Granny: "Hello my daughter what are you doing here?"

Paballo: "Come on Nkhono we are on the way; let us get inside first."

Granny: "So it is true that Ofenste has a girlfriend? If you are the girlfriend then I can die a happy woman. Only if you can speed up things so that I can die early."

Guilt was eating me to the marrow like a bone.

Paballo: "Come on granny don't be like that."

I just closed the door speechless as I followed them to the sitting room which was sharing the space with the dining table. It was neither tiny nor big.

The kids totally ignored me I tried talking to them and they looked at me like I was an alien

Granny: "Hay you do not take your mother's attitude go and greet your father's friend."

Boy: "She is his girlfriend mommy told us."

I was going to have a difficult time with a mother who spoke about these things to her kids.

Paballo: "Tumelo! Let me hear you say that in front of your dad."

Tumelo: "I am going to my room."

Girl: "Me too."

Paballo: "Not you too Lesego?"



She was running after her brother with Paballo following them carrying their bags.

Itu: "Well that went very well."

I was hurt and his granny saw that.

Granny: "Do not worry they will come along. Kids are the most blessed creatures; you may try to corrupt them but their true nature comes. It will never last. I hope Ofenste can win the custody so that he can remove the things this woman is feeding these innocent kids."

Itu: "Enough about me. How are you we just got to other things before I asked about your health?"

Granny: "I am well and thank you very much. I will be happy if you make my boy happy. He has been miserable since he

married that witch. First it was her abusive him because they have money in her family and we are just poor and useless to them. Do you know I told Ofenste when they offered to pay for the whole wedding that they will control him? He was like no Nkhono I will pay them back once I am permanent. So he doesn't have a say because he is the wife."

I was speechless I didn't know what to say.

Paballo: "Nkhono, Ofenste will fight with you. Do not scare his girlfriend. Already aunty tried to poison her so she will run

for her life knowing that his ex-wife is a psycho and his mother a murderer.”

Granny: “She what?”

Paballo: “Oh boy.”

At that time the door opened and Ofenste came through smiling only to be met by an angry granny I excused myself to the kitchen. I only heard some auguring there.

“Do not worry too much if granny knows she will protect you and Ofenste needs to stop protecting his mother and his wife.”

I looked behind me and it was his cousin. I didn’t know what to say because I didn’t to sound like someone who liked things.

Ofenste: “Please do not turn my girlfriend against me or else I will rat you to your wife.”

They laughed he came with the plastic he was carrying when he came back from the tuck-shop.

Itu: “He wouldn’t succeed even if he tried.”

Ofenste: “That’s my girl.”

Paballo: “Let me go to my wife and leave traitors alone.”

We both laughed at him.

Itu: "You are not leaving before you eat something."

Paballo: "I am not going to eat food cooked by traitors."

Ofenste: "Suit yourself." He laughed at him. "Please make something for us to eat; even if it's a sandwich."

Itu: "Yes my mango."

He looked at me confused then laughed.

Itu: "Do not blame me; blame my granny who said I shouldn't call you Mr Ntai but my peach or my mango so I chose mango."

Ofenste: "You are my lemon then."

I laughed at him.

Itu: "I am not bitter like your wife so orange maybe not lemon."

Ofenste: "Let her hear you say that. She will tell your mother in law and they will poison you."

I laughed at him.

Itu: "You see now the drink will come in handy. You want me to pay for it and now your guests will benefit too."

Ofentse: "Who said only the man can take care of the woman. You can also take care of me."

Itu: "You are the man so let us leave it at that."

Ofenste: "You are cruel. Did you meet the kids?"

Itu: "More or less."

Ofenste: "What do you mean?"

Paballo: "More like they said their mother doesn't want them to get closer to her."

Ofenste: "What?"

Itu: "Where you eavesdropping on us."

Paballo: "You wish I just came for my cold beer."

He said opening the fridge taking it and leaving us to a staring contest.

Ofenste: "She can't turn my kids against you. I will deal with them because they are my kids."

Itu: "No do not."

Ofenste: "I will not beat them if that is what you were thinking."

Itu: "Oh."

I didn't know what to think. I was not going to tell him how to run his house.

Ofenste: "You will call me when you need some help."

Itu: "I will go and entertain the guests."

Ofenste: "Funny enough you are the guest and I should be taking care of you."

Itu: "Well they don't know that and I am going to do my best not to burn your house down."

I laughed and watched him go to the others. The house reminded me a little of the one we were renting with my family. I was sent back to the place where I thought I would never visit. I felt my heart contracting a little.

I wiped my tears then quickly made the sandwiches. Everything was easy to find so I didn't need him. I took the water basin first and knelt in front of him with a towel on my other hand. His cousin whistled and the granny ululated I was surprised I almost stood up.

Granny: "You see this is a wife material not Puleng. You should marry her as soon as possible. I know you youngsters don't save money so don't worry I will help you out."

Paballo: "I will contribute also because we need this one."

Ofenste: "Wowowo; hold your horses do not chase my guest because of being forward."

When I was done with all of them I asked the kids to come from their rooms. The father insisted on doing the introductions.

Ofenste: "Kids this is aunt Itumelang and she....."

Lesego: "Mommy said we do not need to know her name."

Ofenste: "Daddy is talking now akere? What do you do when adults are talking to you?"

Lesego: "I listen and answer when asked to."

Ofenste: "Good; now as long as you are in my house you will call her aunt Itu or never talk at all."

There was silence. The granny was just eating while Paballo acted as if he was not even listening.

Ofenste: "Lemon this is Lesego my daughter and this is Tumelo the first born. You know my granny and cousin."

Itu: "Pleased to meet you."

They ignored me their father gave them an eye then they stood up and shook my hand. It was the coldest thing ever. Tumelo looked 12 or so and Lesego was around 8 or 9. I just took a deep breath and reminded myself that I needed money.

Granny: "Please bake for me the favourite cakes you always do." It was after our afternoon meal.

Itu: "There are no baking ingredients there."

Ofenste: "We will go to Setsing (Town) with Paballo."

He said it so fast that the granny laughed hard.

Granny: "Didn't I tell you that he low key loves your baking."

I just laughed at him he was ashamed but Paballo assured him it was a good thing.

Paballo: "I can't wait to taste them. Fenste it's okay to like your woman's cooking if you don't then who will?"

He just laughed. He took his car keys and they went to town. I cleaned and looked for the baking pans which were very sticky and dirty I had to start with them before I gave people some food poisoning.

While I was washing the pans Tumelo entered kitchen.

Itu: "Need something champ?"

I was trying to be friendly and kind he just looked at me with an evil eye, opened the fridge took a bottle of juice then left me standing there.

Itu: "What did you get yourself into Itumelang?"

I said to myself. When they got back I just mixed my ingredients and started baking. I was not even close to the manual of understanding step kids.

Granny: "See now I can sleep well knowing that I ate my favourite."

Paballo: "Where is the container for my wife?"

Ofenste: "You are taking our food to your wife? Can't she cook and bake?"

Paballo: "Do not be a pooper of the parties."

Itu: "It is packed in the big container on the table."

Ofenste: "You even packed a big container no Itu he has wife"

I just laughed at him. He took him to the car. It was late I wanted to leave also before the taxis to Bolata stopped moving around.

Ofenste: "Come I need to tell you something."

I followed him to the kitchen and he told me what he wanted.

Itu: "What the....."

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Ofenste: "Come on she is the only one who has been in my corner since I was born. My dad was never home he didn't want kids so he cared less about me. To cut the long story short she is the only one and only thing that matters to me."



Itu: "Are you hearing yourself. You want her to hate me for what we told her."

Ofenste: "You see if we tell her then other people won't have a leg to stand on."

Itu: "I have a bad feeling about this."

Ofenste: "Do not be like that my lemon."

Itu: "Do not even think about it. You think that you are going to bribe me."

Ofenste: "It has to work. What kind of a girlfriend are you?"

Itu: "The original one not the one that gets bribed by silly things."

Ofenste: "This will be an uphill task."

Itu: "Let us get over with this because I need to go it's getting late and my granny will get worried."

Ofenste: "I will drop you off; we will take granny first then we will drop you off with the kids."

Itu: "Okay then soldier let us do this thing."

We went back inside granny was watching television the kids were in their rooms I guessed. Ofenste asked to talk to her.

Ofenste: "Nana we have something to tell you."

He always called her Nana.

Granny: “Do not tell me you impregnated her before you divorced your wife?”

Itu: “What? No, that is not that.”

I was even picturing myself being intimate with Mr Ntai. Ewe it was not going to happen not in this life time.

Ofenste: “Not like that nana. Well I asked Itu to help me get my kids back. I would like to get them full time. I am tired of this up and down. They are getting confused and also getting unruly which they were not while staying with me.”

Granny: “That is a good move my son. So how are you going to marry this child while you are still married to that witch?”

Ofenste: “Do not call her that. I am going to finalise the divorce soon. My lawyer is working on it and I am not worried about that part I am only worried about my kids.”

Granny: “So you two will get married as soon as the divorce is final?”

Ofenste: “This is what we want to talk to you about. We are not lovers”

Granny: “What? Are you only screwing?”

Ofenste: "Language Nana and no we are not even ex lovers. I asked her to be a pretence girlfriend. We are sorry to have fooled you but if we had a choice we would have told you first."

Granny: "So I am the last one to find out. I am always the last one to find out?"

Ofenste: "No one knows because they will let it out you know them. You are the only one I trust hence you are the only one who knows."

Itu: "I am sorry I didn't mean to lie to you."

She didn't reply to my comment she looked at her grandson and continued.

Granny: "Let us hope you know what you are doing. Please it is getting late take me home."

Ofenste: "Are you not sleeping over?"

Granny: "Since when do I sleep over in people's houses?"

Ofenste: "Your great grandkids are here tonight."

Granny: "I am not sleeping with them when they are like brats. You need to make this work and fast so that you can bring your kids home.

Just like that, I might have lost the only person who was in my corner. That was just another squabble in my way; just great.

Itu: "I am leaving before the taxis get scares. Thank you very much."

I said going to get my handbag from the kitchen table where I had left it; Ofenste followed me.

Ofenste: "Hay I thought I will drop you after I drop her."

Itu: "I told you and do you listen? Never; you don't listen; now she hates me as well. Thank you."

Ofenste: "No do not be like this nana hates lies so she will come around."

Itu: "Alright for now I need to get to the taxis."

I said going outside. Lucky enough there were two options to take a local taxi and take another one in town or take one taxi that was going to take forever as it passed Mandela Park and Charles Mopeli stadium. I opted for option one as I was in a hurry to get home and rest. I was emotionally drained. This was not working for me. Stress was going to kill me softly. If there were pills to heal emotional stress I was going to take four on that particular day.

I rushed as a taxi was coming. I didn't want them to find me on my way. I breathed with a sigh of relief when I got inside the taxi.

Driver: "Are you running away from home?"

The way he was so dramatic he had even opened his eyes wide.

I just laughed at him hard.

Itu: "More like running away from a lover."

I said laughing.

Driver: "Do not stress I can take care of you. What do they say the fishes in the seas are what?"

I laughed at him

Itu: "You mean there are plenty fishes in the sea?"

Driver: "But that is what I said mos." I just laughed at him.  
"I know you from Bolata

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are you going there now because it will be your lucky day I am knocking off."

Itu: "Yes I am thank you."

Just like that I had saved myself money and a long distance journey. He got other passengers on the way and my journey was stress less. I got home tired I just got into the blankets because Nkhono was sleeping already.

It was Sunday the following day; my granny woke up early alone I just slept till the late hours of the morning. If I were rich I was going to sleep the whole day but I needed to sell a little and my customers deserved a drama free Sunday. When I was done with my cleaning, bath and breakfast I opened the shop. My phone was still off from the previous night I didn't want drama.

I sold a few items then Nkhono came.

Nkhono: "I thought you were not opening today?"

Itu: "Even if I am lazy I need to work because I am not rich."

Nkhono: "But your mango has money."

I laughed at her.

Itu: "I told him about that name. He is now calling me lemon."

Nkhono: "Serves you right to reveal our secrets; it has consequences you know."

Itu: "I will not tell again."

She laughed as we saw Dipulelo coming through. I closed the tuck-shop so fast as if something was chasing me.

Nkhono: "Do you think they brought Lesedi?"

Itu: "I think so because next week they are supposed to do the ritual thing."

Nkhono: "Do not look down upon those that believe in certain things because it works for them whatever works for you keep it going."

Itu: "I am not looking down upon them just wondering."

Nkhono: "Stop wondering let's go."

We closed the door and left. In the rural areas the good part was one could go as they pleased without locking especially when they were going around the neighbourhood.

Dipulelo: "Hello; how are you?"

Nkhono: "How are you my daughter, my son how are you."

Uncle: "We are fine. You may go inside they are inside."

Nkhono: "Thank you."

Dipulelo: "How are you Itu?"

Itu: "I should be asking you that question. How is Lesedi doing?"

The husband went inside after greeting so it was just the two of us.

Dipulelo: "You know that she is a strong girl and I am happy the blackmailer was caught."

Itu: "What are they charging him with?"

Dipulelo: "In this country if you were once a criminal they can find anything to charge you with."

Itu: "You are right. Let us go inside I want to see her."

Dipulelo: "Alright I am coming she is in her room."

I went inside greeting the family then I proceeded to Lesedi's room.

Itu: "Hay how does it feel to wake up from the dead." She just smiled at me.

Lesedi: "Please do not make me laugh because I still feel pain in the ribs when I laugh."

Itu: "Sorry ghost, you are a walking dead." "Leave my child alone."

Dipulelo came in laughing also.

Itu: "So tell me did you see heaven like that author said?"

Lesedi: "Do not even start with me. You should be worried about your baby mommy issues."

Itu: "DP you told this child about the issue?" She laughed



Dipulelo: “Not really the phone was on loud speaker and she heard.”

Itu: “Leave me alone with my baby mama soon she will be calling us telling the father that the child swallowed a stove.”

Lesedi: “Please do not do this to my ribs.”

Dipulelo: “Well your boyfriend’s baby mama is that type; when you are finally resting sipping on some coffee on a winter night then she will call and say the kids do not have clothes to open the fridge.”

We laughed deep down I knew this woman was capable of that.

Lesedi: “Do not worry ausi Tumi just say the word and I will give you her file.”

Dipulelo: “You have started.”

Itu: “You haven’t even healed.”

We said it in unison and she just smiled and shrugged her shoulders I knew no coma was going to stop her from helping me.

Lesedi: “I am only helping you and I know you will never be cruel. I vowed to only help my family because there are fake friends out there.”

Dipulelo: “You have to love them all and trust no one.”

Lesedi: "I have learnt it the hard way."

My phone vibrated on my pocket. I answered without looking because we were busy chatting and the conversation was flowing.

"What the....."

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"How much should I give you for you to leave my husband?"

I looked at the phone again because it was as if I had answered a wrong phone. It was really my phone so there was no mistake.

Dipulelo: "Who is it?"

She was whispering I shrugged Lesedi also whispered.

Lesedi: "Loud speaker please."

I placed it on loud speaker and composed myself.

"Are you still there?"

Itu: "Sorry who am I speaking to?"

"So you are a man snatcher? How many husbands are you dating?"

It was Puleng; I didn't even want to know where she got my number.

Itu: "Okay please whatever you think you can give me try to save it for your makeup or whatever."

Puleng: "Everyone has a price so name yours."

Itu: "Listen here I do not want to be rude wanna be African Pamela Anderson please take that money and the one you will

get from the divorce settlement and then maintain your expensive lifestyle you are trying to so hard to have. I don't need your money and your fakeness close to me."

Puleng: "Everyone has a price and you will regret not taking the money and run for your life."

Itu: "Okay how much are you offering?"

DP and Lesedi looked at me with inquisitive eyes.

Puleng: "I knew you were in it for the money. How about a quarter of a million?"

I had to open my eyes wider, how rich was she and I really needed Lesedi to give me that file. If I never needed it before I really needed it then. Lesedi showed me a cut sign. She wanted

me to cut the call. I was going to toy with her feelings she didn't know me.

Itu: "That is too little considering that I will be leaving the love of my life and a chance to have a family I will pass."

Puleng: "How much are you putting on the table?"

Itu: "Half a million can solve some of my problem."

Puleng: "That is too much money considering that you are just a poor simple girl."

Itu: "Oh dear this poor simple girl is your worst nightmare and you know that."

Puleng: "I am not going to give you half a million."

Itu: "I know you are not because you are recording me so that you can send it to Ofenste. We might as well give him a show. Do not even think of sending half to him because I recorded to the end also. Good day Mrs Pamela."

Puleng: "Arg!"

She dropped the call on me I just laughed.

Dipulelo: "How did you know that she was recording you?"

Itu: "It was just a wild guess and I had a feeling this was a trap."

Lesedi: "So what now?"

Itu: "I think I will need that file because I need to know who I am dealing with."

Lesedi: "Yessssss."

Dipulelo: "Not so fast."

Itu: "I was about to say the same thing. You are not going to do anything except what I need only. We are not going to get you killed because this time around you won't be luck."

"Getting killed for what?"

We all jumped. We had forgotten that we were not alone in the house. Dipulelo ran to the door to her husband.

Dipulelo: "Nothing honey we were talking about girl stuff."

They left the room and we breathed with the sigh of relief simultaneously.

Lesedi: "That was close."

Itu: "That is why I am saying you are not going to risk your life again."

Lesedi: "Yes mom."

We both laughed. I sat with her for a while and I left when she was resting. I left my granny with the other elders as they planned grown up stuff.

I called Lerato because I knew that deep down I needed her advice. She was like a sister that I never had.

Lerato: "Someone missed me."

Itu: "Not a chance how can I miss that?"

Lerato: "One day you will swallow your worlds I tell you. So what's up?"

Itu: "You know things are not going well I might have to be paid only once."

Lerato: "Why; what happened?"

I told her everything. She was also lost for words.

Lerato: "So what are you planning to do?"

Itu: "I was hoping you are the wise one and you will tell me how to handle things."

Lerato: "This is tricky because granny is the only person who can make this work. If she is not in your corner then it will be a disaster."

Itu: "I know that and it is the reason why I need your advice."

Lerato: "What I can say is give her time. She loves you and that love won't just go away like that."

Itu: "They say there is a thin line between love and hate."

Lerato: "I know but for now this needs you sober and patient. You need to see where this will take you. I am thinking if you can just let granny be and focus on the kids who are the main reason you are getting paid. My advice is; do not try too hard. Make sure you act as if you don't care that they are treating you badly. Even if they don't answer to your questions or they don't react to you talk alone. If you talk alone and answer yourself then one of them is bound the crack."

I laughed at her.

Lerato: "You see you are laughing one of them will laugh. When you are busy with the other one then the not so laughing one will be jealous."

Itu: "Who taught you all this?"

Lerato: "Let us say I have experience when it comes to kids."

Itu: "Cross your fingers that it works."

Lerato: "I am definitely sure it will work."

Itu: "Thank you very much. Has the runaway husband come back home?"

Lerato: "He is still at home Kali spoke to him and his uncle."

Itu: "What is your plan?"

Lerato: "I would rather not we talk about it. Let me talk about the interview I am going to next week."

Itu: "What? Why was I not told about this?"

Lerato: "I am telling you all about it now."

Itu: "You are not a good friend."

Lerato: "How was I to tell you when you are here stressed? Besides I wanted to tell you the good news once I got the job."

Itu: "Well do you really want the job?"

Lerato: "I need this job to stay sane my love."

Itu: "Okay I get you. Let us cross our fingers. This will also give you time to look at things differently."

Lerato: "Exactly; I fell in love with my husband while I was young and I felt like he was going to love me back but now it is time for reality I am going to love myself more."

I felt sadness sipping in my soul. It was so sad to learn that there were women suffering to be loved while they had too much love to give. What more did Nadifa want when he had a beautiful and faithful wife?

Itu: "I hope for good news."

Lerato: "That makes the two of us."



We spoke about other things till my airtime was exhausted. Nkhono came late because she was busy socialising with her age mates. They were going to slaughter a sheep for Lesedi the following day. The weekend passed without any further drama.

Ofenste and I if we were in a real relationship we would have been the worst lovers ever. We hardly communicated unless it was important. So we never even talked about her granny. The whole week at work I was avoiding him. I was experienced on that.

“You are scarce these days?”

I was startled by Veronica when I was busy hiding in the stairway

Itu: “It is not like that the reason is I do not want to be in trouble so I clean early to avoid disturbing people at work.”

Veronica: “I know what you are talking about but also make sure that these people do not treat you like dirt. The fact that you are a cleaner doesn’t mean you are dumb and uneducated.”

Itu: “What can we do we are just cleaners.”

Veronica: "Do not even downgrade yourself. I saw your results some of their results are as bad so working in the office doesn't make them clever."

Itu: "Well it is what it is."

Veronica: "Life can be unfair sometimes."

Itu: "Tell me something I didn't know; but what can we do."

Veronica: "Let us just push life"

She went her own way while I was left busking in the sun.

"Are you avoiding me again?"

I had been trying so hard to avoid him I guess it was not good enough.

Itu: "Mr Ntai; how are you?"

Ofenste: "Do not even try to avoid the question why are you avoiding me."

Itu: "Me avoiding you? Well this is not the right place."

Ofenste: "Okay then. Schools are closing on Friday and we need to go and collect the kids they will be staying with me."

Itu: "We?"

Ofenste: "Yes 'we'; as in you and I because we need to present a united front to them as we collect them. So the whole month they will be with 'us'."

I laughed at the 'us' when he was serious I stopped.

Itu: "Wait a minute so you want me to come and stay with you in your house."

Ofenste: "No

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I am still married remember and when I do have a girlfriend she has to visit me occasionally not sleep overs everywhere but here and there."

He was really serious.

Itu: "I have the whole week to think about it. You are also acting as if your granny did not just give me a cold shoulder."

Ofenste: "We will discuss that later not here."

Itu: "Thank you Mr Ntai."

I said that as I saw one of his colleagues coming; I didn't want them getting the wrong end of the stick. He left as I went to my locker. I had made a vow to myself that I will not be emotionally attached so it was easy to do this job.

When the Friday in question came I was ready as we had knocked off early. It was month-end after all, I was ready when there was a knock at the door I was surprised as I was meeting him by the road as usual.

“I am coming you said you will meet me by the road. I .....

What the .....

22

“Dumelang.”

I didn't know what to do or say. It was Ofenste's granny; I looked behind her to see if she was alone. She was not alone Paballo's car was parked in front of our yard he was on the phone.

Granny: “I am not going to waste your time I know you are going to get the kids so I will say what I need to say.”

Nkhono: “Who was at the door I....”

She trailed I think because she didn't know her. She was on one crush; I was surprised as she was always on her wheelchair.

Nkhono: “Let the visitors come in Itumelang; where are your manners?”

Trust my granny to humiliate me in front of visitors.

Itu: “Please do come in.”

Granny: "Thank you very much."

I moved aside for her to enter. She didn't even wait to be introduced.

Granny: "I am Ofenste's granny from his father's side."

Nkhono: "I am Itumelang's granny from her mother's side. I am the only parent she has ever known my husband passed on when she was in grade 3 so she knows him from pictures. You look every young from her description I thought you were very old."

They laughed as if they were old friends. I was looking from one person to the other as if I was in the wrong room.

Granny: "I am old now. You should have seen me during my olden days. I was the queen."

I suppressed laughter.

Nkhono: "I can tell. I always tell her that they don't bath these kids they hide behind the make-ups."

Granny: "What do they know about bathing? We used to take our precious time bathing then after past there we will walk slowly to the boreholes and meet potentials on the way."

I couldn't suppress the laughter anymore I just burst out with laughter.

Nkhono: "Tell her this one is worse she doesn't even know how much make-up is."

Itu: "Ah Nkhono:"

My granny could sell you for a penny I tell you.

Itu: "Should I make tea or juice for you."

Both: "Tea."

For your own information it was boiling outside. Do not even ask me how they managed but I tell you they managed the tea just fine.

I left them talking there as if they were old friends. Please tell me never to trust my granny again.

Granny: "I know you want to leave but I want to tell you that I am not happy that you two lied to me. I am not the kind of a person who takes being lied to lightly. I haven't forgiven you. You have to work hard to gain my trust. I even told Ofenste the same thing. I am going to give you the benefit of the doubt."

Nkhono: "I will have to tell you that what they are doing is helping the kids and I agree with them I am afraid. If it's going

to help him get his kids and divorce his ex-wife then I think the less people knew about it the better.”

Granny: “So you are siding with her?”

Nkhono: “On this one I am siding with her. I am not saying what they are doing is okay but they are both benefiting on this. They will be getting what they want and they can “break-up” then.”

At least Nkhono was on my side. She was right the less people knew the better.

Granny: “I am still mad though because I am not people.”

Nkhono: “That is your problem there you are on your own.”

Okay I was not going to be involved it seemed they were friends so it was between them. I looked at my phone Ofenste had sent many messages and I had told him that his granny was here.

Ofenste: “They are still there?”

Itu: “Yes

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they are even drinking tea and debating here?”

Ofenste: “How angry is she?”

Itu: “50/50”

Ofenste: “Good or bad?”

Before I could reply the grannies were looking at me. I stopped what I was doing and looked at them.

Nkhono: "We are saying you can go your mango is waiting for you?"

I just laughed.

Granny: "We don't want to give Puleng another reason to hold the kids more than necessary. I wanted to take the kids myself but my age couldn't tally with what the courts wanted.

Itu: "I will see you later Nkhono."

Granny: "More like tomorrow."

Itu: "Huh!"

Nkhono: "Just go Itu it is rude to keep a man waiting."

Itu: "It is the other way round you can't keep a lady waiting."

Granny: "This is the twenty first century."

Itu: "Amen. Are you not going now granny?"

Granny: "Did I come with you? I know my way back home and I am still mad at you."

She was back to her old angry self. I didn't want to push it.

Itu: "Okay I will see you later."



I took my bag and left. Paballo was smiling to his phone.

Itu: "You had to leave me at their mercy alone?"

Paballo: "I was not going to be involved anyhow. How did it go because she was angry?"

Itu: "Still a little angry. Who told you I lived here?"

Paballo: "She has her ways I was only driving her. I think she didn't even tell Ofenste. You can't say no to her so I had to oblige."

Itu: "Okay; let me be on my way."

I rushed to where Ofenste had parked his car. It was up the road and I wished he was near because I was drained already.

Ofenste: "Sorry about my granny."

Itu: "There is nothing we can do about it. She is trying to protect his only grandson."

Ofenste: "I do not wish for you to meet my sister."

Itu: "You have a sister?"

Ofenste: "Yes married staying in Senekal."

What a way to start this so called journey. We spoke about things that were happening at work. He seemed not happy

also; as people he was supervising also talked ill about him.

Ofenste: "We are here."

I looked at the house in De-belt. It was like we were in another place rather than Qwaqwa. The suburb which I have never been to surprisingly; it had big beautiful houses with the tallest fencing and walling I have ever seen. How did such people live without talking to their neighbours as they were enclosed in their houses? I was thinking to myself that I was never going to survive in such an environment without talking to my neighbours every morning.

I was wondering at how rich these people were. How did Ofenste get hooked with such a person? I was wondering if he even managed to pay for the house utilities maybe that's why he looked too ordinary for someone who was a manager. She

was really milking him dry literally and he was letting her. I had a huge task ahead of me.

Ofenste: "Coming in or you will wait outside?"

Itu: "I would rather wait."

Ofenste: "I will be back in a jiffy."

He said closing the door leaving me with my thoughts. It was time to toughen up. I needed to remove the grieving Itu and put on the grown up boots.

After about 10 minutes the kids came running to the car happy. Tumelo came to the front and he was disappointed that there was someone there. Lesego: "You lose your turn it's not my fault." Tumelo: "That doesn't count."

I was guessing they took turns on sitting in front. They got inside with an angry Tumelo. My chances of making progress were dwindling. Itu: "Hello guys how are you?"

They looked at me without saying anything."

Itu: "We will have a good and exciting holiday won't we?"

Still no answer I was doomed. They looked at each other and started talking totally ignoring me. I sent a message to Lerato telling her it is not working.

She told me not to be a chicken and try every avenue to get them on my side.

When quiet some time passed and there was no Ofenste I got irritated and I knew that Puleng was up to something. I think it was time I acted like a jealous girlfriend. I left the car and went through the gate which was still slightly open.

When I stepped inside it was like I was breathing the different air. Maybe that was why they kept the walls tall to keep their fresh air to themselves no sharing.

Our air was saturated that was why we were not as fresh skinned as kids from this side of town. Well that was crap I loved my saturated air better. I laughed at myself.

I entered through the open door and there they were kissing. I cleared my throat.

Itu: "I was wondering where you were. I am surprised."

They both turned. She was playing him and he was at her messy. My job kept getting difficult by the minute.

Itu: "Or I can join the fun."

I couldn't even believe it myself but I was getting tired of this Puleng. Ofenste: "Let us go love."

Itu: "Right after you."

I let him leave. I went back to where Puleng was standing.

Itu: "You might have all the money in the world and think you own it but I will kill for my man. I can even kill your stupid brats for the heck of it."

I was on her face I didn't mean to threaten her kids because I loved kids. Puleng: "What .... I ..."

Itu: "Yes keep on stumbling like that and I will rearrange your face."

She touched her face going backwards. She was scared and I knew how to deal with her. I was not a violent person but for the money and to save those kids from her I was going to be a little violent to her only.

Itu: "Take care before you lose everything."

I left her scared there and rushed to the car.

Ofenste: "I was...."

Itu: "No need." I looked at the kids and smiled. I had to stay more sober for this job I tell you....

23

The kids were playing at the back and I felt some kind of way. I was thinking about my triplets and wondering if I was going to be a good mother failing to convince these two to listen to me.

Tumelo: "Ntate Lesego says she is hungry."

We were about to leave town. So we were going to be forced to drive back.

Itu: "I will cook a delicious meal for you."

Lesego: "I do not want your food I want McDonalds."

I was forced to breathe in and out.

Itu: "I will also give you something yummy if you eat the food I will cook for all of us."

Tumelo: "Lady; she said she wants McDonalds.

I felt my blood boiling but I calmly replied.

Itu: "Sorry I was trying to help."

Ofenste: "Please do not be rude to mama Itu."

Tumelo: "She is not mama we have our mother, if we do not want to eat her food you can't force us."

Ofenste kept his cool but you could see his jaw line that he was angry. I was studying Tumelo and I saw something that I

couldn't put my fingers on; but I had a plan on how to help him.

He needed help I could tell.

Lesego: "Daddy; please."

Ofenste: "Okay princess."

He made a u-turn and we went back to town. I was not going to disturb family time so I offered to stay in the car.

Ofenste: "What do you want us to bring for you?"

Tumelo: "Daddy; come."

They pulled him away. They had attachment problems I think he needed more time with them than he thought.

I took my phone and downloaded a few story books then I asked my driver's wife if they could pick me up later. I was going to do this faster and get my money then get out of their lives. After a few minutes they came back. It was almost an hour but I didn't see that as I was busy on my phone. I had Dipulelo to thank because the data always came in handy.

Ofentse: "I didn't know what to buy for us."

At that point I was glad he didn't buy for himself too that was going to be a good excuse to cook for them before I left.

Itu: "No worries I will make something quick for us to eat before I go home."

Ofenste: "My hero."

I laughed; they were busy eating their meals. They seemed to be enjoying them so they loved food. That was going to be one point for me as I knew their mother was not a domesticated person.

Ofenste: "We are here. Please no bags in the sitting room go and place them in your bedrooms."

Tumelo: "We are sharing these days."

Ofenste: "What happened did Lesego have her episodes again?"

Tumelo: "Sometimes."

He said running after his sister.

Itu: "What episodes?"

Ofenste: "Nothing."

He was worked up so I knew it was not something small. I just let him be I was going to work with what I had.

I went to the kitchen and just used the available ingredients. He was watching television with Lesego sitting on his lap. There was something wrong with her and I was going to find out, what episodes were they talking about?

Itu: "Any refreshments guys before the meal?"

I wanted them to remember that I was still around. They all looked at me then their dad.

Ofenste: "No maybe after the meal."

Itu: "Okay."

Tumelo: "Why does she have to be here dad? You said it is going to be only just us so that we will enjoy."



I heard him saying to his father. I was not a heartbreaker but I was going to start with those kids. I was going to make them love me then leave them and give them space with their father. I had feelings too you know.

I made finger foods for appetiser and whipped the cream I left to create ice-cream for them. When I finished there was a mouth-watering aroma and I knew they were going to love the food.

Lesego: "Let us pray daddy."

They said grace while I was looking at them. When they were done I ate first so that they won't think that I put something in the food.

We ate watching television which we didn't have at home so all the programmes felt new to me although it was a repeat to them and they were complaining a lot.

Ofenste: "Thank you for the meal they enjoyed a lot especially the dessert."

Itu: "It's cool."

Tumelo: "We are ready for bed daddy."

Itu: "Come I will tuck you in

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where is your sister.”

Ofenste: “How are you getting home?”

He was dismissing me but I was going to do this my way.  
The sooner I do it the better.

Itu: “Worry not about me.”

I said taking Tumelo’s hand he resisted then I tightened my grip. I made sure not to hurt him. Kids were the only concern I had if they were safe and happy then I was going to be sure that I did my job.

It was my first time in their room or let me say Tumelo’s room. It was well decorated and had a double bed I guess for times like these.

Itu: “Okay who is sleeping at the far end?”

They looked at me and never replied.

Itu: “Well you have brushed your teeth if you want to pee run to the bathroom I will be waiting.”

They ran while I looked for one of the stories I downloaded earlier. They came back Tumelo entered the other end without saying anything. Lesego did the same, so I realised that she did as her brother said or what can I say she followed on his footsteps.

I fixed the cover and set down. I sat on the side table because there was no chair.

“Once upon a time there was a girl who was always sad. She lived with her family but she was never happy she wished she could have a better family according to her thoughts. She had loving sisters but she was not happy with them.”

I looked at the kids Tumelo was on his phone and Lesego was listening but looking at his brother now and again. I was going to read all the stories one at a time till they responded some day.

“One day she met a fairy who asked her what wish she should grand then she said: “I am not happy with my family please give me a small family with rich parents. The fairy told her that it will come with consequences and she was okay with whatever outcome. Then she waved a magic stick which led the girl to her new family. She was happy because the house looked exactly as

she pictured it. She could eat anything without her sisters asking from her. Then she met her rich parents who bought all the things she desired for. She was happy. As time progressed she started missing her family because her new family was too busy for her. She was always left with the house helpers. She then missed the irritating sisters and the poor life because they cared about her. She was sadder in her new life than in

her old life. She asked for the fairy to come. When she complained the fairy told her to live with her consequences and she had agreed. She cried to death the end.”

Lesego: “Ah.”

I could tell she didn’t mean to say anything.

Tumelo: “Lame.”

I was happy that they responded. Even if it was not what I expected I was happy as there was a reaction at least.

Lesego: “I am praying.”

Okay that was the first. I let her pray even if I was offended that she asked God for her parents back but I was impressed that they prayed. After she was done I took the phone from Tumelo kissed their foreheads even if they didn’t want and said my goodnights. I went to the bathroom as I was emotional. When I came back I was surprised to find them already snoring. Well that went well.

I looked at them peacefully sleeping and they looked so innocent and good looking. I even regretted using them to fight their mother. I was never going to do anything to them I had just acted impulsively.

I sent the message for the transport to come and get me. They were already on their way thank God.

Itu: "I am done they are sleeping I will see you on Monday at work."

Ofenste: "Wait about what happened earlier. I .."

Itu: "Do not worry much about it that's not part of the contract so I will not dwell on it."

Ofenste: "I wanted to clarify."

Itu: "Ofenste bo, motho wa Modimo I said it is okay. You have a weakness and it's not my place to judge you or be the jury. I am here to do my job and I will do it; as long as you won't stand on my way of doing my job. The kids are sleeping now and I am leaving."

Ofenste: "You are offending me when you say I am weak."

Itu: "You see; listening is a skill. I said you have a weakness not you are weak."

Ofenste: "It's the same thing."

Itu: "If you say so."

Before he could respond the wife called and I knew they were outside.

Itu: "My ride is here. Beside your weakness you are cold. How are we supposed to do this when you close yourself inside that

box? Not everyone is here to get you. I am paid to do this so I need to do my job well. You need to give me all the information I need when I ask instead of saying nothing all the time I ask about things. I need to do my job and get out of your hair. If I am not needed anymore you say so I am not a child and it doesn't mean money comes first. I need the money yes but above all my sanity and dignity comes first."

Ofenste: "I was...."

There was a hooter noise and I had to rush.

Itu: "I will see you on Monday."

Wife: "I told you she had a boyfriend."

They both laughed.

Itu: "I am sorry to disturb your family time."

Driver: "It's okay."

Wife: "At least I got to see where your boyfriend stays."

Itu: "Please don't be like that."

Driver: "Tell her. She wants to die single."

We laughed and talked about their kids who were becoming troublesome as they were getting older. There was no traffic as Qwaqwa never had traffic from 6pm and it was almost 7pm. I always wondered why it was like that. There were no night

restaurants or any businesses operating after 6pm. Within a few minutes they were dropping me home. I gave them money for a special even though they wanted to refuse I just left the money there. They were helping me so I was not going to remove the little the family needed.

Nkhono: "You came late. Lesedi was looking for you she said it's urgent."

Itu: "I am tired I will see her tomorrow."

I didn't even bath I just threw myself on top of the bed and it was lights out.....

24

I was woken by my ringing phone. I was freezing. Qwaqwa was like that not so friendly in the mornings and evenings.

"Hello"

I didn't even bother to check the caller. I think I was supposed to switch on my phone when I was sober enough this sleeping business made me answer bad calls.

"So now you are threatening my grandkids. Do you think you can take them away from their mother? You will never amount to the woman that she is. Make your own."

Itu: "Who is this and why are you calling me."

“Well I am your worst nightmare. If you think you are going to marry my son and take the kids away from their mother then you have to think again.”

Itu: “Oh it’s you; are you done?”

“Do not talk to me like you are talking to your friend.”

Itu: “I think we are done here.”

“If you dare drop this call you will never find happiness I tell you.”

Itu: “You think you are the one manufacturing happiness from where I am standing you are lacking it as well as you have

nothing better to do than stalk me. Was it not enough that you tried to kill me?” There was silence and I knew I have hit the nerve. “If we have nothing to discuss then I am busy sleeping here I need my beauty sleep to look good for Ofenste.”

I just dropped the call

I was not in the mood to do anything I slept; weekend mornings were slow in the veggies and snack departments. They usually started buying around mid morning.

Nkhono: “Why are you in a foul mood?”



Itu: “Nkhono; some people are like mosquitoes I tell you. You spray them they still buzz and you sleep they buzz worse. I think I will have to be a mosquito to their lives also.”

Nkhono: “Do not allow anger to control you because it will consume you from the inside.”

Itu: “I am trying Nkhono but Ofenste’s mother and her daughter in law are testing my patience.”

Nkhono: “Please excuse your emotions here because you are at work. Do you lose your sleep over things that are happening at work?”

I shook my head a no.

Nkhono: “Exactly this is a job you are doing your job so take that in and work like any other job you will have ups and

downs. Face them like a woman I raised; who is not afraid of the unknown.”

Itu: “I will calm down Nkhono. Puleng went to Ofenste’s mother about what happened yesterday.”

Nkhono: “Then be the opposite of Puleng. Do not run to him. She will do something again and things will pile up she will wonder why her son is not asking her then she will blow up and your mango will see that you can defend yourself you don’t run to anyone.”

Itu: "I think you and Lerato should get more money here because you are my advisors."

Nkhono: "I will be getting more because I will be living in a better house."

Itu: "Well I have to pay Lerato then."

Nkhono: "Lesedi is getting better I hear she is going back to write examinations."

Itu: "I have to go and check on her. She will pass I have faith in her but she will not do as well as she always does."

Nkhono: "I baked yesterday so please take some for them when you go there."

Itu: "I hope you baked more."

Nkhono: "I hope you are not taking some to your mango."

I just laughed.

Itu: "He is not my mango."

Nkhono: "Okay his lemon. Let me go and set up the stall."

Itu: "I will clean up here and cook then come and relieve you."

Nkhono: "Doesn't it show that I cleaned?"

Itu: "It shows my Nkhono but you know my cleaning and yours are two different definitions."

Nkhono: "You will get old one day. I wish I will be a living ancestor and see you struggling like me."

Itu: "I am not laughing Nkhono I love you so much now let me finish here and you need to rest."

She left while I cleaned. I was feeling better that phone call didn't even disturb me it was packs of having wise people surrounding me.

When I was done cleaning I took a container to put their cookies there. My granny always baked for the whole village so there was enough to take to Lesedi and her family.

Lesedi: "If it isn't the best stepmother ever."

She laughed at me.

Itu: "Stepmother yes the great not so sure."

Lesedi: "What did you do now?"

Itu: "I threatened the mother using the kids."

Lesedi: "What?"

Itu: "I know and I am crucifying myself already. I love kids and I will never do anything to hurt them no matter what."

Lesedi: "Do not threaten kids ever because this woman will take it as a weakness and use it against you."

Itu: "Trust me my granny gave me a lecture of a lifetime I am not coming to any fighting party again so rest assured I will be smart."

Lesedi: "Good because I compiled a file for you."

Wait a minute this girl was becoming a pro.

Lesedi: "Do not look at me like that because I am only doing it for you. I have stopped doing anything for anyone."

Itu: "Thank God because I am not going to lose you because of your investigations."

Lesedi went to the drawer she was still limping a little though.

Lesedi: "You can use it the way you want to but let me warn you once you see what is inside your life will ever be the same

again. You will be entering in a dark world. I would never use it if it were me."

What the.....

Itu: "Okay so you are giving me the file but you are advising me not to use it."

Lesedi: "Do not put words into my mouth."

We both laughed I knew she was trying to be clever with me.

Itu: "In the scale of 1-5 how dangerous is it?"

Lesedi: "A 20."

Itu: "Lesedi what the....."

Lesedi: "That is why I am saying once you use it you have to be prepared for war. Not just any war but a massive war."

Itu: "Can I rethink about this?"

Lesedi: "The file is yours I did it for you. From my point of view where I am standing not taking any sides just an independent observer who has no interest at all in any other view whether be it....."

Itu: "Get to the point."

She was really enjoying making me miserable.

Lesedi: "Well I think you will fall in love with Mr Mango."

I laughed at her hard. When I looked at her she was serious.

Itu: "Do not be ridiculous; eew I can't even imagine myself with any other man even if it's Will Smith my crush."

Lesedi: "You are still crushing on Will Smith you are so old."

She laughed at me the nerve of the child.

Itu: "That is not my point my point is I will never fall for him. Maybe his brats; because they look like angels when they are sleeping; I feel like munching on them sometime."

We laughed.

Lesedi: "You are weird but those kids are yummy they make me wanna adopt."

Itu: "Where do you know them from? Wait; do not even answer because I will not like the answer."

Lesedi: "Relax isn't it you women like to post your kids as if they are your achievements not your blessings. You even post their location. I wonder about their rights because what if they want to stay anonymous for life. That is why some perverts steal kids because they will be following you as you post that you are at wimpy Phuthaditjhaba et cetera et cetera."

Itu: "Do not be angry at me I never posted my kids."

Lesedi: "It pisses me off. Okay here is your file madam. I am going to bath see you tomorrow before I go."

Itu: "Why are you chasing me away; I will go in my own time?"

We both laughed as I stood up."

Lesedi: "I am straight and very young."

Itu: "Eew I am your mother."

Lesedi: "Good bye mother."

I laughed going out. I spoke to her granny who thanked me for the cookies. I told her to thank her friend and she laughed

The weekend passed without any drama. I went to work on Monday and I was not lucky as I met Mr Ntai on the lift.

Itu: "Morning sir."

Ofenste: "Itumelang."

I couldn't tell his mood.

Ofenste: "The kids wanted your food as I do not know how to cook"

I laughed at him.

Itu: "You should learn faster because what will you do when you are living with them full time?"

Ofenste: "You are right."

Itu: "So where are they now?"

Ofenste: "I always leave them at nana's place there is my cousin and his wife. They stay there for now as they have their own business. Starting a business is not easy so they are still finding their feet."

Itu: "Okay."

The lift left me on the third floor while he went to the fourth floor. I had a plan to cook for them the following day. When I got home I got the courage to open the file. I closed it at the speed of lightning.

“Aaahhh what the.....”

I screamed .....

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Shock could not describe how scared I was at the information I was given. How was I going to take on the big guns like that?

Her father was the big drug load who was selling Nyaope in the streets of Qwaqwa. Her mother was a nurse in the hospital which is where they got their pills in different kinds.

How did Lesedi even find such information?

On their pay roll was the commissioner; not even the station commander. There was information that the previous year the police had arrested him before they could reach Phuthaditjhaba police station there was a call from the commissioner asking them to return him where they took him from with his goods.

Do they even call drugs goods for crying out loud it was killing many potential young ladies and guys?



That was not all. Nyaope was on top as it was selling more than any other street drugs in Qwaqwa. There was also a record of a warehouse that was used by powerful prominent people to engage in sexual activities with young girls. Some were taken from UNIQWA willingly some without their concern.

Was this really happening in Qwaqwa or was I reading something from a fictitious novel from a bookshop? I was even shivering. I was not supposed to tell anyone as her father had

influence. What if they made my family disappear? We were not even a factor as we were just bugs that can be crushed under the boots.

There was also a file about child trafficking. I wondered what those walls were for; then I understood maybe they were hiding behind them all the dirt they were doing. There was no way they didn't know about their parent's shenanigans. Even her brother the one who was driving a big expensive car I guess was part of what their parents were into.

The mother who had studied at a nursing school and vowed to take care of the sick and never to harm them was doing the opposite. If the patients didn't get their medication which meant some had to die while they made so much money.

They had little kids who they protected while they didn't have mercy for the other families whose kids where abruptly taken

away from them. These people were merciless. I was not even sure if I wanted to use the file. I still valued my life maybe I was really not ready for this. Maybe that was why Ofenste was acting weak towards Puleng because he knew where her money was coming from.

I had bad dreams on that particular night I even woke up early before Nkhono could go to church and buried the file at the back of the yard. I was scared that they were going to find it if ever they sent their spied. I was paranoid right?

Nkhono: "Why are you up so early when you are not going to work? Are you having a morning prayer?"

Itu: "If God can make this problem go away I will repent today."

Nkhono: "What problem?"

Itu: "Nothing I am just saying."

Nkhono: "I know you. You will tell me when you have decided to."

I mumbled going inside. I was taking that file to my grave. I cleaned and made breakfast for her which was the first. She just looked at me with inquisitive eyes and ate in silence. I was eaten alive by this information. It was still making my intestines growl.

I went to see Lesedi before she went back to Welkom.

Lesedi: "From the looks of things you opened the file against my command."

Itu: "Listen to this child. What were you thinking digging such dirt? You knew I was going to read it. You know how curious a mind is. You can leave a box by that corner for months even years and no one will even bother it but the moment you instruct people not to touch it you will see a stampede people rushing to open it."

She laughed at me as if I had horns

Lesedi: "Curiosity killed a cat and I am not a cat."

Itu: "This is not funny."

Lesedi: "You should see your face. Ask me I know there are things you want to hear."

Itu: "Does Ofenste and his family know?"

Lesedi: "Nope. They think that they are running a legit business which they do have a shop selling genuine things but it is used to clean the money."

Itu: "Does Puleng and the brother know?"

Lesedi: "You mean brothers? Yes they all know because they are working as a family. Other brothers are based in Bethlehem."

Itu: "For real now not fabricated story. Is this real?"

She laughed at me thinking I was joking then she kept quiet when she saw that I was not blinking.

Lesedi: "I am a hacker dude not a storyteller. I even failed English at school I hacked into the system and gave myself a B."

Itu: "What?"

Lesedi: "You should have seen yourself."

I laughed this time around. She looked serious what was I supposed to think. With her capabilities I think she was capable of doing that.

Lesedi: "Are you not going to work tomorrow?"

Itu: "I am going but passing by Nana's place to give the kids some food and cookies."

Lesedi: "The kids who still do not talk to you."

Itu: "I am doing my job soon they will be fine they are kids after all."

Lesedi: "If you say so Mrs Mango. I will see you when we close. I know I will not do well but I will do my best as I have been catching up. They sent some of my work via my email."

Itu: "Please do pass and don't cheat."

Lesedi: "One thing I know is; I will never cheat; no matter how unprepared I am."

Itu: "That's my girl. Now come and I give you a hug; I will see you when schools close and next year is your final year then I will be eating and chowing your money left right and centre."

Lesedi: "I am not working; I will work after 10 years."

I laughed going out after hugging her. She always cheered me and made my day. I was going to miss her.

When I woke up the following day I cooked; when I was done cooking I used the containers I had bought as my granny complained about people I give food not bringing them back.

Itu: "Nkhono I am off to work."

Nkhono: "Tomorrow morning you have to go and buy some stock these kids are now buying daily."

Itu: "I will try to do that. See you later."

I rushed to the bus stop and took a taxi that took me straight to Phuthaditjhaba. I knew Nana's house from a distance I was hoping I was not going to get lost. I was lucky the taxi didn't go around looking for people. I called my driver to cancel the morning trip he was only going to pick me up after work.

When I opened the gate the kids saw me and ran to the opposite direction. Well I was not hurt by their actions anymore.

Itu: "Granny; how are you? I brought these for you guys so that you won't trouble yourself cooking for the kids."

Granny: "Thank you my daughter. If you keep on feeding me I might forgive you." We both laughed. "You did well because Paballo and his wife went early they thought they will be back soon but their supplier took longer. Starting a business is hard."

Itu: "They will soon pick up don't worry all they need is your support as friends and family then they will be happy."

Granny: "You are right. Thank you for the food; do not be late for work."

Itu: "Say hie to the kids I know they still hate me."

Granny: "Hate is a strong word; so do not say it. They will come around."

Itu: "So says everyone around me but they still run away from me."

Granny: "Do not stress about them."

I said my goodbyes and took a taxi to town. I met Ofenste looking for me at the lockers.

Itu: "Mr Ntai."

Ofenste: "Nana tells me that you brought food for them. Thank you very much."

Itu: "Did you know?"

What is wrong with you Itu? Do you want to die? Why will you ask him that?

Ofenste: "Pardon."

Itu: "I mean what do you know? I came right on time because Paballo was held up so Nana was going to slave on the stove."

Ofenste: "Thank you very much and Nana is very happy you know that she loves your food."

Itu: "I see it in your face that you wish you were nana."

Ofenste: "Lemon I will kill you."

I laughed at him taking out my cleaning stuff.

Itu: "Do not worry I will cook for you all when I visit one day."

Ofenste: "How about this weekend?"

Itu: "If I didn't know you I was going to say you also look forward to seeing me."

He laughed.

Ofenste: "Do not flatter yourself Ms I know how to cook."

We both laughed.

Itu: "It seems you want my cooking more nana was right. What is happening weekend?"

Ofenste: "I want to take them to Kestel. Little Africa has been their favourite since so I need time out with them."

Itu: "Is it a good time for me to interrupt the family?"

Ofenste: "We are family aren't we?"

He said air quoting the word "Family." He was right I needed to do my duty.

Itu: "Alright I will be there but I do not know how to swim."

He laughed patting my shoulder going out.

Ofenste: "Who doesn't know how to swim at this day and age?"

Was he for real. I had never seen a swimming pool in real life. How was I going to learn how to swim then? People born with things assume that everyone has a privileged to do them too. He went to a multiracial school so he probably learnt how to swim there.

I was agitated when weekend came but I bought a swimming costume and went to their home. He was going to drive us



there. They were still changing when there was a knock at the door.

I was forced to go and attend to the door as I was the only one near it and I was done packing the picnic basket.

I opened the door with a smile only to be met by the devil.

“Are you kidding me?”

I didn't mean to say it aloud but it just did come out uninvited.....

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I opened the door with a smile only to be met by the devil herself. Why did it have to be me always opening the door to the devils? Granny was not a devil it was just a metaphor in her case. This time around it was the devil herself.

“Are you kidding me?”

I didn't mean to say it aloud but it just did come out uninvited.

““Are you kidding me?” are you really saying this standing on my son's door way saying this to me.”

It was monster in law. I wondered what she wanted at that time of the day when we were about to leave.

Itu: “Hello, how are you?”

Mother: "You have the nerve in my son's house. You are being rude and you expect me to answer your greeting after that."

Itu: "Well."

I just left her standing there and continued in the kitchen.

Ofenste: "Who was at the door? Oh mom."

He said going to the sitting room.

Mother: "Does she stay here when you are still married?"

Ofenste: "Mother did you come here to judge me or did you come here for something?"

Mother: "Are you sure you want to go this route with Puleng."

At the mention of Puleng I just flinched it was like a cold shiver down my spine.

Ofenste: "We are about to leave mother what can I help you with?"

Mother: "When you were still with Puleng you were never this rude. Now you do not know how to talk to me your mother."

Ofenste: "Modimo waka (My God)"

Tumelo: "Granny you are here?"

Mother: "You said I should come for a visit."

Tumelo: "I didn't know we were going for a picnic to Little Africa. We are going to have a good time come with us."

Ofenste: "No

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maybe granny has something to do; she was not prepared."

Mother: "I will join you next time I know there will be no space for me.

Tumelo: "We can leave daddy's friend here to cook for us."

Well thank you Tumelo for the vote of confidence. Well there goes my weekend because I knew Ofenste always chose his family over me so I was not holding my breath.

Ofenste: "Tumelo go and check on your sister while I talk to granny."

He ran past the kitchen I was about to pack my things.

Ofenste: "Mother; I am going with my kids and my girlfriend to this picnic. Next time you need to call when you are coming even if it is to see the kids. You respected Puleng enough to call all the times. If you are not going to respect my house then we can stop these visitations I will stay in my house while you stay in yours to avoid conflicts. If you can't respect Itumelang then respect me because this is what I want."

He was boiling I was even surprised that he could be so tough if he wanted.

Mother: "You are herding for disaster my son. Let me warn you. This won't end well."

Ofenste: "I will call you when I am bringing the kids."

He was dismissing her. He even led her to the door I just sat in the kitchen chair and pretended to be reading something on my phone.

Tumelo: "Is granny in the car already?"

Ofenste: "No we are not going with her today."

Tumelo: "I wanted her to go with us this is not fair."

Ofenste: "Well if you missed her that much then we can leave you at her house we will pick you up when we come back."

Lesego: "I want to go swimming."

Ofenste: "We will my princess; don't worry; we will only leave your brother then drive faster."

Tumelo: "I will go."

Ofenste: "What was that?"

Tumelo: "I am sorry I will not say anything about granny I will join you when we go for our picnic."

Ofenste: "I thought as much."

I was not going to get involved at all. I took all the packed things to the car. I placed them in the boot.

We left with happy champs even the sulking Tumelo was happy chatting with his sister. My phone rang I smiled.

Itu: "My love. How are you my husband?"

I saw a side look and smiled alone. We were not in a relationship he had no right to look at me the way he did. It was Nhlanhla, I was surprised why he was calling me but I never showed it.

Nhlanhla: "I hear you are out enjoying yourself."

Itu: "You were also out in Jozi doing God knows what and now you are accusing me."

Nhlanhla: "I am still single if that is your way of asking if I met anyone. I am not going to cheat on you; not today; not ever you are my wife."

Itu: "You are so sweat now I have company what did you want?"

Nhlanhla: "I can't say it over the phone I will wait for you when you come back."

Itu: "I am not sure when I will be back."

Nhlanhla: "I will wait you are not going to sleep over are you?"

Itu: "You are now giving me ideas."

Nhlanhla: "Don't you even laugh at me when....."

Itu: "I love you I will call you when I get home. Just find something to do while you wait for me."

I said the last sentence deliberately as I saw that Ofenste was looking at me with an eye that can kill me.

Ofenste: "You are married."

Itu: "Kind of."

Ofenste: "What an answer."

He looked at me and I looked at the kids from the back. I was not going to have such a conversation in front of his kids.

We arrived at the venue then paid it was surprising that I never had any episodes when I was leaving Qwaqwa to Kestel. I was slowly but surely overcoming my fears. He took some of the things from the car the kids also took their bags I took the rest.

Tumelo: "We are early so we get to choose the right spot next to the music speakers."

Ofenste: "I am not playing music today."

Both: "Nooooooooooooo."

I just laughed as they placed their bags on the table.

Ofenste: "Go and change while I light the braai stand."

Tumelo: "Yes we are going to have hotdogs. Make them as mean as last time dad."

I just smiled on my own thinking about my kids and Lethabo. Were they going to be close or were they going to be closer to me like they did when they were small; I was not going to dwell on the past. They change fast to their swimming costumes they were so happy and excited I loved the way they behaved when they were happy. To my observation they loved outdoors more.

I helped Ofenste with the meat while they were jumping on the trampolines nearby.

Ofenste: "So when did you get married?"

Itu: "May we please enjoy today without heavy stuff? I am still digesting what your mother said."

Oops

Ofenste: "What did she say?"

Itu: "Nothing much I am going to handle it my way."

Ofenste: "I promised you that I will protect you from anything."

Itu: "This is my war don't worry."

Tumelo: "Dad; we want to go inside the pool before many people come."

Itu: "That is a good idea and the water is still clean."

He looked at his dad who nodded then I followed him. Lesego was already waiting. I had changed to a swimming costume also with a towel over it of course. I sat down and watched them in the shallow end of the pool. They knew what they were doing. I was wishing the child in me would never go inside the water.

I took my phone and took a few pictures. They were genuinely happy.

"You need to get inside there."

I looked up Ofenste was standing over me. I was then sitting at the edge of the pool with my feet inside the pool.

Itu: "If you start I will follow suit."

I was lying through my teeth. There was no way I was drowning in front of people.

Ofenste: "I am going to change and you will see. I will be up there in the adult pool."

Itu: "Or so this is only for kids?"



Ofenste: "You didn't think this was the pool for everyone did you?"

I felt stupid but then I was not to blame it was my first time at the place and surrounded with so much water.

He went back I think to finish with the braai. After a while he switched on the music and the kids together with others who had arrived screamed and started dancing. I laughed looking at them. I was relaxed when Ofenste pushed me inside the water.

Itu: "I told you that I can't swim."

Ofenste: "I don't believe you."

I was kicking and screaming with water flooding my lungs.

Ofenste: "Look at you doing like a duck; swim properly."

He really thought I was faking it. I was sinking and there was no way out. I was getting weak on my knees.

"She is really drowning."

It was a female voice from the far end. I was going down which meant I was moving to the deep end. Why was I unable to control myself?

Lesego: "Dad she is going to die."

"People please do something."

The same female voice was pleading. There was no time for self pity I just felt weak and closed my eyes.....

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I opened my eyes and I was in bed fully dressed. I jumped because it was not my bed. What happened?

Everything came flooding about the water. I was also thinking about the fire so the phobia kicked in. I will not say I was in the dark room but when I was drowning I felt like there was nothing to fight for. I didn't even have the zeal to fight the water.

I looked at the door there was Tumelo standing by the door looking at me like he had seen a ghost. He ran out calling his father. I just sat down and placed my hands on my forehead. What did I really get myself into with this guy?

“Dad is she dead?”

Lesego was following them asking.

Tumelo: “No silly I said she was standing. The dead can't move.

Lesego: “I was just asking.”

Ofenste: “Guys please give me some space with aunty Itu I will call you when she is feeling okay.”

They left. I was not feeling okay emotionally. Ofenste was not a real human being. Or they did something to him these stupid in laws with Puleng.

Ofenste: "I am so sorry about earlier I didn't think you are serious about the fact that you can't swim."

Itu: "I didn't go to white schools like you did. Have you seen a swimming pool here in Qwaqwa in your life? So where was I going to learn how to swim?"

Ofenste: "I am sorry."

Itu: "Now please tell me what do you want with me because I do not see my purpose here?"

He placed his hands on his head then wiped his face. He finally sat down.

Ofenste: "Puleng was my first girlfriend and she became my wife. So I do not know any other love or interaction with a female except her. She is a sensitive person and we always did the things her way. I was not trying to kill you but I was just being playful. I am trying to change but it will take time. I only know how to interact with my kids now when I am a single parent. She made sure that the kids were raised by the house help. Nana helped me to bond with them I cannot ask Nana to help me with you also. I am so sorry if you want to cut the contract I will pay you the remaining money.

I do not think I will ever manage a relationship. Or maybe I should just go back to her as my mother is suggesting.”

Itu: “What is your heart telling you?”

Ofenste: “I was never in a healthy marriage and my kids are happy now more than we were a family. I love my kids too much so I am not going to subject them to what they went through when they were growing up. I loved my wife so much and I never saw anything wrong in what she was doing until I was far away from her.”

Itu: “You are not answering my question?”

Ofenste: “I do not know. Can I please start afresh and try. This time I will try harder.”

Itu: “I am not going to work with you if you are going to be cold and close me out if you are done with me then tell me and I won’t bother you.”

Ofenste: “Okay let us try.”

Itu: “Let us try what really?”

Ofenste: “I will be open to you.”

Itu: “I can work with that. As for me I will fight my own battle; so do not think I will trust you to fight my battles.”

Ofenste: "Fair enough."

Itu: "May I please go home I feel stuffy."

Ofenste: "I am so sorry about earlier. You might not be able to go home it's almost midnight already."

Itu: "What?"

I checked the time indeed it was late.

Ofenste: "Do not worry I called your granny although I left out the fact that I almost killed you. I hope she is going to forgive me."

Itu: "I am not going to tell her because this is embarrassing really. So where am I going to sleep."

Ofenste: "I will change the sheets and you will sleep here I will sleep in Tumelo's room."

Itu: "I don't even have towels or toiletries."

Ofenste: "I am a collector of towels and I have a new tooth brush. As for some of the girly stuff you will have to share with Lesego if you do not want to smell like a man."

Itu: "Let me go and bath."

I left for the bathroom. I was used to the basin where we boil water and bath the head first then the upper body before you

get in and wash the lower body standing. These were the things we had to live with the rest of our lives.

I filled the tub I wanted to soak because it was my only chance I was going to get. He came in and placed the towels and toiletries. When he was closing the door I heard Lesego asking: "Will she die?"

Ofenste: "Do you want her to die."

Lesego: "I don't know but no one is supposed to die."

Tumelo: "You do not know what you are talking about. She will not die don't worry because she is okay now."

I just laughed wondering if they were going to finally let me in. After my bath I washed my clothes and I wore his t-shirt which left my bum hanging out I thought I was going to walk on it but it was not descent. I had to shout for him.

Itu: "Please borrow me your sweat pants."

Ofenste: "The t-shirt is too small?"

Itu: "Yes would I ask if it was not."

He laughed at me. I ended up laughing also. He opened slightly and gave it to me. I felt like a destitute asking for things. Lesego's toiletries were too Barbie for me I had to use his.

Ofenste: "The food is ready; let us eat."

Itu: "This late."

Tumelo: "We were waiting for you to wake up. Daddy was even planning on calling the ambulance."

I just looked at them and sat down. They were not even tired.

Ofenste: "The kids were traumatised they also slept when we got here."

Itu: "So what happened when I drowned?"

Ofenste: "Story for another day."

I just nodded and continued eating. I was really hungry and my stomach was attesting to that.

"Time for bed; for little kids."

It was when I was done washing dishes. I wanted to get to bed and talk to Lerato or Lesedi anyone even Dipulelo.

Lesego: "But we are not tired."

Itu: "Come I will tell you a story."

They were reluctant again but I took their hands and led them to their bedroom. Tumelo was still at the far end busy on his phone.

"Once upon a time there was a princess who was abandoned by the queen because she was young and she didn't want a baby.

The princess was left with a fairy godmother who loved her with all her heart. The godmother was very poor but she gave the princess everything. When she was growing up other kids used to laugh at her because she was always wearing clothes that were either too big or too small. She had everything as her godmother gave her all the love she can get. She went to school to work hard so she never had funny friends. She was always chosen to go for academic projects but because the fairy

godmother could not even afford to give her transport money. Her godfather passed on leaving the two of them to fend for themselves. She passed at school and went to university life was better as she was given some money by the government to use. She met her prince charming there....”

Itu: “I will end here for today.”

Lesego: “No please do not.”

Yessssss some reaction I wanted. I was happy with my progress she was softening up.

Itu: “If you want to hear more then you have to talk to me. I will finish it even tomorrow during breakfast. For now be the good princess not the bad one so that we will finish the story.”

Lesego: “Okay good night aunty.”



I hugged her and looked at Tumelo who looked aside placed his phone away and slept. I kissed his forehead also. When I was leaving the room I looked back and uttered "I love you."

Ofenste: "Are they sleeping?"

I jumped as I was not prepared he had startled me.

Itu: "Yes they are."

Ofenste: "Thank you for telling them bed time stories. Lesego couldn't stop talking about the story."

Well my strategy was working. Well I was going to make it.

Itu: "It is part of my job don't worry. Good night."

He looked hurt but it was the truth. I took my phone and texted Lerato who was still online. We spoke for a long time I then found myself awake very early.

When they woke up there was breakfast ready for them and I was waiting for my clothes to dry up so I could go home.

I had called Nkhono who told me that she was going to church so i will find the keys under the rock were we hid it.

Itu: "I will be going home soon."

Ofenste: "We missed the picnic yesterday so i was thinking because your granny is not home; why don't we have our picnic outside by the garden before you go home."

Lesego: "Yes and you will finish the story."

She was so excited.

Ofenste: "What do you say T-boy?"

Tumelo: "Whatever"

Ofenste: "Well two versus one we win."

They danced I just laughed. Tumelo continued eating. We cleaned the kitchen with Tumelo who was not responding.

When we were done the picnic was set outside with their mini braai stand. We sat down watching Lesego showing us some dance moves.

We really enjoyed Tumelo was in a better mood as we were all playing different games. I was done taking things inside and sweeping while Ofenste was cleaning the braai stand when Tumelo came running from the house.

"Daddy; come quickly."

He left everything in a flash and ran curiosity got the better of me and I rushed inside also. I wasn't prepared for what I saw that day.....

“Please don’t you stand there I told you to bring her medication.”

Ofenste snapped at his son; I was even scared but then I looked at Lesego who was on the floor groaning in pain her feet were coiling getting harder her face was forming veins. It was getting worse as she was light skinned. Her veins looked like they were about to pop out.

I was scared to even move. I watched as he placed a cushion under her head.

Tumelo came running.

“What were you doing? Were you digging it?”

Tumelo: “No I was.....”

Ofenste: “Get out of here.”

He ran like a scared little puppy. I felt a lump on my throat. What was going on? Lesego was on the floor still having an attack when he was busy on the floor fiddling with an injection trying to administer a shot to her.

Ofenste: “Don’t just stand there you are making me nervous and I am going to make mistakes.”

He barked and I almost peed my pants. I ran like a headless chicken wondering what was wrong with Lesego when I

bumped into scared and crying Tumelo. I took him into my arms and hugged him tight not letting go as he was as scared as I was.

Itu: "Come."

I went to their room and sat on the bed with him.

Itu: "What is going on?"

Tumelo: "She is having one of her episodes."

Itu: "How often does she have then?"

Tumelo: "As often as they want to come. The doctor says she has a something something- attached to her brain and they need to remove it. It is like the other twin. When she wants to play it would not want to play so it will be like they are fighting in her brain with this other twin."

Okay I was totally in a movie. Did these things happen to blacks?

Itu: "This is scary."

I didn't mean to say that but I was getting scared too. It was the first time for Tumelo to talk to me so I was going to milk that cow the best way I know how.

Itu: "So are they going to remove it?"

Tumelo: "It needs a lot of money. My grandpa has it but my mom doesn't want to go with her. She says she will grow up like that and decide when she is old."

Itu: "Will that be okay won't it be too late."

Tumelo: "I think it will be too late because the doctor said if she is growing the other twin is growing also and her tantrums growing more."

Itu: "How does it make you feel when daddy shouts?"

Tumelo: "It is like I do not matter because even mom does that she panics and shouts. They don't know that I know how to take care of her when she has her episodes. When I am left with my grannies they teach me how to do it. Even at school when it happens they call me from my class and I do that and get to spend time with her in my class for the day."

He felt wanted like he was doing a great job so why were the parents doing this to him?

Itu: "Why don't you tell them this?"

Tumelo: "I tried so many times but they don't listen it is like I do not exist. When these episodes happen I am invisible to them for even three or more days; they will only take care of her."

I felt my heart bleeding they were mean to me but they were just kids. I was going to make sure he gets his rightful place as

the first born and stop being their punching bag when their daughter had her episodes.

I took him to my arms and rocked him to sleep it was getting late and I was supposed to go to work the following morning but I was not going to do that. He was my manager so I was going to take care of his kids while he covered my behind at work.

I was in tears watching him sleep with some hiccups. He needed so much attention also. Now that is the gap I saw on him when I first met them. I was not sure what it was exactly but the neglect they administer on their son was eating him alive. They were supposed to do what their grandparents were doing to him. They were bad people yes; but the kids were innocent and they didn't ask to be born in that family.

I wiped my tears as I saw Ofenste standing by the door. I stood up without saying anything when I passed him I stopped and said: "I will make dinner while they are still sleeping."

I suspected that Lesego was sleeping too. When I passed Ofenste's bedroom indeed she was sleeping. I cooked absent minded. I was thinking about how scary this was. Divorces mostly affect kids more than the parents. These kids were crying out for help and there was not a single adult who wanted

to step up and take over. Both of these parents were selfish. Ofenste was just a standby player in his own life. I hope I was making sense

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hell yes I was making sense he was just watching his life from the terraces.

Ofenste: "You see this is the story of my life. Half of the times I don't see whether I am going or coming. I am just defeated."

I composed myself hoping I was not going to burst on him.

Itu: "Life is what you make it Mr Ntai."

Ofenste: "You are saying this because you have never been in my shoes."

I wanted to say something but it was useless arguing with him.

Itu: "You are right I will never know how your shoe will feel like in my feet because I have never walked in your path."

I continued cooking he wanted to say something but I was not going to allow him to do that. I was even planning on going home at that moment but I thought of the kids. If I was going to abandon them then who was going to have their backs?

I called my granny and explained to her. She was hurt but assured me that she was going to be fine as long as I took care

of the kids. My granny trusted me from childhood because I was always honest with her as she taught me to. Even when I started dating Lethabo I was not going to hide him so I told her. She loved him from the first sight but warned me about his mother. When he broke my virginity I cried to her because that was the most painful story of my life. You would swear that I was not going to go back to him. But I even went back for seconds. I just laughed thinking about that.

“Food is ready.”

He was watching television. I gave him his food. Tumelo came. I smiled at him.

Itu: “You are awake. Come and wash your hands the food is ready.”

Ofenste: “You are awake come let us eat. Go and wash your hands and tell daddy what you dreamt of in the afternoon.”

He laughed and went to the kitchen to wash his hands. Maybe he was used to his father who changed characters.

Ofenste: “So what did you dream about?”

Tumelo: “Come on dad I am not a child anymore. I didn’t dream.”

They both laughed.



Ofenste: "I am your father but I dream always."

He was good with him I was wondering who was the Ofenste who screamed at us.

Tumelo: "I do not dream even at night."

Ofenste: "Now that is a white lie."

Itu: "I called Nkhono that I will be coming tomorrow at home. May I please have a day off so that I can look after them while you go to work?"

They both looked at me.

Ofenste: "Will you do that?"

Itu: "I don't mind at all."

Ofenste: "Thank you."

He looked behind me and Lesego was standing there.

"Princess you are awake."

Just like that Tumelo was ignored again. After eating he took his phone and ignored them too.

I washed dishes while Tumelo took a bath. Ofenste bathed Lesego.

After some time I was done I went to bath also and put on the same sweater and sweat pants. I joined them in the sitting room they were watching television.

Offered to take them to bed again, he wanted to refuse but Lesego insisted I know it was about the bedtime story.

Lesego: "Please continue with the story."

I knew it I just laughed while tucking them in. At least Tumelo never resisted he even allowed me to kiss his forehead.

"Okay the princess met her prince charming. They were poor so the prince was kind of rich he took her to his home but the parents never liked the princess. She was sad but her granny told her that other people are mean always but they do not mater in life. They finished school and went to live in a far away land. They visited after sometime. They were still young but they loved each other. They then had a baby. But when they went to the hospital they did not get only one baby but three."

Lesego: "What triplets."

I laughed and thought children at her age were clever I thought it was three twins I never knew the name.

"So they grew up with their loving parents. The prince promised the kitten and the princess that he will build a house. One day

there was a fire and the prince and the kittens burnt and all died.”

Lesego: “Ah I do not want to hear the rest of the story.”

Tumelo: “Is it a true story?”

It was the first time to respond to my story. I just nodded.

Tumelo: “So what happened.”

“They buried the kittens and the prince back home. The princess never went to the far away land where they stayed. The princess was always sad till one day she also met two sad kittens. She vowed to protect them. The end.”

Tumelo: “This is not a story this is true. You know the person.”

Lesego: “Do you know the person.”

Tumelo: “No this is your story. Your kittens died.”

Lesego: “Did you have babies.” Itu: “It is late; let us go to bed.”

Lesego: “But we want to hear the end.”

Itu: “We will finish it don’t worry.”

I kissed their foreheads with tears in my eyes. Lucky enough it was slightly dark as the only light that was on was the side lamp.

I sat on the other side of the bed and watched them sleeping. I then took my phone and goggled.

“The evil twin on the brain”

What I was reading on the page got me goose bumped for life.....

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I was in awe. Of all the sicknesses that can affect this child why would she be affected by such an illness?

I was reading with my phone clashed in my hand. If it was a glass it was going to cut my hand. I wasn't even aware that this was possible. I read about the lady who was operated on and it was successful. Her mother had money so why was she not sending her for the operation.

I sent a message to Lesedi.

Itu: “This is the case so why is the mother not taking some action?”

Lesedi: “Their money is dirty so they are looking for a cleaner to make it legit but in this side of the world it's difficult. Such an operation is very vital it needs more money.”

Itu: “Why don't they ask for donations?”

Lesedi: "I think they do not want many people digging into their lives because once they ask for donations then the media will be involved and then people will start questioning about their money."

Itu: "But they have people in their payroll."

Lesedi: "Only small town people but this is a big issue because the operation will be done outside the country so they are bound to be caught."

Itu: "This is so messed up."

Lesedi: "I told you that once you open that file your life will never be the same again."

Itu: "I do not even know what I got myself into but I am not going to leave without helping these kids."

I said my goodnights and then closed my eyes a little then I was off to lalaland. Qwaqwa is very cold at midnight I was surprised that I was under the blankets. I suspected Ofenste carried me to his room.

I woke up early again to make breakfast for him. There were no lunchboxes in the cupboard I wanted to pack lunch for him. I found one after a long search which I bet belonged to the kids.

Ofenste: "Good morning. You didn't have to cook I hardly cook in the mornings."

Itu: "Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. That is why you are losing the weight so much."

Ofenste: "Listen to her she thinks she know me. I will listen then doctor."

I laughed at him.

Itu: "I packed lunch."

Ofenste: "I think I will be fat for a day. Well the kids always wake up late. So you will have the house to yourself for a while."

Itu: "Well I will clean."

Ofenste: "Lesego needs to get her medication after the meal. She will be fine today but just in case she has an episode please call me."

Itu: "What is wrong with her?"

Ofenste: "I do not want to talk about it now."

Itu: "When will it be the right time because I am here taking care of them?"

Ofenste: "Itumelang I said not today."

Okay I knew when not to push people but I was not going to let Lesego down. I gave him his lunch box and started cleaning the

house. As he said they woke up very late. I talked to Tumelo as I wanted to understand Lesego's condition.

Itu: "I need some answers about Lesego."

Tumelo: "What for why would you ask that? I called mom and told her about yesterday I wanted her to come today."

Itu: "Oh so she is coming?"

Tumelo: "No she said she is busy."

Itu: "Tumelo; you are old enough to know what is going on around you. I am not the enemy here. I do not know but your parents are both busy and I am trying to help here. I am not going to be your mother and I am not going to take her place. Your parents will always be your parents no matter what. My mother left me and I never knew her but it didn't erase the fact that she is my mother. Even if she doesn't have any other kids she will always be mama-itu. So it's up to you. If you want me to help then you will also help me; if you don't want then fine by me."

I left him there eating while I went to clean the bathroom. I had read about this type of a brain tumour. It was called a Teratomas and it was not even worse than I could imagine. I didn't have money but if I were to be faced by the same predicament I think I would have tried something.

I was even wondering why I cared so much when the real parents didn't care. I finished cleaning Lesego was still sleeping I was worried so I woke her up. She was okay.

Lesego: "Are your kittens angels now?"

I just laughed because it was the first thing she said when I woke her up.

Itu: "Hold your horses young lady it's time to bath."

I bathed her even though she was protesting. We played while she was bathing. Tumelo stood by the door as if he wanted to say something.

Lesego: "You are not supposed to watch girls while they are bathing. I will tell daddy."

Tumelo: "Whatever."

I smiled looking at Lesego who looked so beautiful. She took her mother's complexion but she looked like her father. Her father was not really bad at all; if he could smile a lot because he was always sad making him look old and wrinkled.

She chose her clothes.

Lesego: "Are you going to stay with us forever?"

Itu: "We can never say forever because it is a very long time as the future is not guaranteed at all."



Lesego: "Are you saying this because of your kittens."

Itu: "Amen."

She closed her mouth and laughed.

Lesego: "I am just asking. Are you going to tell us the rest of the story?"

Itu: "If you are a good girl maybe I will. Go to the sitting room I will come and feed you."

Lesego: "I am not a baby silly."

I laughed tickling her.

Itu: "You are my kitten so I will feed you."

Lesego: "Never."

She said running to the sitting room where her brother was.

After sometime the brother came to the kitchen.

"I am sorry about earlier on."

Itu: "Okay Tumelo no need."

I ignored him and went to Lesego who ate while I was watching her. I wanted to give her the medication so I went to look for it. I came back with the water.

Tumelo: "May I give her the medication?"

I was not that heartless I was not going to take that away from him. I just took my phone and recorded him. He was so careful and he read with precession. If only I knew that the video was going to help him I would have recoded the whole events of the day. Nevertheless at least it helped.

Lesego: "Please tell us the story."

Itu: "Not now please watch something while I cook lunch."

Lesego: "Can I cook with you?"

Itu: "If you are a good girl and you behave you might join me."

She sulked but I assured her it will be for her good not to sulk. Sulking was going to take away her point. Tumelo came to the kitchen this time around he was not taking prisoners he wanted me to listen to him.

Tumelo: "I am sorry because I know you think I was being rude. I am trying to help where I could with Lesego but dad always treat me like a baby. He doesn't know what granny said. When he is teaching me how to take care of my sister he told me that life is not guaranteed so I need to know how to take care of my sister in case my parents were to leave this earth."

I didn't know what to say he spoke like a grown up and he was mature I wish Ofenste could see this so I recoded him.

Itu: "Please tell me how you do it so that I can also do it."

Tumelo: "I know my parents think that I am too young but I love my sister too much that is why I asked grandfather to teach me. When she has her episodes I usually let her be just for 20minutes if you do that it will give her body a chance for the blood to flow again. If you administer a shot while she is in a trance she might go to a coma."

Itu: "What?"

Tumelo: "She once stayed in a coma for two weeks when mom did her shot and I was scared she was going to die."

Itu: "Who discovered the brain tumour?"

Tumelo: "They took her to some doctors at Water what something a university in Johannesburg."

I was cracking my head till I remember Wits Medical School which had the best doctors they had in the country.

Itu: "Do not worry I will try to talk to your father to at least let you help."

Tumelo: "He will never agree."

Itu: "Leave everything to me. By the way I am not the enemy here and I didn't come here to steal your parents so please whatever issues you have with me tell me. If you want your dad to yourself tell me because I know if I had a dad I would have been selfish too. With my mom I don't know because I got

all the love I craved for from my granny. I don't think I ever missed my mom I think I am still okay without her."

I left him there as I remembered I didn't clean the tab. I took a bath also and washed his clothes that he had borrowed me. I was ready to go. The minute he was back I was going to take a taxi.

Just as if a cue few minutes before he came home; Lesego had her episode. Tumelo looked at me as if he is asking for approval. I was scared I didn't know what to do.

"I got this."

He assured me and I knew he was going to do well. He was doing everything with care he was not even panicking. When he was about to administer a shot Ofenste came in.

Ofenste: "What the hell."

Itu: "Please stop it he is almost done."

Ofenste: "I told you to call me and I ...."

He was shouting and I was not going to have any of it. Tumelo was just in a verge of panic.

Itu: "Just stop it."

I was shouting at the top of my voice so angry. He stopped; Tumelo looked at me and I nodded for approval he did the shot

ran his hand lovingly on the shot. He adjusted the pillow I had brought and added a cushion. He stepped back and came holding a towel which was wet. Placed it on top of her chest; within a few minutes the chest moved normally and her breathing was normalising. He then reduced the head rest by removing the last pillow he had added. He rolled her to her side and she was getting back to normal.

Tumelo: "Please help me carry her to the room."

I jumped before I was asked again. She was a little heavy but we managed. He stayed in their room with her. I went to the sitting room Ofenste was still standing like a statue.

Ofenste: "I am ....."

Itu: "Listen to this."

I played the video for him. He was in tears when listening to him telling me.

Itu: "Tumelo is old and a human being. Do not let this divorce and Lesego's sickness make you lose your son. He is mature and he can do this. Instead of shouting at him while taking care of Lesego involve him."

Ofenste: "I....."

We were disturbed by a knock. I went to open and there was a lady. Where did I know her from? Oh well that was my cue.

Itu: "I am leaving now."

I didn't wait for him I took my bag and left I was too exhausted for any drama.....

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The taxi almost passed with me as I was sleeping. I was so tired I really needed some rest. When I woke up I was disoriented a little.

"Ausi; where are you dropping off?"

"Where are we now?"

"I am herding to town now"

"Please drop me at the next bus stop" I said rubbing my eyes. It was the correct stop I sighed with relief.

Nkhono: "Itumelang wee. I didn't raise you to cohabit with a man."

I just laughed at my granny for being dramatic. I threw myself at the sofa which was about to give up on us. Life was so unfair

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we were trying to cover up on the other side and the other side was getting messed up.

Itu: “Nkhono; stop being dramatic. I am emotionally drained as it is I can’t even think straight.”

Nkhono: “What happened?”

I told her everything. She was shocked also.

Itu: “I wanted to say it is not my job but these kids have no one both parents are just robots.”

Nkhono: “So they are going to let this girl be killed by this evil twin?”

Itu: “I am not sure what to think or say Nkhono. I don’t even have money I don’t even know any doctor I could ask.”

Nkhono: “You said your friend in Limpopo her husband is a doctor.”

Itu: “No Nkhono not her husband but I know people she knows who are doctors.”

Nkhono: “Then you can worry less and try to ask them. Do you know there is only as much you can do for the child? As long as the parents are not onboard then they can’t even examine her.”

Itu: “That is the sad reality. People who don’t care about their kids even if they have money get to have them; some of us who would kill to have kids they were taken away from us.”

I was in the verge of tears. Life was so unfair. Whoever was holding the pen writing our destinies was sure one biased person because he/she had some favourites.

Nkhono: "Do not even say that my child you will be happy one day."

Itu: "I am not holding my breath at all because I know I am not the favourite person to the orator as I am always on the sidelines watching other people get happiness and happy ever after. All I ever wanted was to be a mother and live my life peacefully. I never asked to be rich or to have everything in the world but did I get what I wanted? No; I do not deserve such things as I am not worth it."

I just let the tears flow. I took my bag and went to my room I only heard Nkhono say:

"Not everything is lost; you are still alive that is what matters."

I was thinking to myself that being alive is not a bonus when I was still suffering. I placed water in a kettle because I needed to bath and rest. Nkhono was going to forgive me I was not in the mood to even cook. I smelt mutton stew her favourite so I guessed I was not obliged to cook.

After bathing and feeling the smell of my cheap lotion and soap I felt very clean and refreshed. I called Lerato to talk about Lesego.



Lerato: "So they can't even take her to the doctor for some operation?"

I left out the part about them doing illegal business. I was not going to die young.

Itu: "So can you talk to your doctor friend."

Lerato: "She is not a doctor but married or friends with the family. I will tell her then get back to you. Even though; they will need parents to sign the paper work."

Itu: "Leave that to me I have an idea."

Lerato: "Not an illegal one I hope."

Itu: "No; never; I will never expose the kids to that; it's all legal."

Lerato: "What I was afraid of is happening."

Itu: "What are you talking about?"

Lerato: "You are getting attached to the kids and it will be difficult for you to leave when your work is done."

Itu: "It's not like that."

Lerato: "It is like that. I know I am a mother too so you can't fool me. Your motherly instinct is kicking in."

Itu: "Please let us not go there I am not in the mood."

Lerato: "Alright mama but don't say I didn't warn you."

Was she telling the truth? Was I getting too attached? I can't say I was not happy when they both warmed up to me; I was even happy that Tumelo could trust me.

I could not afford to love them more as his father was just like Qwaqwa weather. The next moment he was cold and the next he was hotter than the hot plate.

I just wanted them to get that glimpse of happiness. Was that too much to ask for?

I slept not so well as I kept having nightmares about the evil twin stuff I also had some about the fire and my babies. Was I thinking too much about this?

It was back to work although I was tired I had to go to work.

Veronica: "How are you feeling Itu?" Itu: "Pardon?"

Veronica: "Oh Mr Ntai reported that you told him that you were not feeling well."

Itu: "Oh, I didn't know that he told you. Well as you can see I still have some dark circles under my eyes."

Veronica: "Why did you come to work then?"

Itu: "I have to work because my family depend on this job for everything. It took me years to get this job and I am not going to take it for granted."

Veronica: "You are the first I so wish you can get what you studied for."

Itu: "Worry not I am going to get it one day. Let me go and work fast so that I can rest."

In truth I wanted to rest emotionally not physically. If I was rested emotionally I was not going to have fatigue symptoms.

I met Mr Ntai at the corridor who asked me to his office. I was not in the mood for him at all but I had to hear what he wanted. Ofenste: "You don't look good are you okay?"

Itu: "I will be fine it is just fatigue."

Ofenste: "You should have stayed at home a few more hours were not going to harm anyone."

Itu: "I do not have that privileged I need the money."

Ofenste: "Oh. I want to thank you for helping me with the kids. They are happy they were even asking about you last night."

Itu: "I am glad I am doing my job well."

Ofenste: "Please do not be like that. You know I have you to thank. I haven't realised that I was carrying all the weight when

I shouldn't. With what Puleng put me through and what Lesego is going through my temper is not in check. I always snap and it is making me a monster. I sat down with the kids yesterday and I didn't like the answers I got. I am willing to change and all because of you."

Itu: "As I said I am happy because I was doing my job."

Ofenste: "I was held at ransom they wanted bedtime story. Not this one; finish the one aunt Itu was telling us. I was even skipping the story I was reading for them as they looked bored." I just laughed at him as he looked so miserable.

Itu: "You will have to listen to the story when I am telling it."

Ofenste: "I asked them to tell me the story and they refused."

Itu: "Well your problem then."

We both laughed. I left for work after that. I was working on auto pilot on that day. When I was about to get home I met my 'husband' on the way.

Nhlanhla: "You don't stay here anymore?"

Itu: "I stay here; why are you here this time of the year?"

Nhlanhla: "It's not necessary I need your help. I know you are busy but I have an assignment that needs more information

that I don't know where to get. You know my family members and friends will not even help."

Itu: "You came at the wrong time I am very tired."

Nhlanhla: "You are my last hope ausi Itu. You know how happy I was when I left this place. I sit with the rest of them but I know there is no future here if I fail I will be back here in this hell hall sitting on the streets with those guys."

I felt sorry for him and I felt his frustrations. He was a good kid and I didn't want him to be lost in the system. I looked at him and I saw the younger me looking for help at college too.

Itu: "Okay when is it due?" Nhlanhla: "Next week Monday."

Itu: "Nhlanhla!!" Nhlanhla: "I know it's late but I really need you."

Itu: "I will work on it over the weekend and email it to you. When are you going back to school?"

Nhlanhla: "I am leaving this evening with my aunt."

Itu: "Okay then you will send the details to my email. I will send the email when I get home."

Nhlanhla: "You are a life saver I will repay you."

He jumped up and down before hugging me. I got home Nkhono was closing the shop.

Itu: "Why are you closing so early Nkhono?"

Nkhono: "We are going for the prayer. Remember Nkhono MaMphuthi lost her grandson."

Itu: "Oh I forgot. Please do not close I will take care of it while I cook dinner for us." Nkhono: "You look tired."

Itu: "I will be fine; don't worry about me."

She went inside and changed while I placed everything back in the stall. I was going to push no matter what.

Over the weekend Ofenste asked the kids to come to my place. I was scared at first but I was at ease when Tumelo made some conversation.

Tumelo: "My aunt is back so we didn't want to go to my granny. She is so mean but she always asks for money from my mom."

Okay too much information but I was curious so I asked him.

Itu: "When did you see her?" Lesego: "She came on Monday night."

Oh so the woman who came was their aunt. I was right I saw her in the portrait at Ofenste's office.

Itu: "Are you sure Lesego is not going to have one of the episodes?"

I asked Tumelo when he was helping me serve people.

Tumelo: "I am not sure but she never got anything since last weekend."

Itu: "Alright then."

For the first time I was happy to have the kids around in the house...

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Months piled on and everything was going according to plan the kids were always with their father more like they were with me. They visited me more than the father. At first I was scared that they were going to feel uncomfortable at my home as we didn't have all those luxurious things then had at their homes both with their father and mother.

I was wrong any chance they got they were at my place.

"Did you manage to get the signatures?"

Tumelo: "I only got from my mom but from dad it is proving difficult."

Lerato had connected us with Dr Muzi and Dr Kay. They wanted a consent form filled then they were going to connect with Lesego's doctor as if he is the one who contacted them. I know

it was wrong but we were doing this for Lesego and Tumelo was happy about it.

Itu: "You know we don't have time right?"

Tumelo: "Yes ausi Itu I will do it this week we are spending it with him so our driver will be picking us up from his place."

He had adopted calling me that from Lesedi, they were buddies surprisingly. I was really doing my job well as the kids were frequenting their father; he was so happy also.

Itu: "Good; please no one needs to know before the call. I know it's hard to keep the secret but do it for your sister."

Tumelo: "I will never tell anyone even my granny doesn't know."

Itu: "My granny too."

We laughed and high fived. If someone had told me that I will be close to Tumelo I would have told them to go and check their mental state.

Lesego came inside the house running.

Lesego: "Aunt Itu; I sold two chips and granny gave me some Nik nak."

The happiness written in her face was infectious it made me smile from ear to ear.



Itu: "That's my girl."

I said giving her the best smile with a high five accompanying it.

Lesego: "Can I go and sell again?"

Itu: "But you have to go your granny wants to be with you today and tomorrow."

Tumelo: "It is like we came 2 seconds ago."

Lesego: "Please tell her Tumi."

Itu: "Guys your aunt will be here soon so you need to pack your toys."

Toys were the only things they always came with. Some where even packed in my room I also wondered how many they had in total.

Tumelo: "Aunty Rethabile always asks us stupid questions."

Itu: "She is your aunt and you have to respect her."

Lesego: "Even if she asked bad questions about you and tell us not to say your name because you are not our mother."

I can't lie and say that didn't hurt but I was not going to show kids that I was hurt I was going to brave it up and pretend.

Itu: "We are not going to hate people because they talk about us behind our backs. So is life; people will always talk about us it's inevitable."

Tumelo: "This is unfair."

Itu: "Well my kittens go and pack."

Lesego: "We are also your kittens?"

She was smiling from ear to ear.

Itu: "Yes you are now my kittens because the other kittens are in heaven."

She ran to my room to pack her toys.

Tumelo: "So you don't miss them?"

Itu: "I miss them always but there is nothing I can do because they were needed more in heaven than here."

Tumelo: "Do you think Lesego will be needed in heaven soon?"

Itu: "Do not even think about it. She is going to be well. Make sure your daddy signs the papers and all will follow. We are doing this for her for her future. Now cheer up and forget about that."

Tumelo: "Yes ma'am."

I hugged him and even though he acted strong he was still a child who was scared that he was going to lose his sister. He was scared that without his sister he was nothing.

Tumelo: "Thank you for everything. I know I was rude to you at first and I told my sister to be rude too but I am sorry."

Itu: "You know why they called it the past? So that we won't visit it as it is not necessary and all the things have passed."

We hugged again. Their aunt came with the mother they didn't even come inside. I was not even holding my breath I didn't want them to come in anyway. When the kids were in the car they came to me both the mother and the sister.

Rethabile: "If you think you can take away my brother and his kids think again."

Itu: "I am not doing that because I already have my own life and kids I don't need to take other people's kids."

Mother: "You need to let Puleng and Ofenste sort out their issues without interfering."

Itu: "Just like you are not interfering. Tell me what makes Puleng a preferred candidate than I am?"

Rethabile: "You are even asking can't you see that you are not even in her league."

Itu: “I am not going to be in her league and I will never wish to be in her league as I am not a killer and I don’t sell human beings. You are busy cheering for her and her money. You want her because she showers you with money. Do you even know where that money is coming from? Some women give birth and raise their kids for them to sell and they kill them alive by selling Nyaope to them.”

I was boiling but I regretted saying those words.

Mother: “You are now making up stories.”

Itu: “Yah right, you tell me that you don’t care where the money is coming from because you love money too much. Well go and eat that money we will be here watching.”

I didn’t even want to hear what they will say I turned and got into the house slamming the door behind me. I knew I had dug my own grave by releasing that file.

Nkhono: “Please do not break my door because I still need this house at least you have your mango.”

I couldn’t help it but smile. Things were good between Ofenste and the kids. We could play the whole weekend without him zooming out. Sometimes I found myself looking at him and smiling alone. Sometimes I could catch him looking at me as if he didn’t know that I could see him. He was winning his kids and

my job was coming to an end. At least we were half way with the building I was close to giving Nkhono a home.

Lesedi: "Why are you looking so sad?"

She had closed after writing her exams so she was home and looking better. I told her everything.

Lesedi: "I found a way to get into their accounts."

Itu: "Lesedi we spoke about this I do not want you to get into trouble."

Lesedi: "I am not going to get into trouble. Come let me show you."

She opened her laptop and showed me how to enter their banking system. I couldn't believe my eyes as these people were filthy rich.

Itu: "So all this is their money."

Lesedi: "Half of it if you follow this link you will see that they have other linked accounts. If you want to swipe them clean you just do this."

She showed me I was tempted but I controlled myself I was not going to do that. I knew there was some tracking what what so if they tracked her laptop then she was going to be in trouble.

Lesedi: “You know how to do it. Even if you are alone in a public place you can do it. Here is the usb this will prevent them from tracking your location and it has the cracking code as I showed you.”

I reluctantly took it. I placed it in a safe place. We spent the rest of the afternoon watching movies in her laptop. I called Lerato later who was telling me her story she really wanted to leave her husband.

“I looked at you standing there I didn’t want to disturb father and daughter moment.”

I kissed her cheeks then kissed my husband. He had been distant of late I don’t know maybe it was because of our fight a few months back. I had forgiven him but he seemed not convinced.

Nadifa Samatar was a stubborn man I was done begging for his attention because life was too short. If he was cheating I would have known what to do because I would have confronted him about the lady he was cheating with.

“Go and fill the tub honey daddy will come and bath you.” He was not even looking at me.

She turned and looked at me, “I love you mommy and I miss you. May you bath me today? I want to hear more about your mom.”

My smile was so wide. “She is your granny.”

“I know but she is your mother.” She said giggling then ran to the bathroom.

I looked at the father who was not acknowledging me. “You know what, I am done. Tomorrow I am looking for a place to stay and leave you alone in your house.”

I turned going to the bedroom.

“You are not taking my daughter with you.”

I laughed looking at him. If he thought I was joking then he didn’t know me at all. I was not even going to tell my mother.

His pastor was forced to come twice in the same month and I was done.

“Okay” the shock in his face said it all. I was done running after him.

“I am coming Kali.”

She shouted back with no care in the world. “I am waiting.”

I did the bathroom routine and put her pyjamas on. I let her run to her room. I was thinking about the job offer my friend promised me; but another province was a no

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no for me.

Lerato: "Listen stranger I have to go. You know our talks give me hope to go on. I was about to give up but your story keeps me going.

Itu: "I am always on the phone because of you. I always look forward to the day because I will listen to your story after work. Speaking of work do you think I should quit?"

Lerato: "I have been telling you to come here in Limpopo or go to my mom's friend in Joburg she is like a sister to me now."

Me: "What is her name again Zee, your family stories keep me going. Who is this one who is married to a guy in a wheelchair?"

Lerato: "You mean Brandon and Wani. They can also help you find a job."

Itu: "The problem is I love my home town it is my happy place, no one will ever judge me and I can easily manoeuvre my way here. Come on do you think a simple girl like me can make it in



a big city. I am good here. All I need to do is to get out of this mess I created for myself.”

I didn't want to tell her that ever since the fire I had a phobia for the big cities and towns.

Lerato: “You know you can always leave and your manager can see what to do with his love life. He is being rude while you are trying to help him. Not forgetting the fact that the ex wife is still using him and he has the guts to think otherwise.”

Itu: “Sometimes patience is a virtue my love.”

Lerato: “Well Itu I am not going to be like you.”

Itu: “Say the woman who is in love with her husband but is afraid to tell him. You know God made us meet not by coincidence but by fate. We are both in the same predicament although our lives are totally in different directions. I wish to meet you one day.”

Lerato: “The day we will meet I will broadcast it to the world.”

Itu: “I have to go my stranger. I will chat with you tomorrow. I will buy airtime. I need to know what happened when you told Nadifa that you were moving out.”

Lerato: “Do not even think about it. Do not even think about it.”

We said our goodbyes as I smiled I was a lucky lady. Who would have thought that a wrong number was going to create a sisterhood like no other? I was even healing after all these years of agony I was finally healing or was I?

When I got to work the following Monday I met Veronica who told me that Mr Ntai wanted to see me. I went to his office

Ofenste: "Hello, you came early."

Itu: "Yes Mr Ntai you asked for me."

Ofenste: "I do not know how to say this but I have to do it. Trust me I do not want to do it but I have to."

Itu: "You know I hate suspense so please get to the point."

Ofenste: "I want to say thank you for your hard work I got my kids back because they are now frequently at my place they love me and our life is slowly getting back to normal."

Itu: "Why am I sensing a 'but' coming?"

Ofenste: "I am terminating the contract we have although I will pay you for the remaining months or even a year."

Itu: "What is really going on?"

Before he could answer the boss came in.

Her: "Mr Ntai these numbers.....oh Ms Itumelang."

So she knew my name well that was not important I wanted to hear what Ofenste wanted to say.

Ofenste: "Thank you ma'am and Itumelang you may go back to work."

I stood up and left. The whole day I was on autopilot. What was going on? I was thinking maybe the things I told his mother. I hit my head hard, why did I say them in the first place.

I was not going to finish the house. I need to ask Bophelo about those applications we did the previous year because she told me that they were hiring.

Or I was not supposed to panic because he was going to tell me that he was kidding.

When I was done with my work I went to his office to get some clarity. There were voices so I listened.

"I will not take them away but if we can try."

It was definitely the wife. Okay what was I missing?

Ofenste: "If we try what will happen?"

I got inside before knocking. I looked at him and he couldn't look me straight in the eyes.

Ofenste: "I am sorry."

Puleng: "I will leave you two to talk."

Itu: "No need to talk he told me everything in the morning. Okay goodbye."

Ofenste: "I am so sorry...."

I just left. Why was I feeling like this was real. My heart was very sore and I felt betrayed.....

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When I got home it was hard to hide it from my granny. Nkhono was always the only one to read me like a closed book and I wondered why. Some people read as an open book but Nkhono read mine closed.

Nkhono: "Sometimes God removes you from a situation so that he can work on something better."

Itu: "Right now I do not want to hear anything about it. I wish I can meet this God and ask him why I am not his favourite child if I am his child."

Nkhono: "Do not be like that you will get through this."

Itu: "What about the house; how am I going to finish this? It is like I am going forward and thousands of steps backwards."

Nkhono: "He said he will pay you."

Itu: "I am not taking his money Nkhono."

Nkhono: "Go and sleep on it. Tomorrow you will go and look for Bophelo and ask her about those posts."

Itu: "My thoughts exactly I think it's time for me to move over."

Nkhono: "Now go and rest."

You will think I rested I called Lerato and told her everything.

Lerato: "What changed really?"

Itu: "I think she has something she is holding against him."

Lerato: "I do not believe that. I think he is just a weak man; who doesn't know what to do with himself. I hate men like him they are just useless. I am sorry i know you love him but your man is weak."

I just laughed even though I didn't want to.

Itu: "I do not even want to think about those people. I feel like a failure. I left home to go and look for a better life for myself and help my granny but I came back empty handed without even a panty to my name."

She laughed forcing me to do the same. I was not in the laughing mood mind you.

Itu: "I tried to build a house it's half done and I might not be able to finish it."

Lerato: "Send your address I want to send reading books to you. You told me that you love reading so please I have plenty that I need to send to you."

Was Lerato serious I was crying to her all she had to say was send your address and I will send reading books.

Who can concentrate in a troubled world like mine?

Itu: "I will send it when I am okay now I need to rest."

We said our goodbyes and I dropped the call. I was not sending that address I was not in the mood to read. Lesedi came to sympathise with me but I was not going to do what she wanted me to do.

Lesedi: "This is your time to get back at this Puleng thing."

Itu: "Lesedi we are not going to do that."

Lesedi: "Well at least I taught you. December is just around the corner are you going to be sulking like this? Please tell me in advance so that I can go to Welkom with my granny."

Itu: "Nhlanhla my husband will be here."

We both laughed

Lesedi: "How did the assignment go?"

Itu: "He was just panicking everything was in place I only had to add a few points."

Lesedi: "He is such a good kid I wish he will not come back here to his friends after he graduate."

Itu: "Where will I get my husband then?"

Lesedi: "You don't belong here you will build in your plot of land and live happily ever after."

I had never even thought about the plot of land for the past years. I was even having doubts that the municipality was still keeping it for me.

She left when her granny called her. I cooked and slept early I was going to avoid Ofenste at all costs till Bophelo got something better for me.

When I got back from work on Tuesday I had a package waiting for me.

Itu: "Where is this coming from?"

Nkhono: "It came with a man who claimed to be Tumelo's driver."

Itu: "Okay so Tumelo finally got this ready."

Nkhono: "What is this?"

Itu: "Some documents I need to send. I know I am not going to be in their lives but this I have to do because I made a promise which I intend to keep."

Nkhono gave me an approval nod as I took the envelope to my room. It was signed for real by both parents. Even if the parents had let me down I was going to do it for Lesego no matter what. I remembered that I didn't send the address so I just sent it then sent my message to her.

Lerato: "Worry not you will give the courier guy when he delivers the books. Make sure you photocopy and have copies for future use."

Itu: "Thank you very much."

Lerato: "You have a good heart Itumelang everything will work out for you one day."

I wasn't holding my breath

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how many times did they want to hear. I didn't reply I just cooked then went to help Nkhono with the selling she wanted to rest.

The week ended and I was happy to say I had managed to avoid Ofenste at all costs. The following week was going to be month



end so I was going to take my salary and move over because Qwaqwa was done with me.

It was a Friday and I always got home before 1pm on Fridays. I was cleaning when Nkhono shouted that there was a delivery. I was not expecting anything but then the books came to mind. I left cursing under my breath.

“They are disturbing me.....”

I trailed as I saw who was standing there. With a very expensive car looking all elegant and I was wearing my faskoti dirty from

cleaning. I didn't even want to go near. My tears were just about to knock on my eyelids.

Lerato: “I came all the way for the delivery and you make me stand here in the scorching hot sun.”

I just cried it was her in person in front of my house.

Nkhono: “Who is this Itu?”

Itu: “She..... I .....”

I just knelt down and cried. I was wailing as if someone died.

She came to me and knelt down with me as smart as she was she took me to her arms and enveloped me there.

Nkhono: "Are you two going to tell me what is happening or you are here for a crying contest?"

We both laughed.

Itu: "Well Nkhono this is Lerato from Limpopo."

Nkhono: "Aaaahhhhhhhh"

Nkhono jumped up and down and started ululating I was so emotional. I hugged her again this time around without any care in the world.

Nkhono came and we had a group hug.

Nkhono: "Come inside the house we can't have you getting heat by the sun."

She pulled her to the house I carried her bags which were very heavy."

Itu: "What are you carrying here? Stones I guess."

Lerato: "No silly your books."

Itu: "Were you serious about the delivery?"

Lerato: "Yes mam I delivered in person as you can see. Here is the key please remove the rest of the thing I am coming to help you carry them inside."

Itu: "Do I even know how to open the car?"

I was not even joking no one ever had a car in my family and I was not going to have it in this life time I had made peace with it.

She changed her shoes telling us about her trip then we went outside. Nkhono was making food for all three of us.

She opened the car and there were bags and bags of groceries but with the local shops' names; some from Bibi; some from shoprite.

Itu: "What is this?"

Lerato: "A girl's gotta eat."

We both laughed. I helped her and there was also another bag full of books. I looked at her.

Lerato: "What? Do not look at me like that I took a bit of everything as I am not sure of your taste."

Nkhono: "Come and eat ladies."

Lerato: "Yes ma'am."

I laughed following her out of my room. I was thinking she was going to say I want to sleep at a guest house. You know those friends that you think are above your standard and you assume they will not fit into your world? That is how I was feeling at

the moment but Lerato felt comfortable and she looked at home with Nkhono asking her a million questions.

Nkhono: "How did you find us?"

Lerato: "I used the GPS she gave me the address then I just used it."

Itu: "So where is Khali?"

Lerato: "She is staying with her father I moved out."

Itu: "What?"

Lerato: "Long story, I am hungry; what is this delicious smell."

I knew better than to ask her questions. We ate chatting she was telling us that she left the previous day but at least she rested midway. Her car was one mean machine.

After eating we tried to pave way for her to park inside the yard. She took a bath while Nkhono closed I washed the dishes and prepared the evening meal it was late already.

We ate still chatting. When Nkhono slept then I had the time to ask.

Itu: "So why did you leave?"

Lerato: "I told you that he was not appreciating me."

Itu: "So what now?"

Lerato: "He has been calling me and he wanted to return the money I gave back."

Itu: "You seriously sent all of it back?"

Lerato: "I was not joking. He thinks I am after his money then he better keep his money."

Itu: "What if he returns it?"

Lerato: "I closed the account."

We spoke about different things we even cried together. It was in the early hours of the morning when we slept.

I was dreaming when I heard commotion outside. When I woke up I was alone in bed. I took my gown and followed the noise. There was too much noise and commotion. When I stepped outside I just cried.....

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I looked at the trucks offloading the building material. It was not only one truck but three with different things.

Itu: "What is going on here?"

Nkhono: "Oh she is finally up. Who is going to marry a lazy bum who wakes up this late?"

I laughed through my tears.

Lerato: "Hay dear you are up."

She came to me and gave me a side hug.

Itu: "What is going on?"

Lerato: "Well I have been thinking about this for some time. The money my husband gave me I invested it over the period of time so I was planning on doing something good with it. When you were crying over the phone I thought what a better way to use it."

Itu: "So you came all the way to...."

Lerato: "Please do not cry."

Nkhono: "I always encouraged you to make friends I never knew you would make such a wonderful friend."

Itu: "All it took was a wrong phone call followed but a message in my phone. Who would have thought?"

Nkhono: "God works in mysterious ways I tell you."

With what was happening I was starting to believe that there was God because who would have sent Lerato to me? That is what I called 'Fated Encounters' if it wasn't for fate we were not going to meet somehow.

Itu: "I feel embarrassed that you visit me but I wake up late."

Lerato: “We slept late and if you have been an early bird you would have ruined my surprise.”

Itu: “It is a surprise indeed. So do I need to go back to work because I was working to finish this house?”

Nkhono: “You can talk to Bophelo about that interview then.”

I had spoken to her about posts in Bethlehem and she was waiting for me to clear my diary and go for an interview in one of the companies.

Lerato: “I can take you to her after breakfast.”

Itu: “Come on you have done too much for me already.”

Nkhono: “Do not be like that my daughter she needs to see the place. What kind of a tourist will she be if she can’t even see this place?”

Lerato: “Tell her Nkhono.”

We laughed at her pronunciation of Nkhono.

Itu: “Okay let me bath and make breakfast.”

Nkhono: “I will help you in the meantime.”

I bathed quickly when I was done they were still outside organising the building material. I think it was the first time since I was born to have so many options for breakfast. We were used to soft porridge then bread with rama. When I

opened our old white fridge I couldn't even believe my eyes. I was still in a dream. Some of the things I didn't even know how to cook. I took out my phone and googled some recipes.

There was a message from Tumelo. I ignored it. After sometime I was done then I got back to it. He blue ticked me also. I served the breakfast. My heart melted when I saw my granny's face lighting up because of breakfast. This was not how we ate ours so it was a big breakfast that made her face glow.

Nkhono: "I am going to say the longest grace today. Thank you my child for this meal and mostly thank you Lerato for buying food for us."

Lerato: "This is nothing granny let us thank the man above and eat."

We ate after grace. We were chatting about anything and everything. Lerato was a fun and open person I was amazed at how humble she was.

After the meal before I washed dishes I was worried about Tumelo so I called him.

Tumelo: "What do you want I don't want to talk to you."

Itu: "So we are back to where we started?"

Tumelo: "You don't even care about us. Were you even going to help Lesego or you were also lying about that."



Itu: "Tumelo; calm down and tell me what is going on?"

Tumelo: "Well my mother told me that you are not going to come around anymore. She told us that you don't love us as we are not your kids."

Itu: "Oh."

Tumelo: "So it is true?"

Itu: "You are old enough to know what is true and what is fabricated. I will never lie about something like that. As we are speaking my friend is here she will be leaving with the documents you brought that are signed. I will never ever lie about something this serious."

Tumelo: "So why did you leave us then because they say we can't visit you."

Itu: "Your parents know why; if they won't tell you then I am afraid I can't do anything about that. If you need anything I am here for you."

Tumelo: "Thank you very much."

He sounded down but I had to assure him because I was not going to leave him to the vultures when they have left him there.

Nkhono: "So you don't watch television what do you do with your time?"

Lerato: "Ms Khali is the manager and the CEO of the television."

We laughed.

Nkhono: "Tell me about it. When Ofenste's children visit I can't even watch anything and we only have three channels."

Lerato: "I was about to ask why is the other channel not playing here?"

Itu: "I might be lying if I say I knew. Now that the house will be done I want to buy DSTV for her so that she cannot be bored when I go and work in Bethlehem."

Nkhono: "But you will be coming home isn't it."

Itu: "We will cross that bridge when we get there."

We spoke about different things while we waited for the builder and his crew to show up. Lerato had offered him extra money if he finished fast and focused on our house for the time being.

You know builders will take three or more jobs which meant only one day a week for a single house. He was about to finish so it was going to be two weeks tops.

Later on we went to check on Bophelo who was about to leave home going for a baby shower of a colleague. I looked at her wearing an outfit matching with her sneakers. These people with money had an outfit for every occasion. The t-shirt she was wearing had a picture of the mother to be I presumed. So they had money to print for only one day occasion.”

Bophelo: “Will you manage to travel at night as they knock off late at that company and by then the late bus would have left for a while.”

Itu: “For now I will cross that bridge when I get there. As long as I have left that company and a cleaning job I need to work in the office and get experience for what I studied for.”

Bophelo: “Well I will talk to Clint I guess he will have to include you in the first round of interviews. Good luck but with your qualifications I think luck is not needed. Lucky enough they are not looking for anyone experienced this time around.”

Itu: “Thank you very much. Oh by the way this is my friend Lerato.”

Bophelo: “I didn’t know you had a friend.”

A. laughed

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see what I meant. I was known as a lone ranger in our area.

Itu: "She is from Limpopo she is visiting for a while."

Bophelo: "That makes sense then" We laughed as they extended their hands to shake each other accompanied by a verbal greeting. "Well I am running late already I will update you on Tuesday Itu."

We left with her as Lerato said we should go out for ice-cream.

Lucky was on my side as I was looking presentable.

Lerato: "Your town is almost like ours; small but yours has that fresh air."

Itu: "I always told people that and they said I am too biased."

Lerato: "So you are not going to try this dating thing again"

I looked at her with a question mark in my eyes.

Lerato: "Do not look at me like that. I know that you had feelings for Mr Mango. If not you wouldn't have been hurt the way you were hurt."

Itu: "I think it was the times we spent together. With distance now I might feel differently. The only true love I had was for those two kids I think the hurt I am feeling won't be replaced by anything else."

Lerato: "You are going to be a good mother why don't you go for surrogacy then so that you won't have baby daddy issues like me."

Itu: "In practical I can but financially I am crippled."

Lerato: "What if I help you?"

Itu: "Let me think about it. For now I am not emotionally ready for my own."

Lerato: "If you say so. So we are still helping Lesego?"

Itu: "Yes please go with those files from there onwards they will deal with the parents directly."

Lerato: "So you and Mr Mango there will...."

Itu: "Do not even finish the sentence. We have a connection yes but there is something he can't do right and I hate that. Talk about your husband."

Lerato: "I blocked him for now I need space for him to find himself also. My daughter has a phone so I call her directly if he answers it I just drop it."

Itu: "You guys need to stop fooling around."

Lerato: "I love him with no reservations but the more he does this the less my love for him grows."

Itu: "Enough about sad news let us go before Nkhono sends a search party."

Lerato: "Okay then but we will have to go past Spar and buy an ice-cream for her also."

She was so happy when we brought the ice-cream for her; grannies with their sweet tooth.

The following day Nkhono went to church. Lerato wanted to rest because from her arrival she hasn't rested that much.

"I go for one day out of town and you bought a car already. Did you take their money?"

It was Lesedi shouting at the top of her voice.

Itu: "What money?"

Lesedi: "From the thieves."

I just laughed.

Itu: "Even if I take their money I will never use it. I would rather give it to charity."

Lerato: "What money are you talking about?"

She was coming from the kitchen.

Lesedi: "What? Is this who I think it is? You look wow in person."

She just went on and hugged her. I was smiling like a retard.

Itu: "There is no need for introductions then"

They chatted as if they knew each other all their lives. It was a sight to enjoy. We ate lunch laughing and chatting.

Lesedi: "Well I came to borrow that summer dress; I told you I lost weight and you didn't believe me. Oh and the summer hat this date needs to be hot like this Qwaqwa blazing sun."

We just laughed.

Itu: "Well you know my room."

She came back wearing them. I knew her clothes were going to be at my place till she remembered to borrow something else. She was a little bigger than me so some clothes fit her well. I was tired of refusing even Nkhono spoke till she became tire.

Itu: "So you now have a boyfriend?"

Lesedi: "Who talked about a boyfriend? I said date. These old people need to be taught terminology. See you later oldies.

We laughed at her. She was the life itself. If only.....

Lesedi: “Who talked about a boyfriend? I said date. These old people need to be taught terminology. See you later oldies.

We laughed at her. She was the life itself. If only; if only I knew that life as I knew it; was not going to be the same.

If only I knew that I was going to be seeing her for the last time in this life time. If only I knew that I was going to be the reason she leaves this earth.

If only I knew I was not even going to open that file or use it. I never knew Ofenste’s mother was going to tell Puleng.

Lerato: “Lesedi is the young version of me.”

We both laughed.

Itu: “I know hay I was about to say the same but the more intelligent version I guess.”

Lerato: “You are only jealous. i..... what is that?”

Itu: “That is the smell of losing.”

Lerato: “No listen.”

We ran outside as we heard some loud cries and the car speeding off. I saw the back of the car. I ran to the gate and Lesedi was lying there lifeless.

Itu: “Nooooooooooooo. Lesedi do not do this to me.



Lesedi: "Puleng."

I knew I had seen that car before I think she thought it was me as Lesedi was wearing my clothes. It was the summer dress I was wearing the first day I met them.

Itu: "Please do not say anything. Someone call the ambulance."

Lerato was frozen there and it was useless.

Itu: "Please Lesedi do not do this to me."

I checked her eyes they were about to close.

Itu: "Lesedi do not close your eyes. Please do not dare close them."

Lesedi: "I....."

Itu: "Please do not even talk."

I tried to shift her but there was too much blood.

Itu: "There is too much blood she is losing blood."

Lerato was busy on the phone. Some people were just standing there watching and some taking a video. It was like I was back in Bloemfontein watching my family die.

Itu: "Nooooo"

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you can never die on me. Please take her phone and call her granny.”

Her pulse was slowly fading.

Lerato: “They are taking too long can we take her in my car.”

Itu: “Are you going to be able to drive?”

Lerato: “I will try, let us go.”

She was shaking but we were not going to let her die on our watch.

She came out with the car we were not even properly dressed but who cared. The woman next door tried to help as she was the only one who wasn't staring at the show.

MaMokoena: “What can I do?”

Itu: “Please take her phone and call her granny she was not answering I think she is at church. Do you have my granny's phone numbers?”

I was even shaking.

MaMokoena: “Yes I have both their numbers I will call them.”

Itu: “Take her phone because it has airtime.”

We tried to take her to the car. Her arm was broken and she cried in agony I think her ribs too.

I was crying also as I didn't want to see her in pain.

Itu: "Please Lerato calm down; we are going to Mofomahadi Manapo hospital. The one we passed when going to town."

Lerato: "I am trying but it's hard."

We were both crying no one even offered to come with us. The world we live in was so screwed up.

Itu: "Lesedi; please do not leave me I am going to be a better person. I will go to church every Sunday and I will give all my salary to charity if you live."

She smiled. I swear I saw a smile forming on her face.

Lerato: "She is going to live and we are going to go on an overseas trip she wanted."

Itu: "She always wanted to go to Hollywood; she said she will be the best investigative journalist they ever created in this century."

Lerato: "Then she will be and we will be there to cheer her up."

She parked in the ambulance parking the paramedic came to us angry.

Paramedic: "You can't park in front here."

When he saw Lesedi he screamed and rushed to get a stretcher. He rushed calling the others to help him. The way

they were fast I was impressed. So there were still around workers who took their work serious.

Paramedic: Call a doctor. Female mid twenties critically injured.”

We were running after him. I didn't even care I was full of blood which attracted attention.

Paramedic2: “Please ma'am; move your car from the doorway.”

Lerato: “Okay.”

She ran after him as she didn't want to get lost. I took my attention back to the doctor.

Doctor: “I am doctor Kalala what happened.”

Itu: “Someone ran her with their car so we don't even know how and where exactly.”

Doctor: “Are you related to the victim because we need to rush her to the theatre.”

Itu: “No but I....”

Doctor: “We cannot perform anything at the moment. I.....”

Itu: "I was going to say talk to her on the damn phone because she is not that privileged to have a car and she was on her way from church. The granny I mean. So should she use a broom to fly here so that you can save her grandchild?"

I was screaming on top of my lungs dialling the number I was very pissed off. The granny answered it was on loud speaker.

Itu: "They do not want to look at her because I am not a relative."

Granny: "I am stuck in traffic so should my granddaughter die because I am poor."

Doctor: "It is not what I said I was....."

Granny: "Then do what you have to do because if something happens to her I will not let you rest."

Doctor: "Female mid twenties let us take her to theatre."

He left with the nurses as they rushed behind that door.

Paramedic2: "You did well these foreign doctors do not value our kid's lives."

Itu: "What does being foreigner have to do with all this? It's hospital policy isn't it."

Paramedic2: "I was...."

Lerato: "Just go man we need some space."

We sat down there. I was crying. This was exactly like the day I was sitting at the hospital morgue alone waiting for the death confirmation of my family. What was really happening in my life? Who did I wrong to deserve this? I was even praying hard. For the first time I was hoping my prayers will be answered.

Nkhono and granny came running. I just knelt down and cried in front of them.

Itu: "I am so sorry it was supposed to be me. She was wearing my clothes and they thought it was me."

Granny: "Please do not blame yourself because you will be lying there and we will still be here even if it were you."

Nkhono: "Who did this Itu?"

Lerato: "It was that witch Puleng I told her to call the police and she is saying maybe it's not her. Lesedi identified her before she closed her eyes as she was tired."

I knew her father was going to let this go away so it was pointless to even report it. The police came in when we were still talking. They were called by the hospital as it was a criminal case. I gave them my statement so did Lerato and MaMokoena who had followed us to the hospital after calling the grannies.

When they left we sat there.

Lerato: "What is taking them too long?"

Before we could answer the door opened and the doctor came out defeated. I couldn't even scream I just let my tears flow.

Doctor: "May you please come to my office."

Granny: "We are all alone in the corridor please tell us we are all family here."

He let out a deep sigh and looked at us.

Doctor: "I am so sorry but we tried everything in our powers. The head injury gave in as the blood quickly rushed to her brain."

All this mambo jumbo made me sick I just vomited on the floor. I felt a deep unrest in the pit of my stomach. I just cried nonstop.

Nkhono: "Itu please take heart my daughter. This is what God had planned it's not your fault."

Itu: "So I am not supposed to be happy in my life. All my loved ones are gone and I am supposed to say yes God it's your will."

Lerato: "Do not...."

Granny: "Do not blame yourself please."

I just cried to the car. It was full of blood; Lerato took a plastic from the back and we sat. The blood had dried out though.

The rest of the week was haze to me. I only bathed on Saturday the day of the funeral. Even Lerato had failed to cheer me up.

Nkhono: "You have to forgive yourself."

Itu: "I....."

I just cried. For the past week I couldn't even formulate a sentence without crying. We went to the service which was at home. They had pitched a tent in their yard.

When we got there; her mother was there she came lashing at me.

"What do you want? You killed my baby"

Was this woman for real? Lerato pushed her away as Dipulelo came to my rescue

"The child you only acknowledge in death because you want her death certificate to claim the insurance money."

She left us standing there.

Dipulelo: "At least you came I was worried you won't come. Are you up for a speech?"

Itu: "I.." Then I cried.



Lerato: “I will say it she is not in the right state of mind.

The service started and we left for the burial ground which was the same one where my family was buried at. It was like I was reliving the past.

When they sang the song Modimo Re Boka Wena:

*Modimo re boka wena*

*Modimo re boka a wena*

*Tsohle di yentswe ke wena*

*Modimo re boka wena*

*Tsohle di yentswe ke wena*

*Modimo re boka wena*

*Tsohle di yentswe ke wena*

*Modimo re boka wena*

I couldn't take it. I just stood up as they lowered her body down. I went to the car leaned on it with my back. I slid down till my butt hit the ground and wailed.

“Why me; why are all these things happening to me?”

That was the first sentence I said after the accident. I saw Ofenste with his granny and my blood just boiled to maximum.

I wanted to go to them but I just placed my face in my hands and wailed. My life was just a mess.....

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We went back home I couldn't breathe well Lerato had to open the windows.

Nkhono: "Itumelang you are going to kill yourself because of stress. She is gone she is resting. Only remember her in her good times not in pain."

Lerato: "She is right. Remember the day Lesedi left the house she was smiling and she was the same old vibrate kid you loved."

I remembered the first day she came to my house. She was still in primary school and an inquisitive young lady. She asked me about everything and anything. I was mad at her but when she was gone it was too quiet I even asked Nkhono if she could have a brother or a sister for me. That is the day I learnt that Nkhono was my granny not my mother.

I smiled alone thinking of how naive I have been and how fortunate I was to have a loving granny. Lesedi then came from time to time. She even trusted me when it came to her projects at school. She always sounded like a bee buzzing in my ear but the silence when she was absent made me realise that I liked

her. My smile widened when I realised that as young as she was she had my back always.

Nkhono: "You see not everything is lost."

Lerato: "She fulfilled her purpose and she was always happy she wouldn't want you to be angry at her killer only God knows why it happened."

I was already planning my revenge. No amount of lectures were going to stop me from finishing what Lesedi had started. I was going to self teach myself how to do some of the things to top up the information that she gave me.

When we reached home I went to sit inside the tent I was emotionally and physically tired. Lesedi's granny called me when they were passing. I was not ready to face her yet but I went.

Granny: "Itumelang, what is it I hear that you are blaming yourself for Lesedi's death? Do you think she will be happy or sad wherever she is if you blame yourself?"

I looked down.

Granny: "Lesedi is gone and she is not coming back. I am hurt and I wish she was not on that road on that particular day but I can't because she was borrowed to us and her time with us is

over. Please stop blaming yourself. Anyone who is blaming you should face me because I know how much you loved her.

Itu: "Thank you granny."

Granny: "Now go and eat before you faint of hunger."

I left the house going back to the tent where Lerato and Dipulelo were sitting. Lesedi's mother came to me again.

"Why did you kill my daughter?"

Dipulelo: "Get a life. Sit down now."

She sat it seemed as if she feared DP so much.

Dipulelo: "What shoe size did Lesedi wear before she died."

Mother: "Ah.... I know it's 3."

She looked at me for an answer

Itu: "Size 5."

Dipulelo: "Well let me make thing easy answer all the following correctly then we will think maybe you are a grieving mother who do not want to only point fingers. What dress size did she wear

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at what age did she start her menstrual cycle? When did she finish school? Which brand of perfume did she use? What was her middle name?"

All those I knew like the back of my hand even her allergies. You know if you love someone you do make time to learn more about them.

Mother: "I am..... I am not going to answer that."

Dipulelo: "Good then zoot and go play with your drunk of a husband."

She left with her tail between her legs.

Lerato: "The nerve. Itu; how are you feeling?"

Itu: "I am wondering if my mother will do the same when I am gone. Will she come and cause trouble to granny or if granny is gone will she cause some for my Uncle who helped my granny to raise me while she didn't care about me?"

Dipulelo: "Do not stress about useless people. Lesedi was a happy child I feel like after tears let us go to town and buy some booze."

Itu: "We have not eaten yet."

Lerato: "We will eat when we come back. I will buy food for you in town."

They laughed going out. I saw Ofenste going into his car. I had courage to face him.

Itu: "You have the nerve coming here after your wife and mother killed her."

Ofenste: "What do you mean? I was accompanying nana I didn't know it was Lesedi."

Itu: "Well go and ask your mother and wife what they did to her and she is not arrested yet because we know why. I hope you have a nice life with murderers."

Nana: "What is she talking about?"

I didn't even what to answer her because I respected her so much so I didn't want to talk to her while I was angry.

Itu: "I hope you are happy now. If you have not approached me and if you had the balls to face your wife Lesedi would be still alive today. I wish you sleep well at night knowing that you killed someone's child. Think about your Lesego if she were to die just like this, poof."

I left them there going to the car. I cried for the last time. I was going to leave this place so that I was not going to be depressed.

Luck was on my side we met Bophelo in town with her snob friends.

Bophelo: “Just the woman I have been looking for. I was going to come to your place tomorrow. So you have saved me the time and stress. Well be ready on Monday they might call you.”

Itu: “Are you pulling my leg.”

Bophelo: “Not at all. So be ready for anything because that company has late hours.”

Itu: “Do not worry; I will sort that one out.”

It was a blessing in disguise I was going to move that was the only thing I was thinking about and it was going to give me time to heal.

Lerato: “This is good news I will go home once you are settled in your new job.”

Itu: “You know that you are a good friend.”

Dipulelo: “Please say louder. When I first met her I thought that she was high and mighty.”

Lerato: “Well you thought wrong. See what Lesedi is doing? Looking out for you from up there; wherever she is; now you will have to move on and thank her later.”

We laughed

Dipulelo: “Well we will have to toast to Lesedi. I can even start my family I know she wanted to be the only child.”

We laughed again.

Itu: "She was one spoilt brat."

Dipulelo: "I loved spoiling her as she was not a troublesome child. She didn't have the teenage adrenaline; I was blessed."

Lerato: "You are still blessed to have mothered her. Your hubby is one lucky man."

Dipulelo: "Please tell him that."

We laughed as we entered at TnT we bought as many beers as we could drink to bid farewell to her. I bought a few for Nkhono I knew she was going to drink too.

We went home the elders were still there sorting out their things some were still gossiping. We drank till the early hours of the morning. Nkhono only drank two and she slept.

We woke up looking like zombies if there were any in this life time.

Lerato: "We went too hard on this."

I laughed.

Nkhono: "Please clean up. When I come back from church I want to relax and meditate. Wena DP your mother in law and husband need you."



We laughed at her.

Itu: "Yes ma'am. DP you will face the music alone.

"I know you are the one who corrupted my wife. Come baby I will get you cleaned up. I know you are grieving but do not let Itu corrupt you."

We looked behind us and her hubby was standing there.

Lerato: "Ohhh young love. This is so sweet. Let me go and bath. Your wife is the best please do not hurt her because you will face my fist."

We laughed because we knew it was alcohol talking. He smiled taking his wife's shoes and pulling her gently going out with her. They loved each other too much it was making me emotional. Or was the alcohol making me emotional. I just laughed at myself so loud.

We cooked and drank the concoction to stay a little sober.

When Nkhono came back from church we were a little sober I was aware of my surroundings. Not that I was too drunk the previous night to a point of not knowing my surroundings but in the afternoon I was as sober as a judge.

Itu: "Nkhono I have some news for you. I might be moving to Bethlehem."

Nkhono: "What? Is it because of Lesedi?"

Lerato: "Not at all granny she might get the job."

Nkhono: "Modimo waka. This is great news I am so happy for you. Don't you need to resign first?"

Itu: "I already spoke to my boss she is happy for me she said I don't even need to serve notice time as they can replace

cleaners without a hustle. There is a cleaning company helping them with that."

Nkhono: "This is great. Do not worry I will be fine here."

Itu: "Then my point is I want to ask Uncle's son to come and stay with you till they finish building if you are comfortable with him you can stay with him afterwards."

Nkhono: "I will speak to him do not worry and he is not a troublesome boy expect his smoking habits."

Itu: "I will send money for him do not worry. He is hard working also."

Nkhono: "But Tshele is too quiet I hope I won't be lonely with him in the house."

I laughed.

Itu: "I thought he has changed."

Nkhono: "Never he took after his mother. I do not visit because his mother will only greet you and that will be the end of story. You will be the only one asking questions in which you sometimes get a single word answers."

Itu: "At least they avoid unnecessary drama."

Nkhono: "That is what I love about him. I won't mind staying with him as long as you provide for his smokes. The beer I know he drinks occasionally so I will cover him."

I smiled alone looking at how things were falling into place.

Lerato: "So I will go with her to make sure she settles in her job then drive back home."

Nkhono: "You are a true friend please do not let this cruel world change you."

Lerato: "Thank you."

Itu: "Do you think they will not allow me to go and say my final goodbyes to Lesedi?"

Nkhono: "They will, we will take her granny and I will join you. I think she would love to because during the funeral they never allowed her to be alone."

Itu: "Okay."

That was the end of the other chapter I was looking forward to the other chapter of my life. I was hoping it was not sad and painful like the previous two chapters I was closing.....

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We went to the graveyard the following morning. Culture only allowed us to go there before any meal. I was wondering why. Her granny spoke to her first. After some time it was my turn. I knelt down on her grave.

“Lesedi; I failed you and I know you might be disappointed as I didn’t do anything when I knew I should have resigned from the other job. If I hadn’t loved money I would have saved you. I now understand why they say money is the root of all evil. If I had been patient with my job even if it took me years but eventually I would have finished building the house.

I am not going to love the money more than I love the people surrounding me and myself. I am going to make them pay. I do not know how for now but I am going to make them pay. You are not going to die in vain I will find a way.

By the way I got a job and I was going to buy that dress and the sandals you wanted when I got paid for what I studied. Your words not mine. I am going to buy them and keep them but I will do something big for your granny so that you will be happy for me. I am going to buy a laptop and teach myself how to use

it so that I cannot be a fossil fuel your words not mine. I am laughing through my tears and I know you would have laughed at me too.

Rest in peace I will not bother you again. I know you are happy wherever you are and telling them jokes. Probably about how stupid I am. I will always love you; always no one will ever take your place. Goodbye.”

I was crying I couldn't control my tears. Granny and Nkhono came and stood next to me.

Granny: “It is enough my child now. You have grieved and it is time to let go. I know it won't be easy because I can still see her in the house laughing and teasing me. All I will do is treasure the memories we shared together. Take heart my child.”

Itu: “It.....it....it...is....is...so hard .....on ...me .....I  
....am...blaming .....myself...and....”

Nkhono: “No please do not; if you do that you will not move on. What is done is done do not cry over spilt milk. Yesterday is not ours to recover, but tomorrow is ours to win or lose the truth is, unless you let go, unless you forgive yourself

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unless you forgive the situation, unless you realise that the situation is over, you cannot move forward. Sooner or later we've all got to let go of our past."

I got into her arms and cried. She was right. It was all up to me to let go of the past.

Itu: "Thank you Nkhono and granny thank you for allowing me to say my final goodbyes."

Nkhono: "Do not mention it."

Granny: "I will never be that cruel. She was close to you and her aunt so I will never deprive you that. I know I am going to miss her but her aunt is going to be lonely I wish God will give her someone to pass time with."

We were heading to the car. She always amazed me the way she loved her daughter in law. I also wished I had the same relationship with my mother in law but who knew the future maybe I was going to get married too. I was going to call my child Lesedi. Thank God the name is unisex.

Lerato: "What took you so long I was even sleeping?"

She never went with us inside the graveyard; she said the place gave her some creeps. We laughed at her.

Nkhono: "We were talking to some ghosts who wanted to marry you."

Lerato: "What?"

She looked so traumatised and I just laughed at her.

Itu: "They are just pulling your leg there is nothing like that."

Lerato: "I do not trust these things you never know."

We laughed at her. We passed by some bush granny said there was a tree that we needed to put on water and wash our hands and feet to remove the graveyard bad luck. Lerato washed too because she was scared that the evil spirit will follow her or let me say the ghost boyfriend who wanted to marry her.

When I got to my room there were missed calls from Ofenste. I was not going to move on once he was at my back. I blocked him. I was not going to leave without explaining to Tumelo. He needed to know that I was not coming. He was going to explain to Lesego. I loved those kids but it was time to move on for my sanity.

Lerato: "Why the long face?"

She was coming inside with bathing water to bath.

Itu: "If it's not Mr Mango."

Lerato: "He is missing his Lemon."

We laughed Lerato was such a stupid fool, in a good way though.

Itu: "I am not going to answer that. Let me leave you to your bathing and go call Tumelo. We need to go and fetch water remember the Jojo missed us this week and it's coming after two weeks."

Lerato: "This is the only thing that puts me off Qwaqwa. I love this place but this Jojo water thing is not cool dude; not cool."

I just laughed closing the door behind me. I called Tumelo as the schools were closed he answered after a while I was about to hang up.

Tumelo: "Is it true?"

Itu: "Hello to you Tumelo."

Tumelo: "Sorry but I was going to call you when my mom is gone. I am in the toilet now hiding. I even saved your number as Steve." I laughed at him. He also laughed

Tumelo: "Well is it true? I heard mom and dad arguing when she was picking us up from dad's place. Dad said she killed Lesedi. Is she really dead?"

Oh boy. They knew Lesedi but I was not going to involve him in this.



Itu: "I am not sure what you heard but Lesedi is gone. I called to tell you that the paper work was submitted so they might call your parents. I am changing this number because I am moving and starting my own life. I love you but I need to mourn and move on." Tumelo: "I understand."

He sounded down but I knew he was a good kid.

Itu: "I am glad Lesego will get the help she needs."

Tumelo: "Why didn't God give us you as a mother?"

Itu: "Do not even say that."

Tumelo: "Well I mean it. Thank you for all your help and I hope when you are done mourning you will remember us. I am not going anyway although I want to stay with my father full time. I do not trust mom anymore."

Itu: "You are still young please do not pick sides."

Tumelo: "Good luck."

When he dropped the call on me I didn't know how to feel. I think he was hurting too.

I took a bath too and waited for the call which came in the later afternoon asking me to attend an interview the following morning. I knew somehow the job was mine.

Nkhono: "Are you going for good or coming back?"

Itu: "Let me go for the interview first and I will know then."

Nkhono: "If I were you I was going to pack my things already."

Lerato: "I think so too."

I was forced to pack which helped as it turned out I was told to start working on Wednesday. It was not even an interview it was only to validate that my certificates were legit not forgery.

I had to move into the BnB with Lerato for the three days left. I was not that broke as I got my package from my previous job. I never changed my number I only blocked Ofenste and family.

Lerato: "I got you something comfortable."

It was on a Friday after work her job was to hunt for a place for me online. And she was doing a great job.

Itu: "When can we view it?"

Lerato: "In an hour's time. Are you fine with it?"

Itu: "I am tired but I am good to go I can go no worries."

Lerato: "If it is good then I will leave on Monday afternoon."

Itu: "I will be lonely."

Lerato: "I know I will miss you too but I have to work these days I have been slackening on my trading I want to replace the money I took for Kali." Itu: "We will go back to phone calls."

Lerato: “Yes please. Let me bath so that we can go.”

We loved the place from first sight. It was fully furnished which was going to be costly but it was good for me as I was not in a mood to furnish a place which didn't belong to me.

On Monday after work I bid farewell to Lerato.....

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The house was cold without Lerato I couldn't find anything to do. I had DSTV but it was boring at that time. I had to start afresh to watch the series some I found in the far seasons but I was enjoying them more than movies.

Bones was my favourite because of Dr Brandon's rude nature or I can say her blunt nature. She didn't want to spare anyone's feelings she said it as it is; as raw and blunt as it was.

“I got home safely and I found visitors in my rental house with my bags already packed.”

I laugh to myself and this just needed a phone call. I turn the volume down and call her.

Lerato: “I didn't say you should call me we are having family time.”

I just laughed at her.

Itu: "Oh now you talk about family time. I am not dropping this call even if my life depended on it. Sorry boo start talking."

Lerato: "Well when I got home they were waiting for me with his daughter they bribed and blackmailed the landlord to give them the spare key. Remember I was ignoring their calls. They even cleaned my utensils and packed."

Itu: "So where were they sleeping or even eating?"

Lerato: "They ate takeaways you know my hubby and cooking."

We both laughed.

Lerato: "They slept in the bedroom; there is a bed; remember; so it was not packed. When I got there it was like...."

Nadifa: "We have been waiting for you for almost two weeks."

Lerato: "Why would you wait for me when you have a house?"

Kali: "Mom home is boring without you please forgive dad."

Lerato: "But dad didn't do anything to mommy."

Nadifa: "My angel; please go and play outside I was call you just now."

She ran outside.

Lerato: "So she is allowed to play outside now?"

Nadifa: "I didn't know what to do with her when she had a tantrum so I used to allow her to go outside and try not to think about you all the time."

Lerato: "So where is your girlfriend?"

Nadifa: "What girlfriend?"

He looked genuinely surprised and my husband is not a good liar at all.

Lerato: "You were hardly at home very grumpy even accused me of marrying you for your money which I fully returned by the way so what was keeping you away from home?"

Nadifa: "I was scared okay. I am never going to have a girlfriend when I am married because it's not the way I was raised. Even my dad died a monogamist. I was scared that maybe you will change for me. I have seen my friends lose everything they worked hard for because of the women they love."

Did he say women they love so was he in love with me?

"I love you Lerato and I do not want to lose you. I will change for you. Whatever you want I will do it for you. I know you loved me and if you may still; you can have me and I will love you till the end of days."

Itu: "So sweet." I interrupted her. She was a good story teller it was like I was watching a movie because I could picture that in my head.

Lerato: "Will you let me finish woman."

Itu: "Okay."

Lerato: "So he was there on his knees begging me. I love my husband and all the love came back when I saw him kneeling before me crying."

Nadifa: "So what do you say?"

Lerato: "I loved you from the first day you came to my mom's BnB looking for help. I have never loved anyone and my heart belongs to you. But if we are to work on this marriage we will have to communicate more than we did before."

Nadifa: "Very true and I will not put you through what I put you through again. It is not only affecting us but our daughter too. I do not want to have a child who will grow up scared of what might happen to her if we are not married. I love being married to you even if I don't show it often. I do not want to be married to anyone else."

Lerato: "I love you too. Let us go home."

Nadifa: "Thank you I thought you will never ask."

Lerato: "We kissed and made out in....."

Itu: "Wowowowo too much details."

We both laughed I was genuinely happy that they fixed things. If there was anyone who deserved happiness it was my friend Lerato.

Itu: "Well to be honest I am happy for you and I wish you all the happiness you deserve."

Lerato: "Thank you friend."

Itu: "Before I forget I need Zee's number. You said its Zee right?"

Lerato: "Oh yes she is the one she is a retired hacker because her husband Thabo says so but she might help you."

Itu: "Thank you very much. I am not a revengeful person but I want them to pay and suffer the way I am suffering now."

Lerato: "Do not worry they will pay dearly."

Itu: "I am working on bankrupting them first so that when Zee helps me to submit those files to the authorities they won't have the money to bribe their way out."

Lerato: "You are one clever person. Lesedi created a monster."

Itu: "I will be at peace when I know they are behind bars not hurting innocent people anymore. I will have kids one day and I wouldn't want them to grow up with that family around."

Lerato: "Speaking of kids you have to make some soon."

Itu; "That is actually not a bad idea."

We both laughed I dropped the call after my goodbyes.

Time passed and things were good at work I was working with people who where good who didn't even mind helping me when I was slacking or behind at some point. I had time every weekend to visit my granny and Tshele. He was doing a great job as the yard was always clean and he supervised the builders who were about to finish before the month even ended. We

agreed with Nkhono to give him a monthly allowance which was going to help him carter for his needs.

After two months Zee was ready for me. She was a mother and wife so she was making sure we are not disturbed during our mission. She sent a file to me I was going to use so that they were not going to trace my IP address.

Third month I started my revenge plan. I was not going to spare them. I know Tumelo and Lesego were going to miss their mother but it was for the best.



I took the usb Lesedi gave me one weekend and hit the internet cafe. I was not going to use one internet cafe for this I had planned everything.

I entered their account faster than I thought. It was as if Lesedi was the one pressing all the buttons. I had compiled a number of charity organisations around the country. The link Zee gave me it also opened the gates to three different offshore companies. I was online with her she was instructing me. The family was at church on Sunday and I was off so we were doing the things kids are not supposed to do at home.

She was a good instructor. I would say maybe their parents were the same with Lesedi but then people out there were sleek.

We were going to do it over the weekend for the reasons that we were both free and the fact that banks were closed on weekends so it was going to be difficult for him to go to the bank and undo the transactions.

Zee: "You are now in. Are you sure you do not want a small chunk too?"

Itu: "I do not want blood money I am serious."

Zee: "Okay not click ctrl

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shift and 7 at the same time.”

I did and it gave me the option to put accounts numbers.

Itu: “Are you sure his phone won’t click?”

Zee: “I deactivated it already.”

I was dealing with dangerous people there; that is why her husband didn’t want her to do that. After I was done I waited for her instructions.

Zee: “Now press F8, Ctrl and T at the same time.”

I did as instructed and the money went like it does in the slots machines in the casinos. I was scared a little but I needed this.

Zee: “Now enter and make it sleep; pay and go to the next cafe as fast as you can.”

I was wearing my sweat pants and trainers so I jogged to the next spot. When I got there I had a few minutes to spare.

Itu: “I am here.”

Zee: “Wow that was fast I wish I was as young and vibrant. Okay log in again. Now we are moving the offshore accounts only. Those ones are tough we need to move them twice. There is too much security there so you need to concentrate. Are you ready?”

Itu: “Been ready for my whole life.”

Zee: “Good we only have thirty minutes before his phone gets network coverage.”

I calmed myself down as I was running. Then Zee sent another different link for me to work with. I was getting good at this but it needed someone who was dedicated. Some buttons were foreign to me and technology was not my friend.

I managed to do everything she told me to. We couldn't move the one which was in Bahamas because it had fire brick but Zee said she sent a red alert to the bank which was going to lead to investigations and they were going to freeze the account while doing that. I was happy as the account had less than two million US dollars.

You should have seen me running away from that place. You know that feeling that you feel when you feel that you are

going to feel like you are about to feel that feeling you have never felt before. Yes that feeling I was feeling it. I was going to wait for Zee after the weekend to release the criminal file that Lesedi had. It was not on soft copy so she needed time.

Itu: “So how much do I owe you?”

Zee: "Do not be silly I am paying a debt I owed Lerato and her mother. When I was in a dark place they helped me without anything in return. I will help anyway I could."

Itu: "Thank you very much stranger I owe you big time."

Zee: "No pay it forward. You will help someone also. Well I bet the charity organisations you helped is a start to pay back."

Itu: "I do not know you but thank you and I love you. May you get all your heart desires granted."

Zee: "Thank you very much. Let me disconnect this line and don't forget to destroy that one too before you get to your area."

Itu: "Thank you."

I felt like I was in an action movie and I was a bad \*\*s criminal. I smiled getting rid of the sim card. It was a sim card given out by street vendors which had already been registered; a phone which was registered from a fake Gmail account. I restarted the phone on the spot where I got rid of the sim card and it was as

good as new as if nothing happened. I then registered it again with my account and put my other line there.

On that particular day I slept like a baby without any bad dreams. For the first time since the fire I felt free.

When I got up in the morning there was a message in my phone. What the.....

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When I got up in the morning there was a message in my phone. What the.....

I ran to the toilet to pee as I was too pressed. I came back then called my granny.

Itu: "Nkhono what is going on?"

Nkhono: "Hello to you Itumelang."

Itu: "I am worried sick here. I saw your message this early in the morning. When are we going to get a break?"

I was almost in the verge of tears.

Nkhono: "Calm down that is why Tshele didn't want me sending that message he knew that you will overact."

Itu: "So what happened?"

Nkhono: "Your cousin was watching television. You know how he is about watching till late he sometimes sleeps in the sitting room let me say most of the times. He was still awake when he heard the noise he didn't want to wake me up so he just took a broom stick and went to check outside. These boys were

loading the bricks in a wheelbarrow. He chased them and caught one. But the others came back and hit him hard when the neighbours heard it was too late.”

I heard my blood boiling literally I was not feeling it but hearing it boil to the last point. We were poor they saw that then a good Samaritan helps us to finish the house and they take the little of what we have.

Itu: “How is Tshele?”

Nkhono: “We just got home from the hospital. They took him for an X-ray they say it is just flesh wounds he will heal.”

Itu: “He needs to rest. Those men need to finish or should I hire someone else?”

Nkhono: “Tshele was saying the same. He believes they should bring back some of the money we paid them and hire other people to finish but I....”

Itu: “No Nkhono you know them because they are your old friend’s kids but they are not delivering. I am asking for a day off today I am hiring someone else. If we lose Tshele because of these useless building materials what are you going to tell your son? That you chose your old friend’s child over his son.”

Nkhono: “I know if you make up your mind then there is no stopping you.”

Itu: "You know me well. I am coming; I will start at the office first. I will take a taxi it is faster than the bus."

Nkhono: "There is no need to waste your money."

Itu: "Oh yes there is need. I am choosing my cousin over money. I have lost too much so far and I am not prepared to bury any of my loved ones soon. Do not tell me about God's plan because He will also ask you "why did you keep lazy people" because I believe he doesn't want lazy people also."

She laughed making me laugh also.

I took a bath it was still early but I needed to be early so that the boss will find me at work. I was lucky she didn't even dispute she even asked me to wait for the company driver as he was going to Qwaqwa. He left me in town and drove back to the firms where he was going initially. I was grateful as I was going to take two taxis if he had left me there.

"I am home."

I announced going inside.

Tshele: "I told your granny not to send the message and she never listened now she will listen to me frequently."

We both laughed

Itu: "She is your granny also and look how swollen you are? This is nothing small."

Tshele: "I am not in pain don't worry."

Itu: "I am worried already. I think I need to buy that fence and get the dog you asked for."

Tshele: "Yes there is no need to hire anyone I can do the fence I will ask dad to also come and help me."

Itu: "He will use the money for his needs."

Tshele: "You see so just buy the fence. We will do it. When you are ready I will ask him to bring the tape measure and then you will measure and go with him to buy the fence."

Itu: "Still not sociable?"

He was still the same. He hated town with a passion. If he wanted his clothes he went early in the morning when they opened shops then he would be back before there were many people in town.

Tshele: "I hate crowds I would rather stay at home digging holes for the poles."

Itu: "So how would you feel about staying with us permanently?"



Tshele: "I will think about it but I got a site. When I feel I am ready for marriage I will build there so that my wife will feel comfortable."

Itu: "Okay fare enough."

Tshele: "I am still young for marriage so worry not."

I spent the day with them. He was sleeping the rest of the day. He was acting strong but I knew he was in pain. I left in the morning with the morning bus. I went straight to work. I had changing clothes at home.

A message came through my email it was a code message. I created a fake account and emailed Zee. She told me that the Bahamas account was frozen so we could strike. I was happy on how smooth and fast this was going. I gave her a go ahead and deleted the fake account. Her accounts had a bridge that stopped the tracking devices so I was safe.

I was a happy soul since I knew that the devil was going to pay for his sins. My job was my haven with my colleges who were super awesome. Things were falling into space.

That same night I receive other good news that Lesego was going for her first operation soon. I was happy that it worked. My work was done. I was ready to move on with my life. Well as soon as the devil and his daughter were out of sight.

The week ended with nothing. The following week I asked Zee and she told me to be patient. I had given up and I had accepted that they were not going to be arrested when one evening Bophelo sent a message to me.

Itu: "This is quite a surprise."

We were not friends. Although she had helped me she had told me it was the right thing to do and she kept her distance from there fourth.

Bophelo: "Well I wanted to ask if they arrested the person who killed Lesedi."

Itu: "Why would you ask that?"

I was really shocked.

Bophelo: "Well I am reading Qwaqwa news online now there is this woman and they discovered her hidden car."

Itu: "What are you talking about?"

Bophelo: "I sent the link to your facebook account go and read and I will call you later."

I was hardly on facebook because it was a waste of time to me. So I quickly logged in. The notifications came flooding in. I ignored the rest and checked the one Bophelo had tagged me on.

It was a story about a woman who went to the car wash to get it cleaned unaware that the police officer who handled the hit and run case was at the car wash too. He had the description of the car and that car looked suspicious to him.

It said the officer called for backup as he was off duty. The car was taken in as evidence. They said the young woman does not

want to say anything so she was still in police custody. There were no names mentioned only Lesedi's name.

I called DP.

Itu: "Bophelo showed me the Qwaqwa news so is it true?"

Dipulelo: "I am fine my love thanks for asking and the baby is growing."

Itu: "What? What baby?"

She just laughed at me.

Dipulelo: "I got your attention now didn't I?" We both laughed.

Itu: "Well that baby better have brothers and sisters in there like they should be at least seven there."

Dipulelo: "What are you mad? I send it back to sender. I am not even sure I am pregnant."

Itu: “Did you have unprotected sex? Okay check, two are you a woman. Okay check; are you using contraceptive pills

well check when last did you go on your period? Oh boy check; check, check and check. You are definitely pregnant. Now can we get to the point?”

She laughed very hard.

Dipulelo: “Okay; mother in law called me and told us that they might be reopening Lesedi’s case. You know I have been

praying day in day out for something to happen and I am happy and I hope she will be found guilty.”

Itu: “Oh she will be.”

Dipulelo: “Why are you saying that?”

Itu: “I know it is what you have been praying for and it will happen. Granny and Nkhono are praying too so believe you me they will arrest her and throw away the key.”

Dipulelo: “I hope so and I hope I am pregnant.”

Itu: “Just go to the clinic dear you will find out and please may I be the first one to know?”

Dipulelo: “After my husband of course.”

Itu: “Your husband is not counted as he is one as you.”

We laughed and I dropped the call. I called Bophelo to tell her that it was indeed the car that ran Lesedi over. She also said she wishes that woman will rot in jail. I went to the post again. People were angry and some were saying if she gets away with it they will burn her alive.

I was surprised they didn't say anything about the father. I called Lerato telling her that she might visit Qwaqwa soon as she was one of the witnesses. I was hoping that police officer was not going to lose his job for doing a good job. The world we live in. Good people are being punished for being good.

Lerato: "This time around I am bringing my family."

Itu: "The house will be done so there will be enough space. We will be happy to meet them also; so it will be a good trip for all parties involved."

Lerato: "Has Zee finished baking cookies?"

We were not going to say it openly.

Itu: "Yes she did; they are raising; we are only waiting for them to be ripe. Unfortunately you are far to eat with us."

Lerato: "Well you will eat for all of us then."

I laughed as I dropped the call. The following week we had a workshop in Senekal. I was getting better about travelling. My phobia was a little controllable even although my boss didn't

want to take any chances we travelled over night so that I could sleep just in case.

She said phobias are triggered by any small things. She said in my case it could be me watching trees as the car drives it could trigger that. She was telling the truth as I felt weird if I looked outside the window when going home. I never looked outside anymore.

We were hardly on our phones we would come later tired in our rooms. She had booked for us at some guest house. We were having some fun as we also had competitions as teams on

a Friday. Saturday morning I was back home in Qwaqwa with many messages that flooded in. There was no Telkom network coverage at Senekal so I had just switched off my phone.

“Why are you screaming as if you have seen a ghost?”

It was Nkhono when I saw the messages from Zee I just froze.

Itu: “They got them all this week. Puleng and the whole family are behind bars.”

Nkhono: “What? How?”

I was not going to tell her that I helped them put all of them behind bars.

Itu: "I do not know Nkhono and I do not care as long as they pay. I am happy Lesedi is working from her grave to clean the streets. I will always love her."

Nkhono: "So the trial will start?"

Itu: "Puleng confessed; I doubt we will be needed to testify. All in all I can move on with my life. But I want to go and visit Puleng."

Nkhono: "What....."

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### ***Two years later***

"Well I am taking you out for a meal tomorrow you can't afford to spend another birthday alone"

I looked at them.

"You guys my granny is coming to spend it with me."

"Did she just say her granny? Well this girl needs to be sprinkled with holy oil and scrubbed with holy water."

I laugh at them my colleagues Sarah

Rebecca and Zyran. It was going to be a weekend and my birthday was on a weekend. We were not friends so to say but

they cared about me as my colleagues something I never had at my first and previous job.

Itu: “Good people I missed my birthday with her last year and she felt bad.”

Rebecca: “She is your granny she will get over it. After our celebrations we will drive you home your time with her won’t be ruined.”

Sarah: “We will?”

It was more of a question than a statement.

Zyran: “Honey we will be stoned so who will drive?”

Rebecca: “She will drive us.”

Itu: “I do not even know how to drive and even if I drive you who will drive you back?”

Zyran: “She has a house where she sleeps.”

Rebecca: “I know you Zyran you are a white who doesn’t mind but Sarah can’t even go to down town spar how will she survive Qwaqwa?”

We laughed at her. Sarah was those white people who were white. She was scared of even going to areas with many blacks. She was not racist but she would rather prefer to live in a world full of whites only. She never even showed hostility towards



me because she shared her food with me sometimes. So I cannot describe how she interacted with people because even from her race she had her husband only as a friend.

Itu: "Please leave my Sarah alone we are talking about me here."

Zyran: "Thank you very much."

Rebecca: "I know you only want to get wasted that is why you are pushing this."

Zyran: "I don't have a girlfriend my parents are out for the weekend so I would love to get drunk before they come back. They still think I am their little boy."

We laughed at him.

Sarah: "How do you manage to hide that you are a drunkard?"

Zyran: "That word is harsh dear but I have a bhabhalazi concoction that always help me."

Itu: "Well as you know that I only drink occasionally I was not planning on getting drunk at all this birthday."

Rebecca: "Come on love. In our black society you know that they will expect you to be married soon so you are leaving your youth years tomorrow say bye to them."

She leaves with Sarah to their work station which was on the other side laughing. They all didn't know about my past and my marriage. Not everyone in your life has to know your past.

Zyran: "You know darling that you can even get married tomorrow if you wanted."

Itu: "Let us not go there."

Zyran: "I mean he is handsome and he has money. Your boss will be your sister in law so she won't fire you in the next coming years or for the rest of your life."

Itu: "I do not do white. Can you imagine looking at your mouth I can't even imagine how you kiss someone do you turn red when you are horny?"

Zyran: "Let me kiss you and see."

We both laughed.

Itu: "No jokes my love you are young for me and I will not go out with Steven technically he is my boss because he is here often than his sister."

Zyran: "You will forever be single. I was trying to help you. Don't you have spiders camping down there?"

I hit him as he laughed going away.

Itu: "I will tell your girlfriend that she is not the main but the side."

Zyran: "You don't have the guts my love I will have to get you drunk to get that courage."

I laughed alone. Zyran was right I needed to go out and have fun. I was even beginning to think I had no sexual feelings anymore. I didn't even see any black man attractive. Was I still holding on to Lethabo so much?

Was I idolising a man who I never knew whether he was not also perfect or not. As I analysed it I saw that if he was given a

few years with me maybe he would have done me wrong sometimes and we would have fought also.

The only time I spent with him was too perfect and it spoiled me for other relationships. Or I was supposed to start thinking rationally and understand that no one is perfect even my Lethabo was just a man not that perfect at all.

"Hay boo what are you doing for your birthday this year? Do not tell me you are spending it at home with Nkhono?"

I laughed at her message. Lerato was still Lerato with a boy on the way and their love blossoming.

Itu: "Are you planning to send a hunk to my house who is loaded?"

Lerato: "That won't be a bad idea you know."

I laughed

Itu: "We will talk after work boss lady just got in."

Lerto: "I love you birthday girl."

I smiled and place my phone on my jean pocket. Boss lady came to me.

Boss: "I saw the report it was well written and you highlighted some issues I was not aware of well done. You will be getting a

huge bonus for that. You are a fast learner and a hard worker; keep it up."

If you knew my boss; that was a huge step for her to compliment me; she hardly commented she was not unfriendly but strict when it came to work.

Itu: "Thank you very much."

Boss: "Oh and before you go home you may pick up your present in my office; I am off to the weekend see you on Monday."

Itu: "Thank you very much."

It was a norm at the office that on someone's birthday we contributed and they went to buy for them without her/him

present of course then the boss will give the person the gift. She contributed a lot I knew it because when I calculated most gifts were above the money we contributed.

I was cracking my head about what it was; I knew each and one of them had a huge card signed by them accompanied by their messages.

After work I went there and collected it. A laptop that I had been struggling to buy not just any laptop; it was an HP Pavilion 14 a 2 in 1 notebook, touch screen and flips. I wouldn't even tell you how much it cost because you will faint.

After putting those good for nothing dogs behind bars I had made a mission to teach myself about computers and a few of hacking stuff with the help of Zee so people in my shoes would understand why this was the best present ever for my birthday.

I just screamed when I got home after opening it. I called DP oh and she had two girls. When her little girl was only 8 months she said she didn't want to wait she had another one. They were practically twins as the little one was growing too fast.

Dipulelo: "Some of us are trying to put kids to sleep when you scream like this."

I screamed again.

Dipulelo: "Okay now I am thinking that someone is attacking you."

Itu: "Well they did attack me with kindness. Guess what they bought for me at work this year for my birthday?"

Dipulelo: "A laptop."

Itu: "You are not fun I am beginning to think that you are a sangoma are you sure you are not? I wondered why your husband doesn't cheat I bet when he is about to cheat you just hold his ball and say 'That one is a whore and she will give us some diseases' then he stopped thinking about cheating."

She just laughed at me and the kid cried at the background.

Dipulelo: "You are so evil. Now my babies are wide awake. I will tell my husband what you said."

Itu: "Sorry my babies; mommy will come and collect you. Give my babies the phone please."

They knew my voice they would speak baby language to me.

Kids nowadays love the phone more than they love their milk.

Dipulelo: "Happy birthday love your present is already at home."

Itu: "But I said no presents this year."

Dipulelo: "You said it I never said anything."

She just laughed. In Lerato and DP I had found sisters like no other. Both of them were so giving that I didn't even know what to do for them. What do you give someone who has it all?

"I know you are crying please do not because you have been through a lot. Its time you made the most out of the little things you have now. These are just material things we are showering you with but you give us all your time which is the most precious gift that we can't even afford. I remember when I was a makoti for the first time. Some people hated me because they were hoping my husband was going to marry in Qwaqwa and their daughters. You came to me and offered a genuine friendship. I doubted you at first but as years went by I realised that it was genuine and you never even changed. Through the pain and heartaches you are still a good person so enjoy these moments that we have been given."

I was genuinely crying I had to drop the call and sent a thank you message. Those silly workmates managed to wake me up in the morning to go on a drinking spree I had to cancel with my granny who understood. At least Rebecca and her husband who was as sober as a judge drove me home. They said I kept on complaining about letting down my granny when I was drunk.

Nkhono: "You now drink like a fish."

Tshele: "I have never seem her so drunk. But at least she had an awesome birthday."

Itu: "Please do not let those three take me out again."

They laughed at me.

Nkhono: "Well you managed to get home safe. We will celebrate today. The food and the cake are ready. You only turn thirty once so your uncles are coming too."

I had tears in my eyes. With so many people who loved me what more could one person ask for?

Tshele: "Well get up we need to go to town and buy some meat. Nkhono cooked it all; we don't have any for braii."

Itu: "Please kill me now."

He laughed at me going out. He came back again.

Tshele: "Your husband was here he left a present. He is now talking about the second wife."

We laughed. Nhlanhla was still crazy but at least he was dating kids his age so he was slowly outgrowing his crush for me.

Itu: "I am lucky to have a husband who always thinks about me."

I prepared breakfast after my morning bath and wore the dress Lerato sent for me. She was the one who was filling my



wardrobe with too many cute short dresses. She said I had to show off so I can get a husband.

Tshele: “Your friends have rich tastes.”

I laughed as we walked to the bus stop. I was thinking about getting a licence and buy a second hand car. I was not going to afford anything new but then my plot of land in Bloem came to mind. I was going to build first.

We were laughing with Tshele to our jokes when we dropped off the taxi at hungry lion. I held his shoulder balancing myself. He was tall. I heard a female voice calling my name. We both turned and my eyes just popped.....

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I looked at her she was still using a chair Tumelo was pushing her. Tumelo had grown and he was looking like his father. He pushed his granny faster coming to me.

“Ausi Itu you are still alive.”

He left his granny, ran toward me and hugged me tight.

Granny: “I think I will have to find another driver if you are going to leave me hanging when you see your friends.”

We laughed as I knelt down to hug granny. She was smiling from ear to ear.

Tumelo: "I missed her so do not blame me. Look at you smiling from ear to ear too. Hello uncle how are you."

I looked over my shoulder and I have forgotten that I was with Tshele.

Itu: "Oh this is my cousin Tshele so it's uncle Tshele to you. What are you eating when you are this tall?"

He smiled and looked at his granny.

Itu: "Nana; how are you?"

Granny: "I am fine and you? You just left without even saying goodbye to me. Why would you do that?"

Tumelo: "Nana let us go and order in the meantime. Ausi Itu; please join us for breakfast we came for some business so we didn't eat in the morning."

I looked at Tshele.

Tshele: "I am cool with it I will call Nkhono though so that she won't be worried."

We left Tshele on the phone while Tumelo was watching me like a hawk. They ordered breakfast I was not in the mood for food I needed something too chilli and meaty.

Itu: "Do not worry I will order something later."

Nana: "No I am the one buying so order. I want to hear everything about the past two years."

Itu: "Nothing much happened after we buried Lesedi...."

It was my first time after two years talking about her without shedding any tears.

"Well after we buried her I got a job in Bethlehem I moved there I only come home some weekends. I am happy at work so my life is work

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work, and more work."

Nana: "Such a boring life."

We laughed Tshele came in and ordered something also.

Tumelo: "Well I tried calling you I wanted to tell you that Lesego went to USA for the operating because the doctor you sent us to did the first procedure but the evil twin had grown so here in Africa they couldn't do another procedure. She went there it was successful now she can live a normal life she took dancing and karate so they went for her dancing competition in Harrismith with dad."

I was so happy that something I did worked out.

Nana: "So it is you who applied for her to go for an operation?"

Tumelo: "Oh poop on toast." I didn't want to laugh but I did. I had asked him not to tell them. "Sorry it must be the excitement of seeing you. I wanted you to be happy that you did something for Lesego. Mom didn't want to take care of it dad didn't have money for it."

Nana: "Well do not make excuses for your parents. Did Itu have the money for it? No she didn't but she tried something. I always teach you that you don't need to have money to change the world. Look at her she changed your world you are now a happy family because she took an initiative to help you."

Tumelo: "Yes ma'am."

Nana: "I would like to thank you. It has been a mystery as to who managed to get Lesego the appointment when I tried convincing the parents who did care. I wish God can give you a peaceful and happy life because you care about people around you even if they don't care about you. My grandson treated you badly and his mother but you were kind enough to help him regardless."

Tumelo: "I am sorry about my mom. I asked her about Lesedi and she told me that she is the one who 'accidentally' killed her. She wanted to scare you so she said. But then I asked her why she never came up when even in the radio they were

looking for the person she never replied. I am trying to forgive her. I hope with time I will forgive her.”

Itu: “I was angry also but after sometime I realised even if I am angry I will not bring Lesedi back. I will not have my life back. I will not have my triplets back I will still be here bitter for nothing. She is your mother that will not change. She loves you that is what is important if she never loved you she was not going to give you the life you are living now. She was going to kill you in her womb like what other women are doing.”

Tumelo: “So am I heartless to want to be angry at her?”

Itu: “No your anger is justified but you only have one mother no one can replace a mother ask me I am in living hell now wondering what life would have been if my mother had not dumped me here. I am happy my granny is the best thing after the loaf of bread.”

We all laughed

“My point is we all make mistake. I am not ready to forgive her but the difference is she is not my mother. If she was I was going to forgive her for my sanity. I am this happy because in my heart I forgave all the people who wronged me. I will not get my life back but I am happy now. I have found a sisterhood and a friendship so divine that if my life hadn't taken a tragic

turn I would have never met those people. You are too young to hold a grudge.”

Tshele: “Yes she looks so simple and young but she is wise kiddo listen to her.”

Nana: “I am glad we ran into you. They didn’t want anything to do with their mother I told them that you can choose your friends but you will never choose your family.”

Itu: “I am not going to dwell on bad news let us talk about school how is it?”

He smiled a little.

Tumelo: “High school is not fun we have too much work and I am not respected the way I used to be respected.”

We laughed at him.

Nana: “You mean you do not have money to throw around and buy people’s love.”

We laughed at him.

Tumelo: “Not like that. People who are popular now are those who play sports not us academic freaks. I can’t play sports so I am just me.”

Itu: “Do not say you are just you. Some of us we were not academically gifted and it was always difficult; use

your academic record to make yourself happy enter those competitions that other academic freaks enter.”

We laughed at him; he also laughed.

Nana: “You need to forgive each other with your Mango and be in their lives again.”

I was not going down that route. I wanted my peace and with Ofentse’s mother and sister I was not going to get that. With him also I was not sure I was ready to forgive him. I might have told Tumelo that I forgave them but looking at people there are possibilities that the hurt comes back.

Tshele: “Who is Mango?”

Itu: “No one.”

I said it as fast as I could as I didn’t want them to know more.

They laughed at me.

Tumelo: “I guess Mango is dad.”

Itu: “Well this is our cue to leave. It was a pleasure to see you again Nana and Tumelo. Greet Lesego and your dad for me. I will see you around.”

Nana: “What is the rush?”

Tshele: “We came for meat. It was her birthday yesterday so we are celebrating as a family today.”

I would have killed him for that. It was great meeting them but I was not ready for the ‘reunion’ thing.

Tumelo: “Really; are we invited?”

Nana: “It’s a family thing so do not spoil her day. Happy birthday Itu we wish you many more.”

I looked at Nana she was shaking. She was getting older by the day. I was hoping she still had more years with her great grandkids. They were lucky though to have seen her alive.

Itu: “Thank you for the meal. Have a great day.”

We left with Tshele to go to Spar they always had those readymade chilli hot wings. I wanted them for my uncle and I; we were both obsessed with that.

Tshele: “So are we going to pretend this morning never happened or should I ask Nkhono?”

Itu: “You know I love you more because you are not so nosy what changed?”

Tshele: “What I saw, the bond between you and that boy it is like a mother and son bond. You cannot fake such a bond so tell me; what is the story?”



Itu: "There is nothing to tell dear and the relationship was sour with his family so that is just a child I like and nothing more."

Tshele: "Nkhono it is then."

I just stood there while he walked as if he didn't just threaten me.

Itu: "Okay then I will tell you but promise me you will never tell your father the other nosy people."

Tshele: "Have I ever done that before?"

Itu: "No but there is a first time for everything so just promise."

Tshele: "Okay; okay fine."

I told him everything of course I left out the hacking stuff I didn't want to go to jail and Zee made me swear on my life that we are both going to take the information to our graves.

Itu: "Well you see there is no love lost there it was a business transaction."

Tshele: "But the kids thought it was real that is why Tumelo genuinely love you."

Itu: "You see why I do not want anything to do with them because everything every feeling was a lie."

Tshele: "So you admit there were feeling."

Oh I forgot my cousin was just a bore when it came to these questioning tactics. We bought some meat at Roots butchery after Spar then took a taxi home with Tshele making a fool out of my misery the whole way. I loved him still he was my favourite cousin.

When we got home it was buzzing and my uncle was already drunk he had to sing the birthday song to me.

You know in rural areas a family function is never a family function only. Where meat and alcohol is concerned some people take it as a free invite. Midday the whole compound was buzzing with people we didn't know. Luck for our thoughtfulness with Tshele as we had bought extra meat. We were not going to chase our neighbours. I went to give Lesedi's granny a plate. She had a knee problem so she was immobile a lot. DP was planning on taking her for good. They were looking for someone to take care of the house.

Around 5 the noise had died down they had eaten and drank so they were gone. My uncles also left with their wives only my granny and cousins who were going to sleep over.

There was a knock at the door when I was about to sit down.

Tshele: "Your neighbours; coz."

Itu: "Not again."

We laughed at I went to open the door. I opened the door laughing and just froze.....

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"Who is at the door coz?"

I could hear Tshela's sister shouting from the kitchen. She was drunk but not to a popper.

Itu: "No one. I will handle it."

They continued chatting and I got out. I knew Nana was going to tell Ofenste but I never knew he was going to come to my place. He never came when we were 'dating' he always dropped me by the road. Only the kids knew my place.

I got out and closed the door. It was a sign that I didn't want them inside the house.

Tumelo: "I am sorry I know I shouldn't have but I was excited so I told them and they were excited too."

Lesego: "Talk for yourself and your father."

Okay what was going on? So it was Tumelo who told the father.

Itu: "Hello Lesego."

She mumbled what sounded like a reply to me I just had a flashback of the first days I met with them. At least the stories helped well I was not going to dwell on that.

Itu: "Hello Tumelo again. Hello Mr Ntai

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how are you doing?"

Lesego rolled her eyes. I swear she rolled her eyes on me. I was not going to entertain her there was nothing that was keeping me tied to their family.

I looked at Ofentse; damn he looked so fine and he had gained a little weight. Not too much but even his skin was fresh. He was clean shaved and good looking. He was wearing red sneakers with a black jean a white v-necked t-shirt and a red leather jacket. They were almost identical with Tumelo only he was wearing a red jean with a black leather jacket.

I had zoomed out when I heard Lesego throwing a tantrum.

Lesego: "I said can I go to the car now?"

Tumelo: "We heard you yes you may; I just opened it. There you go princess."

Ofenste: "Do not be like that to your sister she is tired from her dancing competition. You know she doesn't mean to be rude."

Tumelo: "Yah right."

I looked at them. It was like they were brother. Tumelo was so tall. All this time I was thinking of what I had rehearsed for the past two years but it went outside the window.

I had rehearsed in front of my mirror on what I would say to him when I met him in town one day but the day never came

for the past two years it came after and I couldn't even formulate a sentence in my head.

Ofenste: "Sorry to just budge in but Tumelo really wanted to bring this present for you. Happy birthday; I wish you all the best."

Tumelo: "You knew I could drive myself you also wanted to come."

Ofenste: "You were not going to drive without a licence."

Tumelo: "As if you never send me to do some errands in your car."

I just found myself smiling. It was a sight to bask on. The last time I checked they never had such a beautiful relationship. Things really change in life.

Itu: "Well thank you for your time. Thank you for the present."

Ofenste: "You are most welcome."

Tumelo hugged me so tight and then gave me the present. I looked at him going to the car.

Itu: "They grow up so fast."

I didn't know what to say. I was not even prepared to meet him. I knew Nana was going to tell him about me but I never thought that it would be before 24hours.

Ofenste: "I checked on you for months; I was too scared to come inside and ask. I saw Nkhono several times but I couldn't bring myself to approach her. I was ashamed more than scared."

Itu: "It's in the past may we not revisit it."

Ofenste: "We have to revisit it in order to bury it. Well this is neither the time nor the place. Happy birthday."

He gave me his present and left. Before he reached the car he turned and looked at me.

"You look so beautiful. My number hasn't changed by the way."

He got into the car and left me a blushing mess. I laughed at myself before going back inside.

"Who was at the door?"

Itu: "No one it's just my presents; I will put them in my room. "

Tshele was not buying my story. He followed me to the bedroom.

“I know you very well. What happened? Why are you shaking?”

Itu: “Well.....”

Tshele: “Out with it.”

Itu: “Ofenste was here with his kids. They are the ones who brought these presents.”

Tshele: “That is cool.”

I looked at him with inquisitive eyes. He seemed to be thinking hard.

“Wait a moment who is Ofenste I was thinking of Ofenste from Sibu’s mother. You are not talking about him are you?

.....Oh Ofentse the Mango guy.”

I just laughed even though I didn’t want to laugh.

Itu: “He is not Mango guy we call him Mr Mango.”

Tshele: “Same difference to me.”

I laughed at him. He was not drunk but tipsy. He never drank to a stopper no matter what. Even if the booze was a full house for free. He always told me that as a person you need self control he taught himself that when he started drinking.

I was wondering why he couldn't find a job; my cousin was one very intelligent and stand up guy.

"Well while you are day dreaming I am here waiting for you to tell me more."

I looked at him and laughed.

Itu: "For your own information I was thinking about you."

Tshele: "Eew that is so gross even if I were single; I wouldn't do my cousin."

Itu: "You are the gross one. I was thinking about how intelligent you are but people do not want to hire you."

Tshele: "Where does my inteli what what feature in the mango man conversation."

I laughed at him hard he ended up laughing.

Itu: "There is nothing really coz; he came with his kids to give me presents and left this. He told me his number hasn't changed but I couldn't tell him that I blocked and deleted his number."

Tshele: "Shame my sister wants do die alone. Why would you delete his number?"

Okay i didn't know whether to be angry or laugh because he said those two sentences in two different voices. The first one



was soft then the second one he was in my face shouting. I just laughed at the end.

Itu: "You sounded like someone with a personality disorder."

Tshele: "This conversation is far from being over. I am planning on taking you to Ntate Moloji the witchdoctor so that they can wash your man luck or is it unman luck."

I laughed going out of the room.

Itu: "I have a man. Steve he will marry me you will see."

He looked at me with a serious face and walked away. He knew about Steve and his intentions at first he was sceptical but later on he had encouraged me to go for him but I was not there.

We salvaged a meal from the ones leftover in the pots we were lazy to cook. Others were drunk. I was not going to cook alone. At least the meat was still plenty.

When I got to my room I went to check my presents. I opened the one from Lesego first it was a girly diary I wondered what I was going to do with a diary when the year was ending then I saw the year. It was for the coming year.

I smiled then took out Tumelo's present which was a picture frame with a photo I took with them in the almost failed picnic. There was a card. It read "I have been waiting for this

opportunity to give you this. This picture reminds me of how perfect and happy my family once was.”

I held my mouth and my chest was moving up and down. If only he knew that we were just acting and I was a liar in that movie.

I took the one from Ofenste it was a t-shirt in my favourite colour. I laughed because I bet he asked the kids about my colour. He was not interested in knowing my life or anything to do with that. I unfolded it and a note fell.

“This is my number in case you don’t have it anymore. 079.....”

I just laughed. It was last minute presents but I was happy that I got something from them. You ask me why I was happy I wouldn’t have told you.

I was not going to clean. My cousins always bullied me to cleaning after family gatherings. Even if it was done in their homes; I got them this time around. I took the morning bus to Bethlehem I was going to pass by my flat as I didn’t have clean formal clothes at home.

I took out my cream suit with the t-shirt I was given and wore them. I looked at myself in the mirror and I felt good and confident. Gone was the Itu who used to clean offices and be bullied by workmates and in was the real Itu. I was sure

Lethabo and the kids were going to be proud of me. I made a mental note to go to the graveyard to tell the kids and Lethabo that I love them so much but I was letting them go.

I switched on my phone as I always switched it off during the night. Messages came flooding. I knew it was DP and Lerato. My phone rang before I checked my messages.

“You don’t drop and bombshell like that and then disappear from the face of the earth. My husband is driving us to Bethlehem now.”

Itu: “Such drama in the morning Dipulelo.”

I even rolled my eyes till they almost hit their sockets.

Dipulelo: “Baby; where are we going now?”

“To Bethlehem why are you asking? Girls please be quiet I will go back home if you do not want this road trip.”

What?

Itu: “You are not serious right?”

She laughed at me.

Dipulelo: “As serious as a heart attack.”

I was not sure what to say I just kept quiet.

“Just kidding we are going to Qwaqwa to take mom. She can’t be staying alone in her condition. We are passing there to buy breakfast for you so don’t even think about it.”

I laughed closing the front door. I was running late so my only option was to take a taxi. I was going to pay full amount for a distance less than 500meters. I cursed under my breath. Yes I was a cheapskate. Money didn’t fall on trees so I was not going to waste it on useless things.

Before I could even get to work Lerato called.

“My love I am in a taxi going to work I will call you when I get there.”

Lerato: “Itumelang in a taxi well it will rain \$ today.”

She knew me well.

Itu: “I had to go to my flat first to change. I was late the bus delayed after Kestel there was an accident.”

Lerato: “I will call you after work.”

This was what I liked about Lerato she understood when not to disturb me. I got to work sweating I had to sign in and go to the bathroom first.

After an hour I was better and settled. I ignored the calls from home because I knew my cousins wanted to complain about cleaning. I told Nkhono to sort them out.

After lunch the reception lady came to me and said there was a delivery for me. It could not be DP because I ate breakfast with them.

When I got there I was.....shocked is an understatement.....

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I looked at the reception area there was a guy from AtmosVuur my favourite place. I hardly got time to get meals there because of the proximity. What am I saying; it was very far in Van Der Merwe Street and we were down side of town. Well I didn't order so it must be DP.

“Ma'am, please sign here for me the delivery note and I have a box for you in my scooter.”

Okay I was not sure if it was DP. I followed him to the scooter which was just parked upfront.

Itu: “Is it allowed to park like this by the door?”

“I know the bosses they are my customers.”

I concluded that the lunch and the box were from Steve. As the delivery guy said; wait a minute they didn't deliver so what.....

Itu: "I thought you guys don't deliver."

"We don't but if it's a special delivery with the amount of money it comes with my boss can't resist such deliveries."

It was Steve I knew it he had such a romantic gesture. I took the box and went with them to my work station. I opened the box it was with two of my favourite chocolates and a rose. It was packed so beautifully I didn't even want to eat them.

Zyran: "Well; please tell me it's not who I think it is?"

Itu: "You know you should have been a woman. Of all the people here you like things."

Zyran: "Well a little bird told me that you received a package and it's past your birthday so I was thinking you know someone didn't buy a gift for you like he did on your previous birthday."

Itu: "Zyran what am I going to do with you."

We both laughed.

Zyran: "Nothing honey we are attached on the hip."

Itu: "I do not know who they are from. I will not speculate."

Zyran: "Can we eat then without speculation."

I laughed at him. He loved the place too as he was the one who introduced us to the place.

Itu: "Well 'we' will share the food."

I meant Sarah; Rebecca and him. We were the only youngsters in the company so we did things together. He took the food to the kitchen.

Rebecca: "Who thought of buying this lovely food?"

Zyran: "Someone has an admirer. Did anyone see the boss man today?"

Sarah: "You think he is the one who....."

Itu: "Guys we came here to eat; didn't we. I am starving."

Rebecca: "Well we will discuss it after we eat I am starving. Can we go to AtmosVuur weekend I miss their food."

She said digging in as we ate.

Zyran: "Come to think of it this person knew she will not be eating alone?"

We looked at each other and laughed

Sarah: "Is there a note?"

Itu: "I will check in the box with the chocolates."

All: "What?"

Zyran: "So there are chocolates too. This is definitely a man who bought this for you."

Rebecca: “Duh

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we knew this one already.”

We laughed. I had concluded that it was Steve who bought the food. Who would say no to free food? We didn't even eat our lunch boxes; which I didn't have on that particular day.

Rebecca: “Life could be so beautiful if we ate AtmosVuur's food daily.”

Sarah: “Who is going to pay for your kids at school?”

Rebecca: “You just murdered my dream. Dream murderer.”

We laughed at her. The place had good food but expensive we couldn't eat their food daily. We finished eating and went back to work. I checked for the note but there wasn't any. I just took one block in the chocolate slab and ate. If someone was trying to kill me then I was going to die full.

When we were knocking off I went to check on Steve. Their offices were upstairs facing the street. It was a beautiful office that I envied. I knocked there was no answer.

“He is not here and he won't be here for the whole week.”



I looked at my back it was my boss I felt like the earth could open and swallow me. What was I going to say when she asked me what I wanted?

“Well your brother has a crush on me and I think he is the one who bought lunch and chocolates for me.”

“You can email him any work he will supervise it from his holiday home.”

Rich people. Who has a holiday home in Africa? Well at least she thought it was work related. You see why I knew the

relationship was not going to work? I was not going to fit in to begin with, who can fit in with a family who had a holiday home when I didn't even have a house or stand to my name.

Itu: “Thank you very much ma'am; I will email right away before I go home.”

I left the place in the speed of lightning the rest of the team was gone I was left with Margret who knocked off late always since her husband passed away.

I sent an email to Steve asking him to call me. I logged off and then went home.

I placed the box on my bed and called Lerato.

I told her about the previous day and the presents then about the mysterious lunch.

Lerato: "Do you think Steve is coming into you full force?"

Itu: "Nothing is making sense to me since yesterday. I do not even know how I am feeling anymore. Ofenste was just Ofenste my boss and i was only working for him but yesterday....."

Lerato: "What is it?"

Itu: "I do not even have words to describe the feeling."

Lerato: "Itu and Ofenste under a mango tree k-i-s-s-i-n-g..."

She was singing I just laughed at her.

Itu: "Hold your horses tiger there is nothing there."

Lerato: "If you say so but don't you think it's time to stop living in the past? The kids and your hubby are not coming back anymore. You loved them so much they lived and they will continue to live in your heart. I think that is what he would want for you to move on. I would want the same for my husband. I would never expect him to be miserable the rest of his life if I were to leave them now."

She was making sense I had to stop living in the past.

Itu: "You know yesterday I was thinking the same that I need to go to their graves and tell them that I am glad they are part

of my life but I need to move on because life has passed me by already.”

Lerato: “Yes please and we need that trip for your bachelorette party.”

I laughed at her. They have been asking me to date so that she and DP can plan a road trip for my bachelorette party.

Itu: “Who told you that I am getting married? I only talked about living a little.”

Lerato: “Even if you get married at 60 we are still getting that road trip.”

I laughed at her. I was even imagining us at 60 going on that road trip.

Itu: “Well let me bath and rest we slept late last night and this morning was a nightmare. I need a warm bath and my bed.”

Lerato: “Alright love. Please tell me when you know who our mystery man is.”

I dropped the call and rested after taking my bath. I guess I was too tired because I only woke up when my alarm went off. I was so hungry I could eat a bear.

I made breakfast first. I was never going to make it through the day without it. I was refreshed when I got to work I was on

time and the first one. There was no reply from Steve his phone was going on voicemail.

I was half way done with my morning work when the others joined us. I was happy to always come first even if I didn't have a car.

Sarah: "When you have a car you will always be late as you will count the minutes you are going to be driving to work."

Itu: "I am an early riser. My granny taught me that so I will never be a late comer."

Zyran: "Our husband will be so lucky."

Itu: "Leave me alone. Boss lady is here already."

You could have seen the way they ran away from my work station. I laughed at them as the boss was not in as yet. Rebecca was off so we were covering for her clients also.

Before lunch again there was a delivery. I was not copying with these surprises.

"You are one lucky lady."

The receptionist said when we got there.

Itu: "More like creped out lady if there was such a word."

On that day it was only a box but huge. Not that huge but slightly huge than the previous day. I used so many huge words in a sentence didn't I? I just laughed at myself.

I went straight to those two in the kitchen.

Zyran: "Well people with boyfriends."

Itu: "Guys I am really freaking out here. What if I have a stalker?"

Sarah: "Well a very romantic one."

I didn't mean to laugh but I did.

Itu: "This is freaking me out. Let me see what is in here?"

I opened the box and there they were; the books I have been meaning to buy from my favourite author. On top was ***Almost broken*** at the end was ***Her One Night Stand Baby***.

Sarah: "Who buys a woman books?"

Zyran: "What? I will kill to have a girlfriend who reads so that we can share the passion. Girl this man whoever he is he is for keeps. I vouch for him."

We laughed at him.

Itu: "How can you vouch for someone you haven't met?"

Zyran: "I feel like I know him. What if it's who I think it is?"

Itu: "He hasn't replied to my email. So I am still not sure."

We stayed in the dark for the whole week. On Wednesday it was a present with tickets for two to my favourite comedy show that was going to take place over the weekend. This person knew me well but how?

On Thursday it was a handbag I had been dying for. I told only Lerato and DP about it. I was beginning to think they were playing a prank on me.

On Friday it was a semi-formal dress with semi-formal shoes. For the Saturday evening comedy show; it said in the note which was typed so I didn't get whose handwriting it was.

An email came from Steve. It only said. "I take it you received your presents." So it was him all along.

Then the shocker before we knocked off he came in with a lady her arm tucked under his.

"Well ladies and gentlemen this lady said yes to me so we are getting married.

"What the...."

I got home and got under the blankets eating my ice-cream reading my book Almost Broken. I slept late and my phone was off. I didn't need any pity from my colleagues and friend.

On Saturday evening when I was contemplating going to the show alone; there was a knock at the door. I dragged my feet going to the door.

“You are still not ready?”

What the.....

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My whole life and entirely existence I never would have thought I will see him standing there in front of me in my apartment.

Who showed him my apartment? I was wearing a gown I fidgeted with it trying to tie it.

“Well I am sure we will be late for the show it starts in an hour.”

Itu: “Who showed me where I live Steve?”

Steve: “Well I made it my duty to find out. We are going to be late.”

Itu: “What about your fiancée or whoever she is?”

Steve: “Are you jealous?”

Itu: “Listen I am confused here. What is going on?”

Steve: "Should I do the honours of bathing you and changing you?"

Itu: "You wouldn't dare?"

Steve: "Try me."

He was as serious as a heart attack. I looked at him again and I was not willing to take any chances.

Itu: "Is it legal what you are doing?"

Steve: "Honey this is very legal. Now are you choosing option A or B."

Itu: "Just come after 20minutes I need to bath first."

Steve: "Smart girl clever choice."

He has a smirk on his face I swear he had a smirk. What was really going on? Was I dreaming or was this happening. If this was a dream I was hoping to wake up from the dream.

I took the fastest shower ever when I got to the bedroom I looked for my phone. When I switched it on there were no messages; which was really strange. After twenty minutes he was knocking at my door again.

Itu: "Please tell me this is a joke?"

Steve: "What is a joke?"



Itu: “Are you going to deny that you sent the presents to me books and what note and now you are standing here in my door after introducing your fiancée to us this afternoon.”

Steve: “Oh my baby is jealous. Wait what books and what presents are you talking about?”

Itu: “I am not in the mood to play games with you. I feel like screaming. I want to cry right now and if I do I can’t stop.”

Steve: “Well I brought a present before I left and it was in my office written your name. It was the training shoes and training kits you need as you have old ones.”

I usually ran on weekends but how did he know?

Itu: “Wait a minute how did you know about my training?”

Steve: “When you want to gift someone on their birthday you look for something they really need at the moment so that it becomes worth their while.”

I was in tears because I was confused as hell but something was not really adding up.

Itu: “So where are these presents now?”

Steve: “I bet they are still in my office.”

I took my phone and tried calling Lerato and she was not picking up. Was I losing my mind or what?

“Well we are here. You look good and I am happy to be your date tonight. I wish you would have given me a chance.”

Itu: “Are you telling me you chose the wrong one.”

Steve: “Now come on; my fiancée is sleeping; I do not want her to wake up and feel scared to be alone in that big house.”

Those words shook me and if you asked me why I was not going to answer you.

Itu: “So what.....”

Zyran: “Thank you boss I owe you one.”

Itu: “Okay before I call the police someone tell me what is going on?”

Steve: “Your friend here will tell you because I have no clue he came to me begging and even shed a few tears for me to go and pick you up in your flat.”

Itu: “Zyran?!”

Steve: “Well let me go then my job here is done. For your own information Itu I didn’t chose the wrong one. I settled for the second best. She is not you but I love her the way she is. I know you do not love me for your reasons but we need to continue working together. I am not a bitter man because I still love you but not enough to wait for you to make up your mind. You will

always have a spot in my heart. I am not growing younger and I can't keep hoping that you will change your mind one day."

Itu: "For your own information I love you also but not enough to turn my family's world upside down. We are coming from different worlds and different cultures so it was going to be an uphill task. I am hurt that you moved on but not that much to keep you from moving on. And thank you for understanding we are still going to work together."

Steve: "Well let us conclude that we will be compatible in another life."

Itu: "Yes in another life I will marry you in a heartbeat."

We both laughed

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he took me to his arms and hugged me tight. This was so good but he was not mine I needed to let him go.

Zyran: "Well enough with the lovey dovey can we do this."

Steve got into his car and I looked at Zyran with anger written all over my eyes.

"Please do not kill me"

Itu: "So you made me think I was getting mad while you laughed at me."

Zyran: "Things are not what they seem to be."

Itu: "You are not even making any sense and I would love you to say your last words as I bury you and our friendship because I am in a murderous mood."

"Who will take care of your mango then if you go to jail for killing your friend."

Well I jumped and almost broke my legs. Both of them can you just imagine.

Itu: "What is going on here?"

My heart was beating so fast it was not even normal. I looked back because it was like I was hallucinating.

"Hello Itumelang."

Itu: "What is going on? What are you doing here?"

Ofenste: "Hello to you too."

Zyran: "Well I have a confession to make."

Itu: "While at it please ask God to forgive you all your sins as you are leaving this earth today."

He laughed hiding behind Ofenste.

I got a look at him. He was looking good again. This time around he was wearing a black sward shoe with a white jean tucked

black shirt with a navy blue blazer. Who killed Ofenste and who was this new person in front of me?

I didn't trust my voice I just looked at him.

Zyran: "Well I was not going to leave a brother in the cold when he wanted help. Lerato helped too can we go and watch the comedy show already you two will catch up later."

It was both our love. This is what drew me to him, books and comedy.

Itu: "This is far from over."

Zyran: "Yes ma'am I am mentally writing my will."

We laughed.

Ofenste: "Well these are for you my lady."

I had not noticed that his hand was behind his back. It was a box of chocolates again. I was sure going to have a running tummy after this. There was a rose on top of it.

Zyran left us telling us that we will find him inside.

Itu: "Well what happened to Ofenste and who are you?"

Ofentse: "This is the original me."

Itu: "Are you sure they operated on Lesego not you?"

Oops didn't mean to bring that up.

Ofentse: "About that; I am very grateful that you came into my life. If it wasn't because of your love and care we would have lost her. The evil twin had grown so she was lucky to have you in her life."

Well what did he expect me to say; I just nodded.

Itu: "So was it you all along; the rest of this week?"

Ofenste: "I had so much help and before you punish them I was desperate so I had to blackmail them."

Itu: "Well they will get what is coming to them."

Ofenste: "Let us go before we miss the show."

We entered after producing our tickets. Zyran waved at us. We went to the table. That was the setup the tables surrounding the place so that food will be served. I was sitting across him. I was stealing some glances at him. He looked fresh and happy.

What is it that he wanted from us from this? I was not going to waste my comedy night. I concentrated and laughed with Zyran I didn't know what the future was bringing my way but I was going to embrace it. I had a lot of unanswered questions I really needed the answers.....

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My night was so wonderful the best comedy night ever. Some shows when you see them on American channels you would

wonder if they were ever meant for African soil then you get the shock of your life watching Africans flocking to those shows.

It was first time to have a full house. Most shows we went to with Zyran were not as full as this one. When it was over as I hated crowds we had to sit there in our table and talked. Zyran had ordered some wine.

His parents were around so he had to be a good boy. Ofenste stepped aside to go to the bathroom which was on the other side of the door way. The moment he took off I brought my chair closer to my culprit.

Itu: "Now start talking."

Zyran: "About what?"

Itu: "I think we both know about what."

Zyran: "Well the secret is out so what the heck. He contacted me on twitter about you."

Itu: "Wowowowo him; on twitter not a chance."

Zyran: "It's either him or someone did it for him. So he told me or rather asked me what you liked and what note. But it was on

a Wednesday the Monday and Tuesday presents I was not part of it."

Itu: "So who was...."

Zyran: "In coming."

He said pretending to cough. I laughed at him and we talked about something else.

Itu: "I am still not convinced Ofenste; what is really going on here? Who is this Ofentse and what is really going on?"

Zyran: "I am out of here."

Itu: "I am not done with you also. I will need my answers on Monday."

He laughed going to the door I was in need of answers I knew that this was too good to be true. Or he wanted me to be a character witness for his wife. Wait a minute; maybe he wanted something from me.

"Do you want me to testify on behalf of your wife hence these small gestures? I am not the one who reported her and I will never disrespect Lesedi's memory like this. I ....."

Ofentse: "So you think I am here to loo you only so that you can free my ex wife. Wow."

He looked so hurt as he stood up and left. Well that went so well but would you blame me for being suspicious?



I sat down there watching people leaving most of them in pairs as they were couples. I felt so lonely. Did I want to live my life alone? I had initially wanted to adopt but the process for a single black woman for that matter was too much. I think the conclusion was I didn't stand a chance or the chances were slim.

My granny getting frailer by the day; although I was fooling myself not to admit that she had only a few years left in her life bag. Tshele was in a serious relationship which was stopped by a job the moment he got a permanent job he told me that he was going to start building at his site and get married. Was I really ready to be alone in that big house for the rest of my life?

I looked up when the manager was talking to me.

“Ma’am, are you okay? We are closing.”

When I looked around indeed I was the only one left, how was I going to get home. I took my handbag and left in a hurry only to bump into someone by the door. I looked up and it was Ofenste.

“Oh; you are still here?”

Ofenste: “Yes I am still here. I am the one who invited you here so it would be also fair to see it that you get home safe and sound.”

He said coldly. I just followed him to his car without saying a word. He opened for me and when I was inside he closed the door. He was still a gentleman in his angry state.

Itu: "I....

Ofenste: "The.....

I looked at him and laughed

Itu: "You go first."

Ofentse: "Well I do not blame you for doubting me. The day you came to my office and Puleng was there she came to gave me an ultimatum. She said I had to let you go if she was going to back down from pursuing our relationship. She said if I had to continue then she was going to take the kids permanently without any visitation right. Judging from what I read and discovered from their arrest I believe you know she was capable of doing it. I love my kids with everything I have despite the mother they have. I was afraid to lose them. After you left I felt like I needed to explain to you but I was scared. When I got the courage then the call for Lesego's operation came through. I went there with her in a haze because I didn't know how they knew about the operation. When I came back that is when we

discovered that you are the one who helped and Tumelo told me everything in his anger that I lost the only person who truly cared about them.

I had to ask him what he meant then he told me about the signatures and how you looked for a doctor to review her case. For this I am indebted to you and thank you very much from the bottom of my heart.”

He was parking in front of my flat. How did he know? I was not going to crack my head as so many people were involved in the situation.

Itu: “Are you coming up to finish this conversation?”

Ofenste: “Is my car going to be safe in the first place?”

Itu: “I think so. Some people park outside the whole night I have never heard any complaints. The security is tight this side of town.”

Ofenste: “Okay then I will come up. Let me make a phone call.”

Itu: “Handsomely beautiful car by the way.”

He laughed. I left him there I didn’t even bother waiting for him so I left him. I had changed and was ready to make some coffee when he called me.

“I do not know your flat number so if you leave me here how am I supposed to get in?”

I laughed so he truly didn't know the flat number but he had my number all along so why didn't he call.

Itu: "So you had my number all along?"

Ofenste: "Tumelo gave me after the party. Are we going to talk over the phone like this or you are coming to get me?"

Itu: "I am coming."

I got him but after I made sure that I got a good laugh.

Ofenste: "This is a cosy place I love the colours."

Itu: "I loved them too hence I chose this place. Well tea or coffee?"

Ofenste: "You know I am a coffee kind of guy."

Itu: "Who knows you have changed a lot; maybe you are a no beverage kind of guy now."

Ofenste: "I am not going to answer that. Puleng took too much of my freedom so when she was arrested and found guilty somehow I felt happy I was even questioning myself if I was normal for celebrating the misfortune of the mother of my kids."

Itu: “Well I for one I was happy too but just because she killed one person who mattered the most to me. How did the kids react?”

Ofenste: “Tumelo was happy that I was not involved. He has not yet forgiven the mother but Lesego is just an angry child I do not even know what to do. She finds pleasure in extracurricular activities only the rest of the time she is always grumpy.”

Itu: “I think girls find it hard to grow up without a mother more than boys.”

Ofenste: “Talking from experience?”

Itu: “Yes I never had it easy so I know what she is going through.”

Ofenste: “Then be the mother to her please.”

Itu: “What? Okay; please wait  
pause, rewind, now play button.”

I was not sure if I was dreaming or this guy was seriously suggesting what exactly.

Ofenste: “I know I might have put this in the wrong way. I am a MoSotho man I do not even have a romantic bone in my body.”

Itu: "We are on rewind button because I am lost. If this is your way of asking me out then I think the person who was couching you left some details out."

We both laughed. I didn't mean to laugh but the man was funny and not romantic at all.

Ofenste: "Let us sit on the couch I need to rest my back."

Itu: "I am coming with some cookies."

I placed some cookies on the side plate and followed him. I sat on the single chair opposite him. I didn't want my body to betray me the way it had already started to do so.

Ofenste: "Let me be honest. All the things I have been doing I was coached by my son. I loved the whole experience on watching you on the videos reacting to the presents you got."

Itu: "What? There were videos too?"

Ofenste: "Yes Zyran sent a video all the time. I want to see you this happy. I know I am a cold man according to you but I have changed. I know that whatever Puleng put me through I don't have to take it out on other people. Raising my kids taught me that. You might ask why now but to be honest I have waited for two years to meet you in town to even just meet your granny. I was ashamed to go to her house. I heard you had moved."

Veronica told me that someone informed her that you are working outside Qwaqwa. I am sorry for being a coward but I am not going to make the same mistake twice.”

He was saying the right things and I was getting confused by the minute.

Itu: “I forgave you for the things you did knowingly and unknowingly but I do not have a guarantee that the person I am talking to is changed. Tumelo is the one who was sending gifts and all.....”

Ofenste: “Wowowowo do not get me wrong. He gave me pointer I am the one who bought those things and I asked your friends what you liked the rest was on me. I am willing to change for you.”

Itu: “I do not want you changing your life for me.”

Ofenste: “You know some of the days I reminded myself that I was not in love I just missed you like any other person. Then I met you again in person it changed. I remember going to my son’s room to ask for pointers you know how embarrassed I was. I could have said well to hell with it but I stripped my dignity swallowed my pride to ask my teenage son about dating tips. You know how embarrassing that is.”

I laughed at him because I was even picturing him going up and down in the passage trying to calm himself down before he knocked at the door.

Ofenste: "Well she is laughing at me. Let me drive home it's late already."

Itu: "You know it's dangerous to drive at night you can spend the night."

Ofenste: "With you."

Itu: "Eew on the couch of course I will open it to accommodate you."

Ofenste: "Well it was worth a try."

Itu: "Do not even go there."

I left him laughing as I went to look for blankets. I always had extra for such uninvited guest. Well technically I invited him.

I took my phone to call Lerato again. Same thing it was on voicemail

"I am sure you are looking for a life cover and funeral cover wherever you are." .....



It was like I was dreaming as there was too much noise coming from my kitchen. Was I being robbed? I didn't even have time to dress up or change I just stood up took the bat that was next to my side bed. Don't ask me why I had that because you will hear no lies. A single beautiful black woman staying alone had to protect herself. Yes you heard right now back to the invasion.

I wore my slippers and mind you I was on my short and crop top nightwear. I lived alone hellooooo so do not judge me child of Satan.

"What do you want in my house? I have a weapon and I am not afraid to use it."

The person just laughed when he turned I was embarrassed it was Mr Mango. Well I had forgotten that I had an uninvited guest in my house.

Ofenste: "So were you going to shoot me with a bat?"

I had to laugh, he didn't know that I was about to say I will shoot you. An angry woman with a bat can truly shoot if you don't know.

Itu: "Well I was going to shoot you know."

Ofenste: "Beautiful body I say the thief would have had a hard time to concentrate on stealing I tell you."

I was ashamed I rushed to go to the bedroom but he was faster than me. In a jiffy he was standing in front of me breathing down my head. He lifted my chin up.

“Do not be ashamed it’s just the two of us. You have a beautiful body and one cannot tell you carried three little people there.”

Itu: “What.”

I was shocked that he knew about the triplets who told him because I didn’t tell him. Oh Tumelo he knew that the stories I was telling Lesego were true.

Itu: “I need to take a bath.”

I ran from the kitchen as if there was a monster chasing me. I locked myself in the bathroom and cried. It was my first time thinking about my kittens after a long time. Ofenste made me feel things I have never felt before. Was I attracted to him?

“I am sorry my kittens and Lethabo. You were my world but I have to move on. I will always love you. You will always be my babies no matter what. I hope I will have other kids who will be your siblings but not now though.”

I laughed at myself. Two years back I couldn’t imagine any man making me feeling like this but here I was in my bathroom thinking about a simple touch on my chin.

Well do you blame me his hand was warm. Hell he was cooking in my kitchen with an unbuttoned shirt. Don't judge him he was not there to seduce me but to cook a mere breakfast meal for me.

When I was done I went to my room to change. I took my phone and called Lerato.

"Hay boo."

Itu: "Oh ladies and gentlemen now she knows the answer button on her phone."

Lerato: "Do not be so dramatic. Tell me; how did last night go. Did he kiss you before he left your doorstep?"

Itu: "You mean will he do it when he is leaving after cooking breakfast for me."

Lerato: "What? You sleek thing. Please tell me more."

Itu: "Well you were not answering my calls so I will call you when I am ready, bye boo."

Lerato: "No; no; no you are not going to leave me hanging like that."

Itu: "I will and I just did see yah."

I cut the call and placed it on silence. I know she was going to keep calling but I was not going to entertain her.

I went to the kitchen when I was descent enough.

Ofenste: "I am sorry if I hurt you."

Itu: "No you didn't"

Ofenste: "Well I was worried as you were crying in there."

Itu: "So from being creepy you are now a peeping Tom."

We both laughed I didn't mean to say that but he forced me to.

Ofenste: "Well it took all the pores of my body to stop myself from coming inside there. Also I didn't want to be shot with a bat."

Itu: "Not funny. Next time when you plan to invade someone's kitchen; keep the noise down."

Ofenste: "Well there will be a next time? I will be happy if there is."

I smiled he took the plates and went to the sitting room. The television was on it seemed like he had been watching some crime drama.

Itu: "My kind of drama. What did Doc do? I missed the episode this week."

Ofenste: "You also watch this? Well we have some things in common."

Itu: “You didn’t take time to know me better last time. You even asked me “Are we on the Oprah show?” I was really hurt but I then consoled myself that it was just like any other job.”

Ofenste: “I am so sorry I shouldn’t have taken my stress on you. You see when full custody was granted and the divorce I saw life in another eye. You see I am eating well now taking care of my kids. I had to change everything even my wardrobe because one day when I was about to take the kids for the meeting they were whispering saying they would rather call Nana and Paballo as I dressed like a grandpa sometimes. I had to ask Paballo to come with me I stayed in my car scanning every parent coming in so that I could see where I was lacking. I went online and realised my life had passed me by.”

Itu: “I am sorry about that. Which means not only men are abusers even women can be also.”

Ofenste: “That is true she abused me emotionally and when I was not paying maintenance I realised that my salary was still enough to give my kids the life they had been living all along. I was paying her every month on the other hand still paying for most of the little things needed at school.”

Itu: “Where did she take the money to as they had plenty of money from their illegal stuffs?”

Ofenste: "You tell me because she never needed the money. My guess is she just wanted me to suffer so that I could go back to her."

Itu: "Were you going to go back to her?"

Ofenste: "Hell was going to freeze before I went back to her. There are things you need to know about me. I do not forgive easily at all. Sometimes I never forgive at all. I am not in talking terms with my mom I just drop the kids and leave we talk but not as we used to. I blame her for Lesedi and for hating you for nothing."

I wish I could say he had to forgive her but I was still mad at her because if it wasn't for her Lesedi was not going to die. I was far from forgiving her. I don't know if what we had just started was going to be serious; if it was it was going to be the Moipone and I saga.

Itu: "I like the new you. I was afraid to tell you that you dressed like that when I also was told I dress like a granny."

We both laughed.

Ofenste: "We are grannies  
we will have weird kids."

Itu: "Kids?"

Ofenste: "We are both adults we are not going to play games as we are not growing any younger. I am not going to beat around the bush. I want us to try this thing what do you say?"

Itu: "Not romantic at all. Too pushy and demanding be romantic wine and dine me."

Ofenste: "What do you call the whole week and yesterday?"

We both laughed.

Itu: "You are so hopeless what am I going to do with you?"

Ofenste: "You can love me and be my lemon so that we can make malemon."

I laughed hard it sounded so weird.

Itu: "There is no such. Well the food is tasty I wonder why I always cooked when I was at your place."

Ofenste: "You are avoiding answering me but I will take it you are okay being Madam Malemon. Well I will never cook like you even Nana tells me time and again. So if ever you agree to come live with us then goodbye to cooking for now."

Itu: "I did it wrong last time I would love to leave home after a wedding. Not too big or glamorous but last time I thought I was doing it for love so I settled for less which bit me at the end."

Ofenste: "This means you are considering it."

Itu: "I never considered it up until now."

Ofenste: "Well I must thank my lucky stars often I think they didn't sleep for sometime planning this."

I just looked at him and laughed.

Itu: "I am a bad luck girl. I had a romantic guy without money now I have someone who has a little money but no romantic bone, nothing nada, zilch."

He laughed placed the plate on a side table and knelt in front of me.

Ofenste: "Okay Itumelang I know I am an idiot I don't have a romantic bone in me but I am not going to let a good woman pass me by if it means I can hire a helicopter for me to get a burner saying that you are the one for me then I will. I know you are hurting and I added some of the hurt but I am sorry and I am willing to spend my days apologising. I had vowed never to get married again but if this is what you want I say let us try this and if we still want marriage after a year which is on this date next year then I will marry you. I know I am not saying the right words because my coach Tumelo is not here but I am trying here."



I was in tears I just laughed at the couch thing. So he was serious that his son was his coach. Well he was hopeless indeed.

Ofenste: "I know you loved your husband and you will never find another him because to you he was your final destination and your forever but I am not trying to replace him. I am not trying to replace Puleng too. We are starting on a clean slate. I know I am coming with baggage but please accept my kids because they are part of me. No man this is too much."

I laughed at him.

Itu: "When I was starting to enjoy this."

Ofenste: "You enjoy watching me grovelling. You are heartless and I am going to get you."

Itu: "You love me still."

Ofenste: "No I hate you now."

Itu: "Good for you. You didn't even need to kneel down your coach will be disappointed in you."

Ofenste: "You breathe a word to him and I will never talk to both of you. I will be planning your humiliation too." I laughed hard. "So what do you say? Can we try this? I know I need more time to prove myself but give me a chance to."

Itu: "Okay."

Ofenste: "I will start from..... wait what did you say? Well."

He stood up; scooped me from the seat and spun me around in the air. I was taking a leap of faith and I was hoping I was making the right decision...

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"I need to get going."

He said when we were done eating. I was a little sad about it.

Ofenste: "Do not look sad I need to bath and also make sure the kids are back home; to prepare for school tomorrow. Will you come this weekend to spend it with us? We need that closeness back again before we go further."

Itu: "I will let you know as I have a deadline. Nkhono also need me sometimes it seems that I have neglected her for long."

Ofenste: "Why is that?"

Itu: "I have been avoiding home since I left. One I have been blaming myself for Lesedi's death. Also the truth is I didn't want to miss you or your family or and my ex mother in law. I sent a lawsuit after her."

He laughed

Ofenste: "So you have enemies all over."

Itu: "You being my number one enemy."

Ofenste: "I know it will take time for you to forgive me but please try I will do everything in my powers to earn your forgiveness."

Itu: "I forgive you; but please do not make me go and face your mother; I am still hurting and I believe she still hate me."

Ofenste: "I will never subject you to this; please tell me what happened to your mother in law and your relationship?"

Itu: "May we talk about it some other time I am at a happy place now so I need to forget."

Ofentse: "We said we will start on a clean slate so please lemon wa Fentse we need to know what went wrong in the past to rectify that."

He was right. There was no need to hide the past I needed to move away from the past so that it was not going to hinder my future.

Itu: "Well I had a very estranged relationship with my mother in law. We love each other with my husband but the mother didn't even help him when he was studying. To cut the long story short she demanded money every month even when we had nothing. I tried to show Lethabo that she was only using him but he loved his mother too much.

The day of the fire I lost everything even my belongings but they never cared they cashed up all the policies I got nothing I had to start afresh from the help of the community and especially DP and Lesedi. That is why I didn't want with my Lesedi. The only thing that she couldn't get to was my plot that

was registered in my name. That is why I instructed the court to do as they pleased with her as I am not parting with my land.

Well when your mother was being mean to me it was like I was relieving the past. I do not want to lie I miss my family every day of my life. I miss my husband too but I am ready to move on."

Ofentse: "I am sorry about that I promise you I will not add to your pain. I will protect you from everyone who would want to harm you. So what happened did they arrest the one who started the fire?"

Itu: "It was an accident so they never did anything. This is Africa not the dramas we always watch; whether there was foul play or not we will never find out."

Ofenste: "I am truly sorry but you will have more kids do not worry."

Itu: "On that part; I am still scared too much that is why I never wanted to be attached to Tumelo and Lesego."

Ofenste: "May we take one step at a time. We just started. What if I am not compatible to you in bed or....."

I just laughed at him.

Itu: "Is it the only thing you are worried about?"

Ofenste: "Well she cheated on me so there must be something wrong I was doing. It was part of the reason why I never wanted a relationship again; also the fear that my kids will never like the other person that I would have chosen. I love my kids so much. I love you that much to give us a chance to do this thing. I know it won't be easy as I am still a fossil fuel."

Itu: "My fossil fuel."

Ofenste: "I like the sound of that. I am rusted now but I think I still have my charming ways in my power bank."

Itu: "You don't say."

Before I could say anything he was drawing me to him while he leaned on the sink. He was slightly balancing on his other elbow. He held my waist and lowered his head. Before my mind could register what was happening I felt his lips on mine.

Okay I was not experienced as the only one I could talk about was the one I got from my late husband. The feeling I was feeling well it was foreign to me but good. I was hoping it will

never end. The way he held my waist it was as if I was something delicate. Well the devil is alive because I bet he is the one who made him stop.

Ofenste: "I have been meaning to do this since the day of your birthday celebration when I saw you standing there. Well it surpassed my fantasies and dreams. Can I do it one last time?"

You can do it forever we can even freeze time. Well hell yah I was talking to myself because when I thought I had recovered his lips were on mine also. This time around he used both hands to draw me closer as he placed me in between his legs and my body was leaning onto his chest then thighs were spooning me. Well Mr Mango junior was growing I could feel him.

Ofenste: "See what you are doing to me. Well let me leave you before I do something I will regret later. I promised to court you

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wine and dine you so I hope when I am done with your request you will be emotionally and physically ready for me. This sink was going to witness what was never seen before but let me not traumatise it."

What about me. I was even undressing you already. I am physically ready you know. It has been long can we skip the wine and dine thing.

Ofenste: "Well cats got your tongue."

He laughed at me whipping my lips with his thumb.

Ofenste: "Do not worry all the hunger will be gone when we are both ready. I will make sure you never go hungry again. You will even speak some Greek and French at the same time."

Itu: "You are not fair. You are laughing at me."

Ofenste: "Not at all my love. I am following order; I hope miss lemon here will be ready for me when the time is right."

He said placing his hand on top of my nunu it felt so warm and I lost it.

Itu: "I am ready now."

Ofenste: "Trust me you are not ready emotionally; I love you moratuwa waka."

This time around he gave me a peck on the cheek.

Itu: "I am not mutually in agreement."

He laughed at me.

Ofenste: "You are even speaking your own language. I hope you are ready to speak in tongues."

He was not being fair but I was going to settle for that. We were taking it slow by the way.

Ofenste: "Please take me to my car. If it is stolen I will sell you."

Itu: "Tired of me already. I hope they stole it so that I can see your reaction."

Ofenste: "Well you will see then. Come do not be sour like your name. At least I am mango so very sweet and I have a very sweet dip stick."

Itu: "You are such a moron. I hate you."

Ofenste: "I love you more."

He said tickling me while we made our way to the staircase. We took them instead of the lift as they gave us privacy.

Itu: "I think it is the first time I have a male visitor and I think there is someone by the window wondering."

Ofenste: "The person in the window will be a woman."

We both laughed.

Itu: "Why are you such a hater this early?"



We got to his car which was still intact. We hugged and he gave me a peck on the cheek.

Ofenste: "Please to not be shooting people with a bat while I am gone."

Itu: "I will shoot you first."

I laughed as he got in and drove away. I smiled to myself then ran upstairs. I took my phone to call Lerato but a call came in and it was Mr mango.

Ofenste: "Did I thank you?"

Itu: "Huh?"

Ofenste: "Well thank you very much for giving us a chance."

Itu: "Do not make me blush."

Ofenste: "I know your panty is already wet there go and bath. If I was there I was going to use my tongue. It is already itchy."

Itu: "I am dropping this call."

Ofenste: "Well she knows I am right. I will call you when I get home. Please come over the weekend I will thank you with a big gift I promise."

Itu: "Entice me you know I am lemon so you have the whole week to make me taste less bitter."

Ofenste: "You are on baby. I will up my game. This one is mine; I am not even going to let Tumelo in."

He dropped the call. I checked my phone again and I had many missed calls and messages from Lerato some from DP my guess they called each other.

I video called her

Lerato: "Is that a glow?"

Itu: "I am okay and you? What glow are you talking about?"

Lerato: "You got some didn't you?"

Itu: "I am not telling you anything."

We both laughed but our conversation was disturbed by Kali who was busy saying aunty this and aunty that. She was going

for a musical with her drama class. I was even imagining a musical with a few of the Kalis. I am not laughing but the excitement made me wonder.

I cooked lunch thinking about Ofenste who had not called again. His phone was still off. Well I was hoping he was home. I didn't want to call Tumelo. I slept a little. I woke up when there was a knock at the door.

When I opened then boooooom.....

I cooked lunch thinking about Ofenste who had not called again. His phone was still off. Well I was hoping he was home. I didn't want to call Tumelo. I slept a little. I woke up when there was a knock at the door.

When I opened then boooooom.

"Steve what are you doing here?"

I was surprised as he was not supposed to be there.

Steve: "I was in the office today then I saw the presents you never received. Now I would like to know what is really going on. I didn't want to ask Zyran as he was in the verge of blackmailing me."

Itu: "He blackmailed you? What did he say?"

Steve: "He said if I ever loved you I was going to do this little favour for you as your life depended on it."

We both laughed that was Zyran so dramatic.

Itu: "Well at least it saved my life and saved me from a life of singleton."

Steve: "You don't say. So who is the lucky guy?"

Itu: "All I will say is he has my heart I think he had it for long but I was in denial thinking distance and time will change that."

Steve: "All I can say is; he is a lucky guy. Well I hope he treats you well because I am not so forgiving so if he hurts you then he is in for a big surprise."

Itu: "Thank you very much and I will tell him. Now let me see my present. I am opening it now just in case there is a bomb here."

We both laughed. When I opened it was a pair of training shoes. The most expensive ones if I can add. The other wrapped package had the matching outfit which is a tight with a crop-top then there was the tracksuit with the same colour. Okay this was expensive and so sexy I just hugged him.

Itu: "Thank you very much; the man after my taste."

Steve: "I would have loved to be the man after your heart. Well let me leave

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I also wanted to tell you that if you don't see me around do not think I ran away as a result of the heart break."

We both laughed.

Steve: "Well my fiancé is working in Paul Roux so I might be moving to the offices there as it will be near."

Itu: "I wish you all the best. Please don't be a stranger."

Steve: "I will never be one. Take care."

He left me staring at my present. So that is why he had said presents as they were in three different parcels. I packed them neatly in the drawer; hell I was going to look sexy on my next training session. Before I could admire more I got a call.

"My lemon sorry my battery had died and Lesego had a project that she failed to do during this week. I had a good mind to let the teacher beat her a little."

Lesego: "Daddy."

She was complaining at the back I just laughed.

Itu: "Leave the child alone I bet you were even worse."

Ofenste: "I was so brilliant that most girls drooled."

Itu: "You are so lying right now. Girls go for the players and the sport gurus. If you are not well a few nerds get the girls."

He laughed

Ofenste: "Well I was the handsome nerd."

Itu: "If you say so. I was worried about you. I thought something had happened to you."

Ofenste: "Oh my baby. Don't worry Mr Mango is not going anywhere before he dances with Miss Lemon."

Itu: "How can you say that in front of the kids?"

Ofenste: "I am not there anymore I left them helping each other in the sitting room. I am in the bathroom striping as we speak trying to bath since someone didn't offer me one in the morning."

Didn't I offer..... well he should have asked? I laughed alone.

I was picturing him naked there under the shower he so loved and preferred.

Ofenste: "Well you should be joining me if you were here. I could rub your back you know and clean Miss Lemon....."

Itu: "Okay I am coming this weekend then. Its working and you will pay for this."

Ofenste: "Well that was simple I thought I was going to sweat."

Itu: "You know you are so evil taking advantage of my weakness. You know it's been long then you....."

Ofenste: "No my love you know I am also in the same predicament. So do not even flip the script."

Itu: "Says the same person who flipped it."

Ofenste: "I love you and Mr Mango is reacting to your voice let me just take a bath."

He dropped the call on me leaving me wondering how he looked liked without his pants on. I saw the upper body in the morning and I was turned on.

Well I stopped fantasising and called my granny. Somehow I would have to eventually tell her; I thought to myself.

Nkhono: "I thought you were coming this week my child. Last week we didn't get time alone. I miss you my baby."

Itu: "I miss you too Nkhono. I am coming this weekend I promise."

Nkhono: "Do not make promises before you know your boss's plans. Its month-end remember."

Oh snap. On month-ends boss lady usually asked some of us to work overtime. I was happy to do so as it helped with the extra money which was needed.

Itu: "I will have to confirm first then."

It was going to be a disaster as I wanted to spend some time with Ofenste too. I would have to tell him and he was going to be disappointed.

Before I slept I talked to DP and Lerato who were advising me to rip his shirt off and did as I pleased. Those two were nut cases I was never going to listen to them.

Monday was always a slow day for us surprisingly and it always dragged. Tuesdays to Fridays had too much work so I didn't think I was going to get time to get little presents for Tumelo and Lesego. I just needed an hour for that so I went on Tuesday. It was during my lunch break.

I saw someone who looked like my Nkhono but she was the age of my uncle. Well they really looked like twins. I went to her as my inner voice kept saying I that shouldn't go there.

“Sorry Mme do you by any chance have relatives in Qwaqwa.”

She looked at me as if something is about to dawn then she changed her facial expression.

Her: “I am sorry I am not from here. You had me confused with someone else. Can I go now?”

The way she said it; it was dismissive.

Itu: “Please look at this picture maybe you will see someone you know. This is my granny and my uncles.”

Her: “Young lady; didn't I tell you that I never want to look at that neither am I related to anyone in Qwaqwa.”

She had raised her voice. I saw a young man who looked like her coming towards us. He looked exactly like Tshele and mind you Tshele looked like granny and his father.

Him: “Mommy is everything okay?”



He smelt snob and spoilt from a distance. I was the one who answered first to avoid any conflicts.

Itu: “No; I bumped into her by mistake. Please forgive me ma’am. Sorry sir I was not looking where I was going.”

I left there in a haze. When I got to the office I was not emotionally well. I asked for the afternoon off. At least I had bought something for the kids before the incident.

Boss: “Are you sure you are okay? I can send the driver to take you home. You don’t even look okay?”

I looked at her. She looked so beautiful she had everything she even had a picture of her family. What was wrong with me that my parents never acknowledged me? I just cried. I knew from my gut feeling that the woman I saw might have been my mother.

Boss: “What is wrong? Talk to me.”

Itu: “What is wrong with me that my parents do not want me?”

She looked at me then lowered her eyes. When she looked back at me again she had red eyes.

Boss: “People leave because of their selfish reasons. Do not even think about blaming yourself. For your own information it

was her loss. You gained a parent in your granny. She is always supporting you and that is what matters. I see how you

interacted with the other workers since you came here. You are well groomed and if I were a mother I would be happy to have you as a child. I can't even get my kids to listen to me but I see the elderly here trust you more because you listen."

I laughed, she was right the grannies of the company always called me.

Itu: "Or maybe they know that I am the newest member."

She laughed.

Boss: "Trust me I know those people I worked with them when my father was still in charge so I know they like you. Now go home and rest. The driver will take you there no arguments there. He will bring stationery while at it."

Itu: "Thank you ma'am."

I called my granny who was surprised. She asked me the same question I asked myself why I never took her picture before approaching her. I rested as I was emotional. I woke up very late as I was hungry. I was chatting with my colleagues with Lerato and DP simultaneously when a knock came through. I was surprised as most people called before coming beside Steve.

“You didn’t return my calls I was worried about you.”

Boy was I glad to see him even when I didn’t want to talk to him. I just threw myself into his arms. I felt protected and his chest was radiating warmth.

Ofenste: “Sshhhhh; its okay I am here.”

He kept me in his arms for long only our hearts were communicating.

Itu: “Aren’t you going to work tomorrow?”

Ofenste: “I am; but I just felt coming here. It’s as if I knew something was wrong. I will drive at 3am before the kids wake up.”

Itu: “You left the kids alone.”

Ofenste: “I have another one here so I need to balance my time.” I just giggled. “Why are you up this late and who made you cry?”

Itu: “I am making food. I slept when I got home at around 2pm.”

Ofenste: “Why did you come home early?”

He said carrying me to the kitchen counter. I told him how my day was. He kissed me and hugged me again.

Ofenste: "Let us not worry about people who are not in our lives. Please focus on people who love you. When I came on

your birthday there was laughter which is an indication that you have a family that loves you. I am also going to give you a family so do not stress about what you never had."

Itu: "Thank you for coming. You are the best."

Ofenste: "Can I kiss it better for you."

He didn't even have to ask. I nodded anyway. The kiss was different this time around. I tasted his minty toothpaste in it. He was kissing me with passion but it was filled with hunger.

Ofenste: "I will not be able to stop."

Itu: "I will not ask you."

Ofenste: "My kind of girl."

He went back to my mouth while his hands roamed around causing some problems. I was so hungry I just ran my hands at his back drawing him closer to me. His other hand moved to miss lemon and in went the finger I just flipped.....

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His thumb was massaging my clits. Okay I had mentally imagined this but not the way he was doing it. His breath and kiss was intoxicating me as I didn't know what to do with

myself. He removed the finger and brought his hand in my mouth. I was not going to lick that finger even if my life depended on it.

Itu: "I am not going to do that."

He seductively smiled at me.

Ofentse: "One day you will when the heat gets turned up."

He licked it without even taking his eyes off me and put two fingers this time around. I gasped for air. Ofenste was not like Lethabo. He was not average he was a little big in all the aspects. His fingers went deeper as I clung into him for dear life.

Ofenste: "Are you okay my love."

I shook my head as I was sure that my voice was going to fail me.

Ofentse: "Talk to daddy he will make you feel better."

He said that deepening the fingers. This time around I screamed a little then he placed his mouth over mine. I felt some weird feeling in the pit of my stomach. It was weird and pleasurable

at the same time. He stopped kissing me but the fingers were still playing their part.

I was sure that I was going insane as he deepened the fingers. I was feeling really good when he was about to pull away.

Itu: "Please don't"

He smiled again as he deepened the finger. I felt some warmth engraving me. His other hand was squeezing my breast which surprisingly filled his hand.

Ofentse: "I didn't expect you to pop this fast. I am still erect please make me cum."

Itu: "You mean I have to....."

Ofentse: "You mean you have never done a BJ in your life?"

I felt humiliated I wanted the earth to open and swallow me. Lethabo was so simple he never explored and I was happy about it. I never knew I would have to start a life with someone else that is why I was comfortable. He saw my worry then he lifted my chin with his finger.

Ofentse: "We said we are starting on a clean slate so I will teach you. But not today let me go to the bathroom and finish this."

I was so embarrassed I covered my face with my hand I couldn't even ask Lerato or DP. Was I that clueless about these things?

Well I was happy with my sex life with Lethabo I never complained and he never did.

I stopped thinking when I felt his hands on me.

Ofentse: "Let me wipe you my love."

Well he was not angry that was the good part. He was looking at me while wiping me.

Ofenste: "Please do not be sad we said we will do this together. So you will tell me what you don't like I will do the same so that we will enjoy this I have made up my mind that you are the one I want so we will fight till the end."

Itu: "How are you going to teach me?"

Ofentse: "Do you have a banana?"

I nodded then showed him.

Ofentse: "Well it's just the two of us here; so come; my student I want to teach you well."

He scooped me going to the sitting room. He placed me on the couch and knelt in front of me.

Ofentse: "Do you want your banana bare or covered? Well never mind."

He held the banana the back facing his mouth. I wish I had opted for porn video. He placed it into his mouth looking at me.

He was moving his head not his hand. He was even licking the banana with his tongue. It was weird to ask but surprisingly I felt the edge to kiss him.

Ofentse: "Baby I am not done."

Itu: "Well I will learn some more for now I fell in love with your lips."

Ofentse: "I am going to finish what you started this time."

He removed my panty then opened me wide I felt some sensation he moved closer.

Ofenste: "I am rusty too so please do not feel bad. Do not compare yourself and worse with the porn stars as I want you not them."

It was as if he read my mind. He just kissed me before I answered. He broke the kiss to only finish removing our clothes. Boy he was tall standing there all naked. He lifted my legs as he came up on top of me. He was heavy and he realised that so he balance with his other hand.

Ofentse: "We can go to the bedroom."

Itu: "No more talking."

I drew his head towards me and kissed him. His hands guided his shaft in. I swear I heard a tire down there. I bit his lip.

Ofentse: "I am sorry I know it's been long I will be gentle I promise."



He moved before I could even adjust. Okay this was not what I signed up for. It was painful but he moved slowly for my lucking. I raised my waist to meet his moves to edge him to go faster. He read my movement and he upped his pace. He placed his warm hand under my waist while the other one still balanced to give me breathing room. He came to my lips this time slowly seductively licking and pulling them. Okay this was foreign to me but it made me feel the pain less.

He went back to slow strokes this time around he went deeper I felt my breathing stop a little.

Ofentse: "I am sorry my lemon."

Somehow his seductive voice made me forget about my pain. He changed his pace to a fast one as his groan increased. I moaned because I liked it when he moved faster.

Itu: "I love this pace."

Ofentse: "I will give it to you my love."

Before long we had reached our destination as we panted he just hugged me tight.

Ofentse: "This was worth driving all those kilometres at night for." I blushed. "I can drive all the time here every day for this. Come let us shower and sleep."

He took our clothes as I wiped myself and followed him. I was never going to use that towel again. Lucky enough I was someone who always had five times the things I needed to have in the house. When I started working I made sure I never lacked basics even Nkhono and Tshele knew that I never bought single things I would rather buy in pairs.

It had been long since I had a male looking at me like Mr Mango did I was hoping he will never change.

Ofentse: "I know what you are thinking that I think you are not sexy?"

Itu: "You are a bad mind reader. I was thinking it's been long since I had a lover so I just feel weird."

Ofentse: "Two weirdoes. Please do not stress about compatibility as you said before. I am right where I belong."

He drew me closer to him. Our bodies just made an electric wave. I surprisingly felt at home and I felt I was finally belonging.

When we were done I felt like a baby as he tucked me in. I just laughed.

Ofentse: "You are now my big baby."

Itu: "Do you think Tumelo will agree if I take his place?"

Ofentse: "He will have to live with it."

We laughed as he got in the other side.

Itu: "I never slept naked I feel really naked."

He laughed at me as he got up and went to the closet. I didn't have too many clothes and he saw where I packed my nightwear.

Ofentse: "Three babies will make me old."

He was dressing me and it was funny. We talked about things we liked and disliked. I don't know when I fell asleep I only woke up when he was dressing.

Itu: "What time is it?"

Ofentse: "You are up my love. I overslept now I will have to drive like a maniac."

Itu: "I am sorry I guess I was tired because I also never overslept."

Ofentse: "Well Mr mango gave you some magic portion"

I just smiled at him. He came closer and kissed me till I was out of breath.

Ofentse: "I love you. Please come and close behind me."

I didn't want him to go but he had to. Miss lemon was in pain. I was in trouble. He kissed me again as he was at the door.

Ofentse: "I love you and please don't stand me up on a weekend."

Itu: "I won't please drive safely."

I was wet down there and I wondered if he was not late whether I was going to enjoy this time around. It was not bad because I wanted more. He had reached the spot that almost left me insane.

I was not going to come to this game empty handed so I opened a porn website.

"Eew

how do people do such things?" I quickly closed it and went to drink some water. I was smiling alone. If you had told me five years ago that I will be happy and smiling again I would have laughed at you.

My phone rang in the bedroom and I ran it was him.

Ofentse: "My love I am home already and I was almost caught."

He was whispering like a teenager and it gave me that adrenaline rush.

Itu: "You are like a teenager sneaking out."

Ofentse: "I will do it again in the heart beat. I still taste my girl lemon in my breath."

Itu: "Eew, so gross."

Ofentse: "Not for me. She is mine and I will kill for her. I feel so fresh and new. I just wish I kissed her good bye. Do not be jealous I love you both the same but her she just makes me wanna dance."

I just laughed.

"I will call you let me prepare these two and prepare for work. I love you."

Itu: "Okay then."

I dropped the call. I was not ready to say it back as I felt like I was betraying my husband. I called Lerato blushing. She answered on the third ring.

Lerato: "It better be good because I am....."

Itu: "Ofentse slept here and we ...you know."

Lerato: "You sly devil please tell me more."

I laughed and left some details as I was not comfortable with some details.

Lerato: "Well be ready for mangos and lemons did you use protection?"

Itu: “Yes we did although I am thinking of going to the pharmacy today because I am not going to be responsible for what I will do to him weekend.”

Lerato: “You go my girl. So when are we planning the wedding?”

Itu: “Who talked about the wedding?”

Lerato: “Well honey a man like Mr Mango is not a playing games type so you will have to tell your granny before you find yourself in the middle of a bride prize negotiation you never knew about.”

I laughed but it was as if Lerato had predicted the future.....

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When I got to work I was just on time to start as the previous day I had gotten the afternoon off. Ofentse called every hour.

Itu: “I am still intact like the last hour you called.”

Ofentse: “I can’t work; I am still thinking about last night. Can we get married already so you can come and stay with me?”

Itu: “Dude come on you can’t be serious.”

Ofentse: “I am serious. I wasted too many years feeling sorry for myself and I can’t do it again. I am a man not a boy I know

what I want and you know what you want. Life is too short and I do not want to spend my short life in misery.”

Itu: “Well I.....”

Ofentse: “I promised not to pressure you but after last night I am sure and I will not lose you to small boys like Steve.”

Itu: “What?!”

Ofentse: “I will kill that white boy for my wife. Let’s be serious my love, may you please think about it. How many days do you need?”

He wanted to give me only days when I wanted months or even a year.

Itu: “My love look I.....”

Ofentse: “She called me love at least. It is better than nothing. I love you even if you don’t believe me and I hope you will say it back before we get married.”

Well I had to give it to him he was observant. I just laughed.

Itu: “Let me work then we will talk when I get home.”

Ofentse: “I ordered dinner for you because I know you have a busy week so do not be surprised.”

I blushed; thinking at the fact that he was going all the way out of his comfort zone to prove that he is serious.

Itu: "You are the best. Thank you very much."

He dropped the call after telling me that he loved me. I was still smiling when Zyran invaded my space.

Zyran: "You have been all smiles the whole day."

Itu: "Well let's say I am officially in a relationship."

Zyran: "Guys emergency meeting!"

He was shouting disregarding the fact that we are at work and everyone can hear even the boss was there. The squad came to the kitchen where he had dragged me to.

Zyran: "Did you know that Itu is in a relationship?"

Sarah: "With whom? Is it Steve?"

Itu: "Nope; Steve is getting married remember and he is white come on."

Sarah: "What is wrong with white people?"

Zyran: "Honey you won't understand."

She looked confused but concentrated as she wanted the juicy part.



Rebecca: “Well talk we don’t have all day. Zyran you know because you two are culprits we are always the last ones to find out.”

Zyran laughed at them.

Itu: “Okay, it is with Mr mango. He is the one who had been sending gifts so we decided to try this thing out.”

They had to scream those two. We looked up through the glass and boss lady was looking at us.

Zyran: “Do not mind her she knows that we need gossiping time sometime.”

Itu: “What kind of man are you?”

Zyran: “The kind that was born in Africa. You can’t be born in Africa and not be a gossiping man. If you are not doing it with your friends, colleagues or family; then you are definitely doing it with your partner.”

We laughed at him. I had to tell them everything. They only knew about him the previous week as we were cracking our heads about the gifts. Well I was glad it was off my chest so that I didn’t have to hide it anymore.

When I got home he called before I could even open the door.

Itu: “I am still intact.”

Tumelo: "So it is you. Wow dad can be sneaky I thought you never agreed to go out with him."

Itu: "Hello Tumelo. What are you talking about?"

Tumelo: "Well dad saved you with another name so I was mad that he was cheating on you."

Itu: "But we are not dating."

Tumelo: "Try next door honey. I am a teenager and I know when someone is in love. He is busy acting like a bull on heat."

I had to laugh this boy was too big for his boots.

Itu: "I will tell your father."

Tumelo: "Well I am glad it's you; so it....."

Ofentse: "Are you done with.....Tumelo what are you doing with my phone?"

Tumelo: "Well Ausi Itu called."

He was lying through his teeth as he was the one who called me.

Ofentse: "You are lying do you know why because it shows an outgoing call here."

Itu: "Well I am still here."

They laughed and Ofentse chased him away.

Ofentse: "What was that all about?"

Itu: "Well your son wanted to see if you are not cheating on me as it seems like apparently you have saved me with a different name. I am curious what name is that?"

Ofentse: "It is my phone your spy will tell you."

We both laughed.

Itu: "He is not young anymore and I love that he is protective over me."

Ofentse: "I am only glad that he will not give you a hard time. Stepmothers and stepchildren always find it hard to find balance."

Itu: "I am scared to be a step mother. What if I become an evil stepmother?"

Ofentse: "You will never be that. I saw you with them before and they love you. I will be with you all the way; remember. So do not forget to think about what I proposed."

Itu: "Is it not too early?"

Ofentse: "What will change

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even if we get married today or tomorrow or next year will you lose yourself? Time frame doesn't change anything. I am in love with you and I want to spend the rest of my life with you as my wife not shagging buddy. I do not want to live in sin I do not know about you. I feel like if we don't try then we will be planning for failure. Why do we have to plan for failure before we even start our home? If I was not financially ready I was not going to approach you. Why should I wait for you to be old so that I can marry you when I am ready now? Would you rather be an old bride who will have bridesmaids who have grandkids?"

I laughed at him.

Itu: "I wouldn't"

Ofentse: "Good, so I do not want to waste your time if I feel like there is no future for us."

Itu: "Okay we will discuss this weekend. This is what I am asking for."

Ofentse: "I can live with that. Let me cook before they tell me that I am a love-struck teenager."

I laughed at him.

Itu: "You are love-struck, well why don't you hire help?"

Ofentse: “We made a vow to be a family and learn to make it work without any outside help. During the trial the kids were vulnerable so we didn’t want vultures preying on us. We have learnt to do things on our own so we are happy. Now we will have you and we will see how we manoeuvre the distance.”

Itu: “Well we will talk later there is someone at the door.”

Ofentse: “I think it’s your food.”

He was right it was my food. I hated to admit but I loved the man. He was going to make me marry him in a jiffy. I cleared the dishes and ate. I was hungry and tired. I threw myself on the bed after eating and it was lights out.

When I woke up it was cold and very late. I checked my phone it was after midnight. I got inside the blankets and checked the messages. I had dozen missed calls and a voice note from Mr Mango wishing me a good night as he knew that I was probably sleeping and tired.

Work was work after work I rushed home to cook and rest. Thank God it was a Thursday. Friday I was going home and it was always laid back. When I got home I had to call my granny.

Nkhono: “Itumelang I know you like the back of my hand I raised you. This week you have called me more than you have called me for the past two years.”

I laughed at her.

Itu: “Nkhono it is not like that.”

Nkhono: “I was not born yesterday. Ask me what you want to ask me and get out of my back I am trying to do what other old people do in their free time, which is every day.”

I laughed at her because she was not busy at all Tshele managed the tuck-shop so she had time in her hands.

Itu: “I am coming tomorrow we will talk then.”

Nkhono: “Then stop busting my phone with calls. I am old you know I might have a heart attack from this ringing phone. Now let me go and meditate.”

Okay I shouldn't have bought a TV for her now she is telling me about meditation. I laughed to myself. When I was about to sleep I got a surprise visit. I was happy because I was thinking about him the whole day.

Ofentse: “I got tested yesterday. I know but I wanted to give you assurance as my wife cheated so I didn't have the courage to test all those years.”

Itu: “I do not know what to say.”

Ofentse: “Say ‘yes my love I want the unwrapped candy’ I will be the happiest man in the world.”

I just kissed him with hunger. I was on the pill then and I knew my status too but I was going to tell him later as I was hungry for him.

Itu: "Well I can live like this. I love your surprises and today it was way better than last time. I was in pain last time and I was rusty now I am back at the game."

He laughed at me.

Ofentse: "I have woken the sleeping dragons. I hope I will manage their fires."

Itu: "I am happy you did. Thank you."

On Friday I took a bus home. I had two things that troubled me.

Nkhono: "You brought another bag of food?"

Tshele: "Ausi Itu you are wasting the money that you should be saving for your licence."

Itu: "I am glad to have a family who are not parasites. I was panicking so you know how I buy when I have stress."

Nkhono: "What is stressing you?"

Itu: "Does or did my mother have a scar at the back of her left ear going to the neck."

Nkhono: "What?"

Her eyes popped and she started hyperventilating. We looked at each other with Tshele and she just fainted...

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“What do we do then? She has been out for more than thirty minutes.”

Tshele was pacing up and down. I was cursing myself for asking but I needed the truth. I need to get into this marriage without anything from the past haunting me.

Itu: “You know what makes me angry is the fact that she lied to my face Tshele. She said she is not from Qwaqwa even though his son looks exactly like you so it can’t be a coincidence.”

Tshele: “That is not even a coincidence at all you see how my uncles look alike it was like they were photocopied. It’s a pity you didn’t have her picture. Do you even know where she is staying?”

Itu: “I didn’t get the chance to even get her number. Well I have my ways to find her do not worry; although my friend will give me a long pep talk about using her.”

I was thinking about Zee. I knew we promised that it was the last time when we did the things for Lesego but this was one thing I needed to do before I got married. Yes I had thought a lot about Ofentse’s proposal and I was ready to marry him after



I said my final goodbyes to my family. This is what I needed to do on my own. I had my reasons why I was doing it. I wanted to say my final goodbyes so that I could focus on my new family.

Tshele: "I wonder if she is really my granny's child. She seems to be the only heartless one in the family."

Itu: "I was thinking the same. What if they exchanged her at the hospital?"

Tshele: "Yes but they all look alike."

Itu: "What if they exchanged her brain?"

We looked at each other and laughed. It was not possible but we needed at least a logical explanation for her actions.

Nkhono: "She was not exchanged she was my daughter and she will always be my daughter. I do not know what the devil did to her. Please tell me where did you see her?"

I told her everything and she was also shocked.

Nkhono: "So she has other children."

Itu: "Yes she does and she looks exactly like my uncles; that is why I knew it's her."

Nkhono: "I took after my dad; who had strong genes which I passed to my children."

She started telling us how she raised them; my mother as the only girl she always got away with everything as his father loved her more. When she left without a trace my grandfather

started getting mild strokes. I think her leaving caused him so much pain.

My granny did not want to admit it but she also loved her as I could see it in her face. She was devastated. We moved to other topics as I cooked dinner for then. I loved cooking at home as the atmosphere was not lonely. I hate cooking my meals only.

Tshele helped me with the dishes. The house was so clean you wouldn't believe if you were told that the old lady stayed with a male not a female child. Even in his room Tshele; it was organised to the point that I felt I was the guy and he was the lady.

Tshele: "So what favour did you want?"

Itu: "Your friend with a car; can he take us to the graveyard tomorrow morning?"

Tshele: "Sorry coz he is working outside the province for this month. What do you want to do there?"

I told him everything. He was surprised that I would stay that long harbouring those feelings. I explain to him that it was my life plans to let them stay in my heart.

Tshele: “You loved your family everybody know that and they also know that wherever they are but you are the living one

and you need to be happy. Do you think Lethabo will be happy when you are miserable?”

Itu: “Hell no.”

Tshele: “Exactly so please just say your last goodbye and make sure you live your life fully. You will never find a guy like him. If I were him with my ex in jail I would have fathered more than two kids now.”

We both laughed. He was right I needed to be happy. The universe was giving me a second chance at life.

Itu: “Well I will do that. Let me check on Nkhono before I sleep.”

I leave his room conflicted but then I get courage to go to her room. I find her reading the bible I knocked even if it was slightly ajar.

Nkhono: “Come in. I am about to sleep and I am okay do not worry about me.”

Itu: "You think I am worried about you? Not at all; I know you are one strong lady so I am not worried about you at all. I was worried about myself but Tshele gave me a pep talk."

We both laugh.

Nkhono: "I am a strong lady and I raised you I also know that you are a strong young lady."

Itu: "Do not make me cry. Well I am going to bed. There is something I wanted to ask. What will you say if I told you that I am ready to go out there and date?"

She looked at me with inquisitive eyes and smiled.

Nkhono: "I will tell you that I have been praying for this day to come and I am happy that it has finally braced me with its presence. I will die a happy woman knowing that my favourite person is happy."

Itu: "Am I really your favourite person?"

Nkhono: "No I am softening you to get laid."

The way I laughed it was like I have never laughed before.

Nkhono was just too much.

Itu: "So your worry was for me to get laid."

Nkhono: "Yes and also so that you can give me grandchildren that look like me."

Itu: "Amen. So much for being your favourite person."

We laughed but I couldn't get myself to tell her that I was already dating someone and I had already gotten some.

Itu: "I wanted to ask if I can go to the graveyard tomorrow and say goodbye to my family and tell them that it is time to move on."

Nkhono: "Itumelang you are a grown up woman and you do not need my permission. I am proud of you. It is time you let them go they need to rest and you need to live a little. I will be happy to also go with you."

Itu: "Thank you very much you are the best granny ever."

Nkhono: "I am surprised she only realises it now."

I laughed at her. I said my goodnight so that I could rest. I called my mango and he was still up. We said our goodnight and I slept. I woke up took a bath only to realise that Nkhono was already waiting for me.

Nkhono: "You were supposed to bath when we come back."

Itu: "I am sorry I forgot."

Tshele: "The car will be coming soon."

Itu: "What car?"

Tshele: “We hired a special so that you won’t bag people for their cars. There comes a time in life when we have to do with what we have. We are not blessed the same way. We cannot change what God gives us but we can only be grateful that he still watches over us and protects us.”

Itu: “She taught you well.”

Tshele: “I am glad I came to stay with her. I had given up on hope but now I know that there is a season for everything. I also do with what I have. I will never worry about what I do not have as my worry won’t bring those things to me.”

Nkhono: “I am proud of both of you now let us go.”

Itu: “Well thank you so much. I bought some flowers.”

Tshele: “I am coming with you also. I can’t worry alone here.”

We laughed at him. I took the flowers from my room and sent a message to Ofentse as I was leaving my phone. It was so emotional but I had to do this. They gave me space to talk to them. I talked to the kids then finally I went to Lethabo. It was hard but I was determined to do it.

“We had so many plans and you left me. I do not know whether I am angry at you or not but you left me. Well someone in the morning just told me to be grateful of the things I have. I am grateful of the times we spent together with the kids. You were

my world but now it is time I create another world. I am not forgetting you because you are a special person but you are going to be in my heart. I am letting you rest in peace and please take care of our kittens because I love them also. Now it's time to say goodbye I will always love you but I love him now and I want to be happy. I will see you on the other side."

We got into the car as i found myself singing "***See you again***"

*"It's been a long day without you my friend*

*And I'll tell you all about it when I see you again*

*We've come a long way from where we began*

*Oh I'll tell you about it when I see you again*

*When I see you again."*

I was crying for the last time. I was not going to be miserable again. If I was going to meet any misery in future it was not going to be about my family. I loved them and it was time to let them go I was going to let them rest in peace.

We got home and I took a bath again as Nkhono sprinkled some herbs on us. After my bath I felt new; I was going to start a new life. I felt really happy I was even eager to go and see Ofentse.

I took Tshela to town so that Nkhono was not going to suspect anything. I was not ready to tell her about Ofentse.

Tshela: "You have to tell her soon."

Itu: "I know but give me a week. Next week I am coming home again so I will tell her."

Tshela: "Good luck. I will shut my mouth as I have my six pack to console my conscience."

I laughed at him and took a taxi to Phuthaditjhaba. I was like a new person. You see that teenage fever love where you look at your phone and smile alone. It had hit me hard. I got off I was happy and he didn't know I was coming.

I knocked twice and Lesego opened. She was smiling but when she saw me her smile became sour like she had eaten some sour grapes.

Lesego: "Oh it's you. How can I help you?"

Itu: "Hello Lesego. Where is your father?"

Tumelo: "Who was at the door Les..... come on in ausi Itu how are you?"

At least someone was happy to see me.

Lesego: "I will be in my room."

Itu: "What is her problem?"



It was a whisper meant for Tumelo only and she was gone already.

Tumelo: "Hormones maybe."

I laughed at him.

Itu: "How can you say that?"

Tumelo: "What can I say? I don't know these female things. Dad; look who is here?"

He looked up and didn't know what to do with himself. He was smiling from ear to ear.

Ofentse: "Hie."

Tumelo: "I know you two are dating so there is no need to be modest with me. I will be in my room."

Us: "What?"

He was already striding to his room

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"Thank you for coming. How was your day?"

Itu: "I am not going to stay long. I have not told Nkhono yet."

Ofentse: "Why? Are you not ready for us to tell other people? I was hoping you will tell the kids today about us."

Itu: "We can tell the kids its fine but as for granny she fainted yesterday when I asked her about the scar on my mother's neck. In the morning we had to go to the graveyard so really there was no time for the talk."

Ofentse: "The graveyard?"

Itu: "Well yes

I had gone to say my final goodbyes to my family. I am not saying they never existed but I was letting them go to rest in peace. I wanted to come into this relationship without any doubts or guilt and it worked. I feel like the heavy weight has been lifted from my shoulders. It was not like I didn't want to tell you that I loved you; it was like I was betraying my family by doing so. I am okay now. I can say it without feeling guilty."

Ofentse: "Say it then."

He had a smirk on his face. I laughed at him as I knew what he really wanted from me.

Itu: "So of all the words I uttered you only heard that I wanted to say those words."

Ofentse: "Well I am waiting."

Itu: "Okay then. I love you."

He smiled and closed the gap between us. He held my waist and kissed the lights out of me. I was hoping for more when he stopped.

Ofentse: "Well you are not sleeping here I might as well keep your surprise for next time."

He said laughing as he went to the sitting room.

Itu: "Do not even think about it because I will burn this house down."

Ofentse: "Not so loud. Well even if I wanted you are so loud and Nana couldn't take the kids today she has a doctor's appointment."

I was so embarrassed when he said that.

"Do not be shy I love those noises so much but it won't be good for the kids though."

Itu: "So what will happen when we are married?"

Ofentse: "Oh she is thinking about marriage that makes me a happy man."

Itu: "You are so silly. Yes I will marry you some day."

Ofentse: "Then we will get a bigger house our house that we will pay for together as a family. Then our room will be sound proof."

Itu: "Not funny."

Ofentse: "You are funny but I love you like that. Well let me ask the kids to come as there is no better time than the present."

Itu: "I am nervous."

Ofentse: "You don't need to be. We will be doing it together. We can't run away from this. I will let you tell your family while I will tell my family but for now the kids come first."

Itu: "Yes let us do this."

He left while I felt sour I was worried about Lesego more than I was worried about anything else.

Ofentse: "Okay; kids sit I won't waste your time as I know it's your Saturday time out today. We have something to tell you. We need you to have an open mind about this and tell us your views. Well we are officially dating with Itu and it is serious we might get married soon."

My heart skipped a bit I didn't know why but it just did.

Lesego: "Weren't you dating before and what is so special about now?"

You see why I was scared about this little 'family reunion' I was scared because she was not the same girl I knew two years back. What really happened?

Ofentse: "Honestly we were not dating I was losing your custody and your mom was threatening to take you away from me. I had to make sure that she sees that I have moved on. Itu wanted the money to build the house but she couldn't finish as your mother threatened me I let her go but she didn't let it go. You know why she was arrested don't you?"

Tumelo: "Yes we do."

Lesego: "Speak for yourself I want to hear it."

Ofentse: "Well she wanted to kill Itu but then missed and killed Lesedi."

Lesego: "Lucky her now she will have you."

Itu: "I think I have overstayed my welcome here. I can take all the insults in the world but not Lesedi she was the best thing that ever happened to me. She was coming from humble aboard but she never looked down upon people. She was the one who helped with the operation if it wasn't for her..... well I can't do this."

I stood up and left them arguing. I was not going to deal with this as I was happy. I was at a happy place for the first time after years so I was not going to let anything ruin it.

Ofentse: "Itu wait."

I waited as I was not angry at him I was not even angry at Lesego she was just a child who just lost her mother.

Itu: "Hay, I was just going to go to the shops and I was going to wait for a while. I wanted you to sort things out."

Ofentse: "Thank you for that."

Itu: "Do not be hard on her she just lost her mother."

Ofentse: "I will let Nana talk to her because when I do I will end up snapping at her."

Itu: "Thank you now let me catch a taxi before Nkhono sends a search party."

Ofentse: "Are we good?"

Itu: "Yes my love we are good. I love you."

Ofentse: "Why didn't I record this one? Come here I love you too and this time around I am not going to let anyone disrespect you or separate us no matter what; even my own daughter because if I let her do that I will be the lonely one. In five years times she might be married for all I know and I will be

left alone watching some punk making you happy; over my dead body. You are my lemon for life.”

I laughed at him as he was worked up. I kissed him then stopped the taxi.

Itu: “Nothing and no one is coming between us. I am not running away this time around.”

Ofentse: “Good because I am not going to marry a sissy.”

He laughed and hugged me as the taxi stopped. I was smiling when I sat down watching him looking at the taxi as it disappeared in Phuthaditjhaba traffic. I was never going to let Lesego ruin my life but I was not going to be an evil stepmother not to these kids who had been through a lot because of their selfish mother. I was going to be patient with her like last time. The only person I was not going to tolerate was his mother. I still blamed her for Lesedi’s death somehow.

Who in this day and age goes to confront someone who is doing bad things without investigating first? Even cheating husbands are investigated first before confrontations. I was better off an evil daughter-in-law than befriending a traitor who could kill me in my sleep.

My Sunday was a lazy one with most of the people at church even Tshele I had to go to my place and do the laundry.

Someone got angry as he had plans to take me there after church. I had to soften him up a little.

As usual my Mondays were not too busy but I was lucky to get a massage after work as someone had an off day.

Itu: "I could get used to this."

Ofentse: "It is as simple as a yes my love."

Itu: "But I said just a few more weeks my love."

Ofentse: "Can I surprise you with something else besides this one."

The surprise was lingerie I was not a matching kind of girl and apparently it turned him on. I had to do it for my mango.

Itu: "I am good with surprises you know me."

Ofentse: "Well I hope you won't kill me."

Itu: "If I kill you then who will make me feel good."

We both laughed.

Ofentse: "So I am only good at making you feel good."

We always had a different evening. He was very good in the bedroom department that I stopped trying to keep up. He was happy to teach me and I was happy to learn. This was too foreign to me but in a good way.



Tuesday I had the worst day as it was deadline day. I was not going to even call him I had switched my phone off. He understood my day and was not angry. I had my night out with Lerato. Not literal of course it was telephonically.

Itu: "I am so sorry if it felt like I was neglecting you."

Lerato: "Darling I am not even angry. I am happy that my friend is getting some. I am glad that we won't have grumpy Itu."

Itu: "I was not a grumpy person."

Lerato: "You were tense then. Well when are we going for that bachelorette party?"

Itu: "Not anytime soon."

Lerato: "You wish."

Itu: "What was that?"

Lerato: "I was saying your wish was my command."

Itu: "I will act like I didn't hear that. So where are you two taking me?"

Lerato: "DP told me you would ask; so no we are not telling you. All I know is that it will be something you will never forget because what I have planned for the activities is going to blow you away."

Itu: "I know not to ask you. Well as long as I will be with you two. I have never had people plan such and I am still recovering from the house remember." Lerato: "Well what are friends for?" Itu: "I cannot even repay you."

Lerato: "Who talked about repaying? Besides you were always there for me emotionally and you still are. Kali is confident because of you. Now my hubby always talks about thanking you for bringing his wife back so yes you are more important to me."

Itu: "Well I can't wait. I am waiting for an email from Zee."

Lerato: "Do not tell me that you are still going ahead about your mother?"

Itu: "I feel like I need the truth before I bring a child to this earth and before I mother those two teenagers."

Lerato: "Nothing good will come out of this but friends support each other. I am going to support you. I will never leave you alone on this." Itu: "Thank you very much."

The email from Zee came through that she was getting somewhere as she cracked the home affairs firewall and she was holding the current identification.

The week was busy and my mango didn't come but we called each other every minute we got. I couldn't even go home for the weekend.

Tumelo was talking to me from time to time. Mostly he needed help with his homework so he said. I was not buying it I knew he wanted assurance that I was in good terms with his father.

Ofentse: "Please do not kill me."

That was the first thing he said to me on Sunday when he called me. He was supposed to come but I knew he was busy.

Itu: "What is going on? You are scaring me now."

Ofentse: "I was....." My phone rang it was Nkhono.

Itu: "Nkhono is calling can I call you back."

Ofentse: "I am dead. I love you."

I was confused but I had to answer my granny.

Nkhono: "When you asked me that you are considering dating you were already dating?"

She didn't even greet I was a confused cockroach.

Itu: "Why do you ask?"

Nkhono: "You were never a good liar and you are not going to start now. If you are not dating then why is there a letter from the Ntai family asking for your hand-in-marriage?"

What the.....

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"Itumelang I am talking to you and you are ignoring me. What is going on?"

I was really tongue tight; I didn't know what to say. My granny was always the first one to know what I was up to. I think she was really disappointed. I cleared my throat but nothing came out.

Nkhono: "Itu are you still there?"

Itu: "Yes granny I am still here."

Nkhono: "What is going on?"

Itu: "I am sorry Nkhono I was going to tell you. I never thought Ofentse will send people so early."

Nkhono: "Wait a minute which Ofentse are we talking about, the same one with a mad woman for a wife?"

Okay to be honest I wanted to laugh at her but that was not the times for jokes as I was in trouble.

Itu: "Yes Nkhono the same one."

Nkhono: "Let me drink my high blood pressure pills before I get sick."

She dropped the call before I even replied to her. I was in trouble and I was pissed at Ofentse. I called him and he didn't even answer my calls. I called Lerato.

"Now that I am thinking about it. You knew also all along."

Lerato: "Knew what?"

Itu: "That Ofentse was going to send people for my hand-in-marriage."

Lerato: "What? What people. Please tell me from the start."

Itu: "Well Ofentse sent people home for my hand in marriage. I am not even ready yet and he sends people before even telling me."

Lerato: "How is granny taking it?"

Itu: "Not well. I haven't even told her yet that I am dating again. She is angry I know. Ofentse messed this up."

Lerato: "I do not blame him somehow. He has never been happy in his marriage. He finds a woman he loves who is also loved by his lovely granny and children. What more can a man want? He is afraid that he will lose you. When I was talking to him the time he was buying those presents he seemed like a

clear minded person who knew what he wanted from the start to the finish. He even has invested some money for his kids so that his wife will not work for his kids. He was happy to learn

that you are still single. He didn't sound to me like a man who still wants to play games. So I am not taking sides but I know where he is coming from. You are lucky because some of us learnt it the hard way. He is ready to settle down on his own accord not forced."

Itu: "You are not turning against me."

Lerato: "Do not even guilt trip me. I am happy that he pulled this stunt and I am happy that you are not going to be lonely ever again."

Itu: "Well you sold what you are selling and my heart bought it. I am only sad that my granny got hurt in the process and she will never forgive me."

Lerato: "Who? The granny that I know will be fine. She will never be angry at you; disappointed yes because I would have felt that way too. Do not worry about her I will also soften her up. Worry about dress hunting and catering; don't forget to add the bachelorette party on the list."

I laughed as I knew that Lerato always had something special that made me forget about my troubles she told me to go to

Gauteng for dress shopping I was not ready to go there as Nkhono was waiting for me at home to murder me.

I called her after talking to Lerato and she was not answering the call. I called Tshele.

Tshele: "What did you do to Nkhono?"

Itu: "What is happening; is she okay?"

Tshele: "She is not okay at all."

I didn't wait for him I just dropped the call and cried. My granny was my world I think since I began dating I only disappointed her once but not to the point where she becomes sick. I was going to ask for a day off the following morning. Well Ofenste was going to know me well.

There was a knock and I had to ask who it was as it was late on a Sunday and I hardly had visitors except.....oh no he better not be there I thought to myself.

I opened and instead of shouting at him I just cried.

"Sshhhhh please do not cry. I am so sorry I made you cry."

Itu: "So that is why you were not answering the phone?"

Ofentse: "I knew you will need me so I was already on my way."

Itu: "I do not want to talk to you so you know."

I couldn't stop my tears and the jerk had to lick all the tears.

Itu: "That is creepy."

Ofentse: "Come on baby I know you are hurting but I will not let tears stain your beautiful face. You are my love and I will never ever let you cry again. Please forgive me."

Before I could answer he passionately kissed me. When I was still recovering he scooped me and carried me to the bedroom. On that particular day he made passionate love to me. His slow strokes sent me to worlds unknown he slowed down and looked into my eyes.

"Will you marry me?"

Was this man serious? I was about to.....then he went deeper

Itu: Oooh ....I "

Ofentse: "I want to marry you more than anything in my life. Will you my lemon?"

Itu: "Yes

Advertisement

yes, yes."

I think the yes was more of me feeling good when he was going deeper. He was right I needed that often what better



way than getting married. I loved him no doubt about that and I was ready all I needed to do was..... then he went faster.

Ofentse: "Thank you and I love you more. This is all I want."

He increased the speed and I went crazy. This was the best love making ever and I was not going to spend more time wondering I was going to live my life to the fullest. He got off me wiped us

and turned me over coming from the back. He made me go on my knees in a straight up position. When he entered from behind holding my breast I felt some sensation. I never thought I was ever going to feel these feelings. My body responded well to his touch. We were more than compatible. I really loved his man; my heart and body would never lie.

"So Mrs Ntai, no this is not okay it sounds better when it's Mrs Mango. Are you ready to tame this old horse?"

Itu: "When you put it like that you are scaring me. What more is there under those layers?" Ofentse: "More love making."

I hit him playfully and slept on top of him.

Ofentse: "I am serious. I have been deprived for years and you always turn me on; especially when you are wearing short things. Well; when I think about you I just get a boner."

Itu: "What?"

Ofentse: “You should be happy that your mango is satisfied with his choice. I am sorry I didn’t tell you about the letter but then if I did I knew that you were going to say no. I didn’t want to lose you. I am willing to lose everything but not you.”

Itu: “I love you too. I need to talk to Nkhono. I hope she will forgive me.”

Ofentse: “I hope she won’t let your uncles charge me more.”

Itu: “I was dreading the bride price negotiations. I am even scared to meet your mother after these years; I still feel I am not ready.”

Ofentse: “You are not going anywhere near that woman. She will be there for me at a distance. I am not going to make the same mistake I made before.”

Itu: “Thank you very much. I love you.”

Ofentse: “Well I will believe that when you are wearing this.”

He made me sit up straight; reached for his jacket and removed a ring box. I was never given a ring before. I only saw it in movies. This was like a dream to me. He placed it on my finger and it fit perfectly.

Itu: “If this is a dream please do not wake me up.”

Ofentse: “We will dream together do not worry. I know it’s not an expensive ring but I promise the wedding band one is going to be your choice.”

Itu: “Are you kidding me; this ring is beautiful. I think I am left handed now.” We both laughed and he kissed me.

Ofentse: “I will take you for a manicure so that people can see how left handed you are.” Itu: “That is not a bad idea.”

We both laughed. It was the happiest day of my life. I think Ofentse was not bad at all. I quickly judged him according to

what he had been through with his wife. Speaking of his wife or ex-wife. Itu: “Are you going to tell Puleng?”

His facial expression changed he was angry but when he saw that I am serious he softened up.

Ofentse: “You want me to tell her?”

Itu: “As much as I hate her I would love for the kids and her to find closure and embrace the new life they are about to have. You might think these are kids but they have feelings too and their opinion matters. I want to raise my kids knowing that they can voice their opinions but if their opinions are bad then we will correct them and show them the way.”

Ofentse: “Well I chose well that is what I can say. I know you mean well and thank you very much. I will sit down with the kids and see how we will handle it.”

Itu: “Thank you and you will never regret this.”

He drove home in the early hours after complaining that he will smell like me the whole day. I told him to bring some of his stuff.

When I got to work Zyran was the first one to recognise the ring. He was all over my face most of the times. He was so childish what can I say he was a child so he was allowed to act; I loved him like that as he cared about all of us.

Zyran: “I am not going to wait for the invitation I am going to be in the bridal team.” We both laughed.

Itu: “One white male in the bridal team.”

Zyran: “There is a female too and I am hoping her husband will agree.”

I wanted to tell her that she will not agree in the first place but I never told him that.

Nkhono was coming around after my long talk with her. She was already sending a grocery list to me for the negotiations. If I didn't know better I was going to say she was happy. Well

hell yah she was ecstatic about the news. Tshela will call me to tell her to calm down as some of the things overwhelmed her.

I was happy that she was happy. Then the call I had been waiting for came through.

Zee: "I sent the information last night did you check your emails?"

Itu: "I had been too busy at work even the boss complained that I miss important emails."

Zee: "Okay please check your email there is the information and the address where she is staying now with her husband. They have been married for almost forty years."

What? That was not possible I was less than forty so why would she abandon me when she was married to my father?

Itu: "Thank you Zee I will wire the payment."

Zee: "We said this was for free."

Itu: "Nevertheless I will wire it. Thank you for your help."

We both laughed as she dropped the call. I was not going to let her work for free. She knew me better than to do that.

I remember the day we went there with Ofentse and the kids. Tumelo was busy talking while Lesego was still in the attitude mode. I was still going to ask her only that I was not ready.

Itu: "I will be back soon for you."

I left them in the car happy so that I will talk to mom then come back and introduce them.

When I got back in the car I was as sour as if I ate lemon.

Ofentse: "How did it go?"

I just broke down.....

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I was sobbing when a hand came at my back and brushed my back.

Ofentse: "We are going home. We will do the shopping some other time."

We were supposed to go shopping for the kids. They needed a few things especially Lesego who needed some accessories. She was growing up so she needed to look good somehow. I was still in dismay.

Tumelo: "Let us stop for the food; remember we didn't cook the lunch as we were going to eat out."

Lesego: "Yes please. I need a burger and some chips."

We stopped at Bethlehem mall. I was not in the mood for food I wanted to sleep. I had not told granny as I wanted it to be a surprise that surprised me at the end.

Lesego: "We will remain in the car."

Ofentse: "What will you eat?"

I just shook my head. He took my hand kissed it at the back and left with Tumelo. I knew they were going to buy something for me.

Lesego wanted to say something but I just looked outside the window. She was still giving me some attitude so I didn't need that.

We were coming all the way from Ficksburg where my supposed mother was staying with her family. The drive to Bethlehem seemed too long. They came with the food and we left. He was a good driver but I felt like he was a learner driver.

I didn't want them to take me to my granny's place so we arrived in Phuthaditjhaba and I went straight to the main bedroom. I buried my face in my hands and cried.

There was a hand at my back and it was not Ofentse's it was warm and smaller so I looked back and there was Lesego.

Lesego: "I know how you are feeling."

Itu: "How am I feeling when my mother doesn't want me and your mother loves you?"

Lesego: "You do not know what you are talking about."

Itu: "Well enlighten me because from where I am standing you do not care about me. You have been giving me some attitude."

Lesego: "Your mother is not worth it because she never acknowledged you from the start. Mine left me to fend for myself. I am here thinking that what kind of women are they."

Itu: "So why are you angry with me?"

Lesego: "You know how happy I was when I got the news that you made things happen for me. I asked dad if I could go with you to USA but he told me that you didn't have proper documentation. I came back and waited for you. Each and every day when the gate opened I hoped that it was you. You abandoned me when I needed the most."

Itu: "I didn't abandon you."

Lesego: "To me it was abandonment. You do not love a child then walk away like nothing ever happened. In my small heart you were the next thing to a mother I ever had. I never wanted my mother I wanted you."

Itu: "I am sorry."



Lesego: “You see I know the pain of being abandoned by someone you trust and love the most. I know the pain that you are going through and I wouldn’t wish it even to my worst enemy.”

Itu: “I am sorry I didn’t mean to abandon you but your father said I should never come here and your mother threatened me then she killed Lesedi I was devastated I needed to regroup.”

Lesego: “You were fighting with my parents not me. If you loved me so much you should have found the way.”

She was right. I had loved them like my own I should have found the way even through Nana.

Itu: “I am sorry.”

Lesego: “This is not the time to point fingers what is done is done. This time when you plan to come into our lives you need to consider us also. Tumelo is a guy he doesn’t understand. I am emotional I loved you the first time I saw you even when mom told us otherwise. When you left I thought I was not good enough my dad was always buried to his work. He only changed when we came to stay with him forever.”

I felt her pain. I was the cause of that pain and I was going to try by all means necessary to fix my mistake.”

Itu: "Come here. I am never going to make that mistake again. You are my baby and no one or nothing will ever change that."

We hugged and cried together. Sometimes the things we do affect people we love when we do not realise that.

These kids were going to be part of me and I was supposed to protect them. There was no need for my mother as I was a mother myself.

Tumelo brought some food for us we ate catching up.

Ofentse: "When am I going to have my room back?"

Us: "Never."

We looked at each other and laughed.

Ofentse: "I loved you better angry at each other. Women."

He said shaking his head and going out.

We joined the boys for the movies. I was cuddling with him on a double couch. It was as if the morning never happened. The boys never asked me what happened but I was going to tell Ofentse and Nkhono about it.

That night we didn't make love we just cuddled and it was heaven. I wished to be in his arms forever. When I got home the following day Nkhono knew that I had spent the night in Qwaqwa but not home.

Nkhono: "You are not married yet and you are acting like a wife. Do not disrespect me in my house."

That was my granny for you.

Itu: "I am so sorry it won't happen again."

No matter how old I was I was still a child and it was her house so I needed to respect her.

Nkhono: "It better not happen again or else I will charge him an arm and a leg." I laughed a little.

Itu: "I was not emotionally well so I didn't want you and Tshele to see me the way I was."

She changed her face to a concerned one.

Nkhono: "What happened?"

Itu: "Well Zee the one Lerato got for me to help Lesego; found my mother." Nkhono: "Oh."

Itu: "Yes she gave me all her details and I went there to look for her. I wanted to tell her that I am getting married if she came come at least once for me. Well she has a family and they didn't need me there. She didn't even acknowledge me. The husband who she married before I was born told me straight that he is the one who asked her to send me back home and never look back." Tshele: "What?"

I had forgotten that my cousin was there.

Itu: “Apparently my mother cheated and got pregnant so they are still not sure if he is the father. I asked him why he never asked for a DNA test as it seems like he has a lot of money. He told me that he was never going to waste his money on a bastard child.”

Surprisingly I was laughing the pain was gone. I think Lesego helped me so much. My granny was getting sour by the minute.

Itu: “They said they want to bury the past so I have to move on like I was doing before. All I wanted was the truth now that I found the truth I do not know what to do about it.”

Nkhono: “Well we thank God that she is alive. That was my prayer all along. She at least gave me a daughter I never had.

Please do not go waking up sleeping monsters. Life goes on. She was not comfortable staying in poverty she always wanted to get away from this poor place so I do not blame her.”

Itu: “Well I am content now. I love you so much and I love the poverty I grew up in as it groomed me.”

Tshele: “She doesn’t know what she is missing do not worry.”

Itu: “I am okay now. I only wish I let the lying dogs lay there instead of waking them up.”

Nkhono: “We all learn from our mistakes. You have a good heart my child and sometimes your heart will be your downfall.”

Itu: “If I have a good heart why can’t I forgive Ofentse’s mother?”

Nkhono: “You are still hurting. Lesedi was close to you than anyone else. You feel like if she had not opened her mouth then Lesedi would still be alive today.”

Itu: “I feel like she reaped a part of my heart by doing that.”

Nkhono knew about the file eventually but we kept it to ourselves. We knew her granny was not going to take it well.

Nkhono: “One day all will be well.”

Itu: “I am tired I didn’t sleep well last night the scene in Ficksburg kept replaying in my mind.”

Nkhono: “Go and rest. I was done cooking and Tshele was about to open the tuck shop.”

Itu: “Thank you very much I will do the dishes when I wake up.”

I rested which was disturbed by Mr Mango and Lerato. Lerato was being taken to hospital for delivery. I was happy for her but scared at the same time. Itu: “You will skip my wedding.”

Lerato: “Not a chance the date is not set yet so I am going to be there. Do not forget the party.”

I laughed so hard; as I was hoping for her to forget the party. Well it was out of my hands I needed to allow her to do her things.” She stayed on the phone till she was in too much pain.

Itu: “We were blessed with another baby girl.”

I excitedly told Nkhono. Nkhono: “Were you pregnant.”

We laughed with Tshele.

Tshele: “Keep up Nkhono. Lerato was pregnant she gave birth this evening.”

Then the ululation came. We laughed at her. We were done eating our dinner. I was a happy aunt. The picture made my ovaries tickle a little.

Nkhono: “Well when are you having your?”

Itu: “Come on Nkhono when I am married I will make a soccer team for you.”

We laughed as they knew that it was not going to happen. I was okay with only one addition as there was Tumelo and Lesego.

The following weeks two to be exact they replied to the letter. There was no running away from the future. In a month’s time I was going to be officially a Ntai according to tradition.

I had mixed feelings but regret was not part of that pact of feelings. I loved him and I was ready to marry him. Lerato and her princess were back at home. She was already up and about as it was a normal birth.

The day finally came. We had cooked up a storm with my cousins. My uncles were in control and I loved them as they were always calm and collected.

We were still getting ready when a car stopped by the gate. I looked outside as I didn't know the car. They came out of the car the occupants.

What the.....

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What the.....

Nkhono: "Not today devil."

Tshele followed her I was just wondering what Moipone wanted and who really invited her. DP looked at me with

inquisitive eyes which I returned inquisitively; we were in the dark too.

She was with Lethabo's uncles, that family really had insane people. Who in their right minds followed Moipone's madness?

My uncles were as cool as cucumbers as it was in their nature.

They gave them chairs which granny didn't approve of.

Lethabo's uncle: "We came here as we heard that our daughter in law is getting married again."

We were sitting by my bedroom window with DP it was easy to hear what they were saying there. We were not going to miss such drama. I knew they were going to handle them

accordingly. Uncle Seelo was going to handle them we were worried about the time with DP.

Uncle Seelo: "First of all who is your daughter-in-law?"

They looked at each other; they were sitting facing the other side their backs on our window.

Moipone: "According to culture she is our daughter in law."

Uncle: "Did you come and ask for her hand in married?"

No answer.



Uncle Seelo: “Did we reply to that letter you sent for the hand-in marriage?”

Nothing

Uncle Seelo: “Did you pay anything for her bride price?”

Nothing

Uncle Seelo: “Did you slaughter a sheep to introduce her to your ancestors?”

Moipone: “Well she carried Lethabo’s children so that qualifies her as our daughter in law.”

Uncle Seelo: “According to which culture because in our culture as Basotho for you to be recognised as the daughter in law the family of your suitor needs to write a letter which will be responded to and;.....well why am I wasting my time explaining what you already know.

Moipone you have a court order forbidding you to come anywhere near our daughter but you have the guts to defy that. Are you tired of your meals that you want to eat free meals from jail? I will say this once and you need to open your thick ears. Leave this family alone before you wake the sleeping dogs. I have tolerated you enough as my niece told me that she will handle it.

You should thank her as she is the reason behind this calmness. So this will be my last calm conversation with you as I thought you are reasonable and respectful people. Take your sorry behinds, leave this place and never look back. I know your aim was for the Ntai family to go to your place and do the negotiations there. This could have only happened when you had paid the rightful things and received her as your daughter in law. Please excuse us as we are running out of time.”

Nkhono: “Moipone, what do you really want from my child? Do you want her six feet under? Do you not learn in life? This is my last words with you. Once I kneel down and pray to God crying nothing you will touch will ever amount to anything. Do not be the reason I kneel down and pray.”

She left coming inside the house. We quickly left my bedroom and pretended to be working in the kitchen. I was really

disturbed. What did this woman want from me? Did she want my soul?

Itu: “What does she want; Nkhono:”

Nkhono: “Nothing my daughter; finish up here and go and do your make up.”

I was no going to pressure her. This was my day; it was our day as a family. We were going to forget Moipone and focus our

energy on the right things. On that occasion I missed Lesedi as she would have said something funny to comfort me.

Dipulelo: "Please do not even entertain her."

Itu: "Do you know what is funny. I wish my mother was as persistent as Moipone. It is better to have a persistent irritating mother than a mother who denies you in public and chooses her husband over her child."

Dipulelo: "Itumelang we said no more tears. We are going to smile and be happy. Today you are going to be part of the Ntai family. You have your kids who adore you. Focus on being the best mother those kids could have asked for. If you are the best mother it will bring the best in them. Look at Lesedi she never missed her mother because when I got married to her uncle I gave her a mother she never had. Lesego is a girl soon she will outgrow her father's attention and seek yours. Instead of crying

over a useless person; cry over the fact that you want to be the best mother these kids need."

Itu: "Thank you. I will stop today. I needed to hear that. So today I am starting a new chapter and in it there is no sorrow

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regret or hurt from the past."

Dipulelo: "That's my girl."

We finished as I was thinking to myself on how grateful I was for these people in my life. Lerato called me to wish me all the best. When the dust settled the nerves kicked in. It was going to be my new life I was going to be a mother again. Lesego had started throwing that word here and there.

Ofentse sent a message as the nerves were playing with me:

“This has been my dream in a long time. Please turn my dream into reality as I had been living a nightmare for the past part of my life. I am here at your mercy please accept me as I am I promise I will love you and never hurt you or let you go Mrs Mango. I love you so much you have to hold on to that and keep it in your heart.

Love Mr Mango.”

I was blushing. I was really blushing it wasn't even funny, DP came closer.

Dipulelo: “I was this happy when I married my husband. I know you are not making a mistake if you have this smile in your face. Hold on to that and never let go.”

Itu: “You sound as if you read his message. He told me to hold on to our love because he wants to love me till the end.”

Dipulelo: “Ncoow reminds me of young love. Let me call my husband and remind him.”

I thought she was joking but she wasn't

Dipulelo: “Baby; don't you want to court me again.”

Him: “I will do it all over again my love. I can even pay the bride price again if you want me to. Do you want to get married again?”

That was so sweet I loved their love it gave me hope. For people who married young most of the people thought their love was not going to last.

Dipulelo: “I will marry you again my love. I love you.”

She blew him a kiss as I laughed.

Itu: “You guys are childish.”

Dipulelo: “If I cannot be myself around him then who can I be myself around. The moment you do not feel free to express yourself in a relationship run. If you can't contribute then you

will not even fart in peace.” I laughed till my ribs cracked.

“What? Our marriage reached that point on our first month anniversary we can sit together in the toilet while the other is

busy doing their business. No questions asked and no fear. We said in sickness and in health and in poop also.”

Itu: “I am not going to take that advice.”

Dipulelo: “You will be the one telling me that when he farts his face looks cute.”

I was beside myself with laughter. At least aunty Ora came to tell us that they were almost done with the negotiations we needed to be ready to be introduced. Nkhono had chosen the best traditional attire that brought a glow to my face.

Aunt Ora: “You look beautiful my baby. Make sure you keep this beauty everyday so that your husband will know that he didn’t make a mistake.”

Itu: “Thank you.”

Aunt Ora: “Let me not give you advise as the elders will do that but I trust you so much so please make us proud.”

She hugged me and kissed both my cheeks. She was genuinely happy for me. I knew her and uncle Seelo always had good hearts. Tshela was busy with other men in the meat section. I was going to miss him the most. I had grown fond of his advises and his jokes.

We were called in for them to identify their daughter in law. I was told to look down. It was DP, Tumi, Reggie and I. They pointed me and then ululations followed after. I was nervous when we went back to serve then but Nana was there the second time around.

Nana: "I hope you are the one who cooked for us. I knew you will be my personal chef when I met you at that school."

I blushed and looked down.

Uncle Seelo: "Please do not abuse our daughter."

They were laughing as if they had known each other for years. It was a good start for me; it felt good to be asked officially. When they were done Ofentse came in also and they requested the blessings from the adults for the wedding to be in two months.

Itu: "What?"

Ofentse: "May I please talk to my betrothed outside?"

They allowed us to go outside.

Itu: "How can you ask for such? How are we going to plan a wedding in such a short notice. You want me to have a rushed wedding and ugly one. How am I going to...."

He silenced me with a kiss.

Ofentse: "Please breathe my love. I have set appointments with the wedding planner she said she will make everything available for us to choose from. She is a family friend so there is nothing to worry about when it comes to money. The dress I said I am not including it as it will be your wedding so your dress and the comfortable shop you want."

I was so emotional. This man really knew how to tickle me. He had everything covered as he knew what I wanted. It was our duty as the girls to go dress hunting. Lerato and Dp had already said it.

Itu: "What did I do to deserve you?"

Ofentse: "Well you invaded my heart and now it functions when you are a happy soul."

Itu: "Thank you very much. I love you."

We kissed.

Ofentse: "You look so lovely my wife. I would have loved to rip this dress off but I love it on you."

I blushed; he was saying the right things.

Ofentse: "So Miss Lemon will you do Mr mango the honours of being his Mrs Mango so that we can have a tropical juice and live happily ever after in the Tropical Island."

I just laughed at him and hit him playful.



Itu: “Well how can I say no to this charming request? Why not; I am tired of hiding we can do this thing.”

He hugged me so tight, the hug had all the emotions written all over it but the evident one was love. He kissed me one last time then we heard some throat clearing.

We both looked back. Oh boy.....

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Tumelo: “Did she say yes?”

Lesego: “Well we are waiting.”

Itu: “So you came with your supporters; why was I the last one to learn about this?”

They looked at their father and looked down. I looked at him again he smiled.

Ofentse: “It was a spare of the moment to bring them here as backup. I thought you were not going to agree. I am sorry.”

Itu: “No need to be sorry it’s okay.”

Lesego: "So we are on? I mean the wedding is on?"

The way she was so excited I was touched for the first time I felt welcome. I didn't care about my mother in law because to me she was dead.

Itu: "Your excitement is as if you are the one who is getting married. Your excitement is brushing to me. Tumelo you are also in about this wedding being fast tracked?"

Tumelo: "I am the happiest. I will gain a little weight as I was tired of dad's meals.

Ofentse: "This is my wife not ours so please if you need better food ask for your wife to do so."

Tumelo: "He says wife before he signs."

He said going back to the car.

Ofentse: "I can hear you."

We laughed at them with Lesego who came to give me a tight hug.

Lesego: "You look so beautiful today I love the outfit and I am glad that my attitude didn't chase you because you wouldn't be this happy and we would still be miserable. Thank you for this I am the most grateful of them all."

I was touched I hugged her tight before I let go and kiss her forehead. She left following her brother to the car.

Ofentse: "What was that all about?"

Itu: "Girl stuff."

Tshele: "You are busy here while they are waiting for you inside. They sent me to call you."

We giggled like school kids as we followed him inside. It was finalised then the families were happy my uncles were the

happiest as they received some bottles of their favourite wine and whisky.

They were going to decide what they will do with the remaining money as part of it was going to cover the traditional wedding. I was not worried about this I was worried about the fast tracked wedding. Was I going to cope?

Dipulelo: "Now that went very well."

Itu: "I am worried about this wedding so when will we go for dress hunting?"

Dipulelo: "We can even go next weekend I am all hyped up and ready. I wish I had someone to do this with me."

Itu: "What about your sisters?"

Dipulelo: “You know that they are just off. They are still jealous that I got married before them. The older one is not talking to me because she is still not married.”

Itu: “Well we will do this together. I will be grateful to do this with you.”

Dipulelo: “Not forgetting Lerato. So what will you do about your mother in law?”

I didn’t know how to answer that. I had told Ofentse that I didn’t want to see her during my negotiations. Women were not allowed inside the negotiation room but afterwards; as

Nana was there also they were allowed. They had the input about the wedding only.

Itu: “I will cross that bridge when I get there.”

I went back to work the following Monday. I took a morning bus. I had to ask for some leave days as I was going for my honeymoon after the wedding.

My boss was happy for me but my leave days were few so I was going to pay her back afterwards. My husband to be drove to my place daily for that week.

Itu: “You should move in with me already.”

Ofentse: “Look at this woman talking. I am not the bride. After the honeymoon we are going for house hunting the loan was approved. We can keep this place as our haven.”

Itu: “Are we going to afford it?”

Ofentse: “We will look at our finances. I do not want to go through what I went through before so I will be transparent with you as I know how painful it is to be at the receiving end. I can afford to drive you to and fro work but we will discuss as time goes on.”

It felt so good to be involved in the decision making. I was not told what to do but I was going to be part of the conversations.

Itu: “Thank you for this and I know we will need some weekend away from the kids so we can keep it if we are financially able. Now where are you taking me for our honeymoon?”

Ofentse: “I will take you to Sisonke guest house.”

I looked at him shocked and he laughed at me so hard that I had to laugh also.

Ofentse: “You should have seen your face. I will tell you when the time is right. Now come and kiss me. Please lock the door it’s still early I want you safe.”

I followed him and locked after kissing him goodbye. I always missed him when he left. I hope I was not going to get tired of

him. We had met up with the wedding planner. She was really good she also introduced us to the carters and the baker who impressed us the cakes were very good. I was going to use them for the birthday cakes. Shelomi Bakery was going to be my friend; the Letlojanes were my favourite so far. Their cakes tasted like heaven. The dress hunting was moved to two weeks before the wedding to include my bachelorette party.

Nkhono was the happiest of them all. She told me never to think about my mother as she had buried her in her mind. I listened to her. She told me to live a happy life as I had been having so many misfortunes to last me a lifetime. I was glad that Lerato had helped build the house. Granny's proudest

moments were oozing and brushing onto all of us. I was glad to make her smile after what my mom had put us through. We never heard from her and I never bothered to go back there. I deleted everything that I got from Zee.

Lesego was always after me over the weekends. She would want her hair to be done like mine.

"Mom

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are you ready?"

She was coming into my room after her dad dropped her.

Itu: "What did you say?"

Lesego: "I am sorry I thought maybe it was okay to call you that since you are marrying dad."

Itu: "Yes it is fine I just wanted you to repeat it as it sounded so delicious to my ears."

She laughed at me.

Lesego: "You are being silly how does it taste in your ears when it's delicious?"

Itu: "You will know one day. Yes I am ready my baby although I feel like you are kidnapping me. I hate those saloon women as you know."

Lesego: "You will close your delicious ears."

The following week she was going to miss me as I was going to be on the dress quest and bachelorette party.

Dipulelo picked me up after work. Mr Mango was busy so he didn't see us off. He was hurt but we were going on a girls' weekend out.

Nadifa drove the kids and Lerato to Gauteng. We were going to check the dresses there. On Saturday we woke up dress hunting. Lerato knew a number of sophisticated places. I was not going to afford the dress but they told me that they were

going to top it up as a wedding present. The dress was bought but it was going to be resold what was I going to do with a wedding dress?

Lerato: "The kids are sleeping now we can go do what party goers do."

She came to our hotel room we had booked at Manhattan Hotel in Pretoria. It was my first time out of Free State province. Lesego even laughed at me when I told her that it was going to be my first time out of the province.

Dipulelo: "I am ready. Itumelang please change we need to go."

Itu: "What is wrong with what I am wearing?"

Lerato: "We are going to a night club not a church."

Itu: "What?"

Dipulelo: "This is a once in a lifetime thing. We are also going for the first and last time."

Lerato brought a dress which was a perfect fit as we were the same size. Her husband was going to drive us then come and pick us up when we were done.

He parked in front of Channel M Night Club. It was my first time in a night club. Nadifa didn't even wait for us to get in as he was rushing for the kids. I was even wondering if Ofentse was going to do the same if roles were reversed.



Dipulelo: “We are all single tonight we even hired a boot for some male stripper.”

I was curious so I was not going to complain at all. I sent a message to Mr Mango who said I should enjoy.

Lerato: “Did you tell him we will be in a club?”

Itu: “I don’t want to die I will tell him when I get home.”

Dipulelo: “Good choice; now let us do this.”

We spent part of the night there. The food was expensive but eatable the alcohol was double its normal price. The most fascinating thing was that I got a lap dance from a male stripper. Never in my life did I think it was possible in Africa. I

always saw it in movies and thought those American things were not available here.

I had a banging headache when my fiancée called.

Ofentse: “I am not surprised that you are still sleeping; a night club Itumelang?”

How did he find out; I didn’t have time to crack my head.

Itu: “You promised me that you will be okay as long as I have fun.”

Ofentse: "Did you at least have fun because this was your first and last time in a club without me."

He called me to be jealous. This man needed a life a little. My headache was the one talking at the moment.

Itu: "I enjoyed and I am not going to go in any club ever again. I got a lap dance though."

Ofentse: "Is it safe for me to drive there and ask him nicely why he gave my wife a lap dance."

I laughed at him.

Itu: "Do not be jealous he didn't touch anything. You are the only one I am going to marry and my eyes are only for you. I was innocently enjoying myself I bet you saw the photos and videos; that is why you are boiling."

He laughed.

Ofentse: "I bet if you were in my position you were also going to be jealous. I know you are not Puleng but it's these men I do not trust. Please come home Mango misses his lemon. He woke me up at night missing you."

Itu: "I miss you too. You have bewitched me."

Ofentse: "I was going to say the same. I love you and please; be safe."

Itu: "Thank you I will try. I love you and know that to me you are enough and my world."

Before we knew it the big day had arrived I was looking at myself in the mirror wondering what happened to the intimidated Itu. The Itumelang I was looking at was a confident and was in love.

Nkhono: "You said you do not want a veil?"

Itu: "No my dress is perfect and I am not a virgin Nkhono so what will be the use of it."

Nkhono: "You have made me proud in so many ways I love you so much. To me you will always be my daughter. Please behave and all that I taught you must come into play. I know you do not see eye to eye with your mother in law but tomorrow it's a traditional wedding do not show strangers that you are not

close they will use that loop to fight you. Love her from a distance it's allowed and respect her."

I was emotional. I didn't want to leave her again but I had a life to live also.

Itu: "I love you so much and I will make you proud. I will always take care of you as you are the only mother that I know."

We hugged and we got into the cars going to church, his church. I was nervous but the moment I saw him when my uncle walked me down the aisle I knew that I was home and I was not going anywhere.

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He was smiling nervously. His eyes were watery a little I smiled at him and looked at the pastor when we were standing in front of him. To say I was nervous would be an understatement. I was shaking in my boots but I was happy. It was the happiest day of my life I had to admit.

“We are gathered here in the .....

The pastor had started but I had gone back down the memory lane and started imagining what it was like to work as a cleaner. How his wife made me quit and how we found our way to each other. The pastor was saying a lot of things that I didn't want to hear. He reached the vows part. I woke up when everyone was looking at me. Ofentse realised that I was sleeping and he rescued me my hero husband.

“I will go first.” He said smiling from ear to ear.

Ofentse: “I am not the first person you loved. You are not the first person I looked at with a mouthful of forever. We have both known loss like the sharp edge of a knife. We have both lived with lips more scar tissue than skin.

Our love came unannounced in the middle of the night. Our love came when we'd given up on asking love to come. I think that has to be part of its miracle. This is how we heal. I will kiss you like forgiveness. You will hold me like I'm hope. Our arms

will bandage and we will press promises between us like flowers in a book.

I will write sonnets to the salt of sweat on your skin. I will write novels to the scar of your nose. I will write a dictionary of all the words I have used trying to describe the way it feels to have finally found you and I will not be afraid of your scars.

I know sometimes it's still hard to let me see you in all your cracked perfection but please know whether it's the days you burn more brilliant than the sun or the night you collapse into my lap your body broken into a thousand questions you are the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

I will love you when you are a still day and I will love you when you are a hurricane."

I was in tears and when I checked I was not alone even Lerato and DP were wiping their tears.

Itu: "How am I going to top that?"

Pastor: "I will have difficulties to top that too if it were me. Your vows Miss."

I looked at him looking all handsome. What did I do to deserve such a handsome and loving man? I cleared my throat.

Itu: "I didn't fall in love with you I walked into love with you, with my eyes wide open, choosing to take every step along the way. I do believe in fate and destiny, but I also believe we are only fated to do the things that we'd choose anyway. And I'd choose you; in a hundred lifetimes

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in a hundred worlds, in any version of reality, I'd find you and I'd choose you my fated husband."

Surprisingly I was not shaking anymore I was feeling okay. This was my day, no point of correction it was our day and I was going to enjoy it the best way I know how.

Pastor: "The beautiful vows indeed now let them officially seal the deal."

People laughed and I looked to my right. My granny was sitting there looking very beautiful pride and joy written all over her face. I wouldn't have chosen a better parent and friend to raise me and groom me. She was the best of the ones manufactured in that year. I was a lucky person to her in my life.

We exchanged the ring and I tell you the wedding one was better than the engagement one. I was officially left handed. The pastor didn't ask if anyone was against the union as we had asked him not to.

Pastor: "Ladies and gentlemen I now present to you Mr and Mrs Ntai."

That was after the signing and when he blessed us and prayed. There was some ululation. We left the church with a song and I was so touched to see Bophelo there.

Itu: "You came?"

Bophelo: "I wouldn't have missed it for the world. My granny was going to kill me; that is all she has been talking about for the past months."

We both laughed

Itu: "Thank you for coming it means a lot."

Bophelo: "I am glad but I am going to Limpopo because of work so I left your present with my granny she will give you both mine and hers."

Itu: "Thank you very much and I will make sure that the thank you messages are sent."

Bophelo: “No worries we will be fine. All the best now we are the ones who need to be searching as the field is getting saturated.”

We both laughed and hugged as she left.

“Now Mrs Mango before the day ends already you are diverting the attention. I need you.”

Itu: “Do not be such a drama queen I will be yours from now till the day you die.”

Ofentse: “I would love that Mrs Ntai.”

He said kissing me; it felt good and divine to make out without a lingering guilt.

“We know that you do not have to steal those kisses anymore but there are kids here.”

We laughed looking at Lerato and DP coming towards us. They looked so beautiful and there was nothing that could make me happier than these two my fated friends.

Ofentse: “I need to show off as this one is the love of my life and my soul mate. I am home finally.”

Lerato: “Do not make us jealous because we also have our soul mates around. I am happy for you guys.”



She hugged us and squeezed us. They had arrived late on Thursday and from then they have been running around with us. Nadifa and Ofentse hit it off like the wild fire.

Dipulelo: “I am the happiest. Now please take care of our flower. She is still delicate and if you ever make her cry you will answer to me and I will make you disappear there won’t be any record that you ever existed.”

Itu: “Wowowo you are threatening my husband on our wedding day.”

We laughed

Dipulelo: “Oh honey this is a promise not a threat believe you me once I pose a threat he will pee his pants.”

I was glad to had friends who could go to any lengths to protect me.

Ofentse: “If I hurt her I will make me disappear myself.”

Itu: “Honey.”

I hit him playfully. This was the man I loved and I was praying that he was not going to hurt me or the other way round.

Ofentse: “What baby, I am making a promise before your friends and God.”

I kissed him and we joined the others for pictures. Lerato's kids were sweethearts I couldn't help it but take a picture of them with Lesego. It was the best picture ever.

Nana: "Finally my prayers have been answered I can now sleep in peace and join my beloved parted husband."

Ofentse: "What are you talking about Nana?"

Nana: "Since the day I met her at that pay point in Bolata I made it my mission to fast and pray for God to give you two a

chance. When the kids loved you and stopped talking about you I knew it was a matter of time before God fully answered me."

Ofentse: "You are my warrior and hero thank you Nana for everything."

I was in tears of joy. Nana was a special person to me she was the mother in law I wished for and never had.

My mother in law was there. I would be lying if I would say she wasn't trying. She was trying her best but I was not there anymore. When I talked to her I always saw Lesedi lying down there asking me to make it stop; telling me she didn't want to die. That was the picture I couldn't get out my mind no matter how hard I tried.

Itu: "Thank you Nana you are my favourite person."

Ofentse: "How about me."

Nana: "Stop competing with me because you know that you will never win."

We laughed. The wedding ended at a high note. Sad I was going back home for the traditional wedding. I told Ofentse to start with the traditional one but he wanted the white one first to defy all odd according to him.

The traditional wedding was cosy but beautiful than the first one. My husband was the best; he made sure that all the things

were covered. My mother in law was looking beautiful and happy. I was officially Mrs Mango-Lemon Ntai when the sun went down.

Ofentse: "I left all the cards in my drawer under my table. Please make sure that you thank everyone who brought presents for us."

He was instructing the kids when we were packing for our honeymoon that was still a secret.

Lesego: "I will do all the writing as I have the best handwriting."

We laughed at her although it was no lie she had the best handwriting.

Itu: "Yes my baby girl; mommy loves your handwriting more."

Tumelo: “Nepotism.”

We laughed hard. They were going to stay with Paballo and his family while we were gone while Nana was visiting her son in Cape Town.

Itu: “I love you both and we are going to see your mother when we come back.”

Their faces dropped. They have been avoiding that but they needed that to be honest. At least they wrote to her. She was serving her sentence in Bloemfontein.

Tumelo: “Can we cut and paste you as our mom?”

I was touched but it was not right.

Itu: “I will always be your mother but just like me I have two mother which the other one is actually my granny so you can also have two mothers.”

Ofentse: “You will be the lucky kids in the world. You mother is right.”

Tumelo was still calling me ausi Itu and I was happy with that because we were really close so it didn't matter what he called me. Lesego was also close to me because she needed that motherly love as she was going to be entering teenage-hood in a few years.

Lesego: "May I go with you."

Tumelo: "No silly ausi Itu needs to make another baby without disturbance."

We gasped with my husband. Kids grew up so fast.

Ofentse: "Who told you about baby making?"

Tumelo: "I am in high school dad and you better make a girl as I am very comfortable at being the only alpha in this family."

He said going away. I laughed at his father who looked like he had seen a ghost.

Ofentse: "This boy doesn't know me."

Lesego: "Tumelo what is an alpha?"

His sister followed him behind. She was at an inquisitive age although I knew that she might also have a clue about baby making also. I blamed this on the changed curriculum which taught kids too much biology too early.

Ofentse: "I will kill these kids."

Itu: "Well this is the world we live in. We better finish and go and make that girl before Tumelo rebuke us."

Ofentse: "You are not helping my love."

I just hugged him then kissed him passionately. He would have to be strong to be a sober father.

Ofentse: "Are you sure that you are up to seeing Puleng?"

Itu: "I am only going with you but I am not going to go inside. I do not think I will ever see her and your mother without seeing Lesedi dying in my arms."

Ofentse: "I am sorry my love this is the best day of my life and yours; can we not talk about depressing news and get out of here?"

Itu: "Yes please I want to eat my mango comfortable and uninterrupted."

Ofentse: "That's my girl and mango had been starving for weeks"

Itu: "Sorry my love I....."

Paballo: "We are here family are you ready?"

He was the one driving us.

Itu: "Where are we going?"

Ofentse: "Is the flight booked."

Itu: "Flight to where?"

They ignored me and placed the bags in the car. It was Paballo's car. I slept all the way. When I woke up we were at OR Tambo. Okay I was freaking out.

Ofentse gave me my passport which was left with only a year. I had gotten it when I was supposed to go and stock some maize meal and all from Lesotho then Moipone happened when she took the money and I gave up. I knew my granny had it.

Ofentse: "You said you would die to see Mauritius and I do not want my wife dying on me."

Itu: "It was not literally silly."

We laughed with Paballo looking at us on the review mirror.

Ofentse: "Well your friends and family did this for us."

Itu: "How many?"

Ofentse: "All of them including your colleagues. Nadifa organised and paid for the accommodation."

I was in tears after he and his wife make sure Lewis delivers a kitchen with all the utensils as a wedding present with Dipulelo buying the bathroom and bedroom as a present as they said we needed to start afresh.

Itu: "They...."

I couldn't finish my sentence.

Paballo: "This is your time you two deserve it. Please make sure you enjoy as it will make us happy."

Itu: "Thank you very much."

Later on Ofentse told me that their business venue paid off so his wife and him contributed also. I was lucky to have such a family and friends around me.

Ofentse: "I love you so much and with you came all these people and made my life the happiest. Let us enjoy this."

We were in a flight going to Mauritius and I was the happiest.

## **Epilogue**

"Daddy, please hurry. We are going to be late for the christening of these kittens. The other one is running like a mad chicken already."

We both laughed from the bedroom with my husband.

Ofentse: "These are your siblings you are talking about Lesego."

Lesego: "Not when they tear my bedroom apart; you need to put a handle on my bedroom door."

Ofentse: "When you stop throwing tantrums I will definitely do that."

She left dragging her feet. I looked at my husband with a murderous eye.



Itu: “You should leave my daughter alone you know that your rascals always messes her stuff and it’s not okay for her to always stress.”

Ofentse: “Honey, I know you love your daughter so much and you probably talk about me and recipes about murdering me when you are alone in your girls something, something.”

Itu: “Come on my love why would we do that?”

Ofentse: “I know, wait till these two rascals grow up already they are acting like twins from hell. The smaller one looks like she is eating more than the bigger one.”

I laughed at him. Before you decide to draw your own conclusion they were not twins. They were a few months apart and that was not a mistake it was something we had planned. There was a time when I was carrying Hlalefo that the doctor suspected multiples but I knew I had only one heartbeat.

Tumelo had won I had girls, Lesego loved them when they were still young and stationary but when they started walking and destroying it was like world war 5 in my house. Karabo was the little devil and the young one who ate for all of us in the house. I am just kidding she had an appetite for centuries though.

Itu: “At least we are your girls.”

Ofentse: “I love you all my girls. Come here.”

We were done dressing up. I went to where he was seated at the edge of the bed. He opened his legs and I stood in front of him.

“I do not think I will be happy without you and the kids in my life Mrs Mango. You are the best wife a man could ever ask for. Thank you for accepting Tumelo and Lesego as moody as Lesego can be. I am also a difficult man to please but you made

sure you tamed your beast my love. Remember when the bank approved our bond for this house?”

We both laughed. How could I forget our constant fight only to realise that Hlalefo was on her way. I was so impossible or rather he was impossible and I was irritable all the times.

Itu: “How can I forget; when we planned on repainting our bedrooms. The kids were so excited to redo their own space.”

Ofentse: “You brought the light into this family. Even my grumpy Tumelo became a responsible man who prayed to be an alpha male and it happened.”

We both laughed, as I remembered his face in both occasions when he realised that the baby was a girl. He even asked us to do a party for him each time to celebrate that his prayers had been answered.

Itu: "I am glad that I found you and the kids now let us go."

He kissed me and then held my hand as I helped him to stand up. We finished getting ready and joined the kids in the living room.

Tumelo: "Finally; I was going to drive without you. We are already late."

We looked at each other and laughed.

Ofentse: "I am the one who taught you how to drive so please do not bite the hand that feeds you."

Lesego: "That doesn't even fit there, daddy. Let me go and strap the babies in. Uncle Pabs is coming to pick you up. We are taking the babies with us."

Itu: "You know we are the parents right? We will have to wait for your uncle first before...."

Paballo: "I am here family."

Tumelo: "Finally, working with old people sucks. No offense mom."

He laughed going out.

Paballo: "Are we that old couz?"

They looked so worried and I laughed at them.

Itu: “You are not that old now please take the picnic baskets to the car.”

They looked at each other and followed instructions. I looked at them through the kitchen window. Paballo had finally settled in. This business venture was paying off. It was not an easy road as some days they could come and ask for food from us. Nana’s pension fund was not enough for them.

Speaking of Nana, we had a few years borrowed with her. The day we received Karabo was the day she peacefully slept and never woke up again. We laid her to rest with heavy hearts and unanswered questions but from my side deep down I knew it was a sign. She died a happy woman as her favourite grandkids were doing well in life and she knew that the tasks left were not too hard to handle without her.

I locked the door and followed them to the car. I was afraid to let kids drive alone but I trusted Tumelo’s driving with my life. They were going to pick up Nkhono in town so he knew better than to speed.

Ofentse: “I love you kids

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please be safe.”

“We love you too, you too mom.”

They waved I looked at them and wondered about my mother. There I was raising the kids of a woman who killed the person that I loved the most. I loved them with all the pores of my body but the woman who carried me nine months didn't want me. It was her lose because I was a full package and more. I was not going to lose sleep over her and her so called husband they were made for each other with their wickedness.

Ofentse: “They are going to be fine. You are raising responsible kids remember.”

I sighed because I didn't want to tell him that I was thinking about my useless mother. Paballo's wife was sitting in front as vibrant and colourful as ever. Not even begging for food some days put her down. She believed in her husband and I was seeing a role model in her.

Her: “Family I can't wait for the food the rest I am good.”

We laughed because we knew that she had even ordered a cake from Shelomi Bakery. The Letlojanes had become our only source of cakes for all the occasions. In fact we created occasions so that we could order their cakes.

Itu: “I know you and food will never divorce.”

Her: "I think even in the afterlife if there is food I will still eat and love it. You are looking great my love. The twins looked great also."

Talk about someone who transitions from one conversation to another with ease as if we have recovered from the previous one. They called them the twins as they looked like they were twins.

Ofentse: "My girls are not twins please. If you want Karabo to kill you, she always says she doesn't look like Hlalefo."

Paballo: "Karabo was supposed to be the first one."

Itu: "I think my baby didn't enjoy the childhood. I try to give her special care but Karabo always mess that up for us."

Ofentse: "You are doing a great job my love do not blame yourself kids will never be the same. Lesego is talkative than Tumelo and they have a huge gap."

He was right I was a good mother to my kids all of them and I was not going to blame myself. My colleagues always tell me that and it was high time I believed it too. My husband never encouraged me to be a house wife. He said we will juggle even ask family members to help us. It was working the helper came in thrice a week. At work things were smooth as I had gotten a raise and been hired permanently. We kept the flat for our teenage tendencies sprees. I was still using a bus and some

days my husband took me to and fro. Do not ask me why I didn't have a licence but some things are not meant for some people. I was not born to drive I had a son who was going to drive me around. That is how he defended me when people thought I was being stupid.

Puleng tried to have a relationship with her kids and I was the one initiating the visits. I was not part of it. I was not going to be buddy, buddy with her. Their mother was released as evidence pointed that she was being forced to steal the medication from the patients. I had nothing against her except

that I hated weak women. She never practiced again as her licence was cancelled. She just became a shell of a human being.

“We are here my love and all the friends and family are here.”

When he meant all he meant all, I looked at the cars the GP and L number plates. Zee had been communicating with me and I had been helping her besides the knowledge of both our husbands, we were good friends. Lerato was a sister I never had and a second daughter Nkhono always wanted. Dipulelo was always going to be my rock.

We usually had the couples' outings. The three of us because Zee was only my friend and his husband was not that enthusiastic. We never even once planned our vacation. We

decided that planned things always ended up in disaster. We always saved then when it was time to feel wild the first couple to think about a vacation will just book and then inform the others. Our work places knew about these wild adventures once a year.

The planned holidays were the December ones where we rotated each year. It was family time so it was important for our families. Well enough about dreaming I ran to Lerato.

Itu: “Nkhono tells me you took her for a massage yesterday.”

Lerato: “It was mother and daughter session.”

“I am your biological mother.”

I looked behind me and her mother was standing there. We hugged and exchanged our greetings. We didn't have much time as we were late. We were going to catch up at Sisonke Lodge for our picnic there.

We entered the church which was fully decorated instructions from Mr Mango as his princesses deserved better. My mother in law and her daughter were there. The daughter was still rude to me but I realised it was the bitterness of being a return soldier. My mother in law ... well...sigh.

The ceremony was short and precise. It was something big for this family and I was part of it now. I was not a die hard



Christian I was a church goer in a nutshell. My husband held my hand and I remembered the day we made our vows. It was the day I decided to trust him and take a leap of faith. I do not regret my decisions as each day comes with new challenges and new problems but it also comes with more love and laughter.

Their sister is sitting down with them in front. Besides them destroying her things she loves her sisters to death. She is like a step parent because they listen to her more than to their brother. I am scared as she is entering puberty faster than I thought I am guiding her the way Nkhono did. I am grateful for that because if she was not the one who had raised me I was going to be clueless in many things.

Nkhono was sitting the other end with them. She had become a happy soul. Tshele and his wife had decided to join her while they finished building in their stand that way it was going to help her with her loneliness. She was happy for the decision. Their wedding was only traditional and a small cosy one which followed by signing at home affairs. They wanted to build so it was going to be pointless to waste money on a single or two days the money that was going to provide them with a steady home. I loved their thinking but I managed to convince them to take some of my stuff to help them. Financially I still supported somehow to make sure they built what they wanted. Tshele was working although he was still not yet permanent. They

were also here with his father. The rest of the family were going to join in the lodge. It was closed for that day for us.

The pastor started and within the blink of an eye we were done. They received their presents from people who were too snobbish to think kids deserved presents for every occasion. Not in a bad way but I was black to the core presents were only bought once a year on birthdays and that is if the money permitted. Do not kill me I am an African who was born and bred in the Bundus.

We were one happy family we celebrated till the late hours. Some families had to drive back home. I was glad to have such people around us. The kids slept in my mother in law's house. It

was a norm in most Sundays to give us time to bond as husband and wife.

"I know she will never forgive me but I wish she can even come inside my house and drink tea with me. People my age always brag about spending time with their daughters in law, I am just there always wondering if she will ever forgive me."

I was coming from the bathroom and the kitchen door was slightly open.

Ofentse: "Mom, Itu doesn't hate you. If she hated you she will never allow her kids to come and visit you let alone spend

all this time. Remember she is the first one who gave you the chance to raise the girls. I know she doesn't hate you."

That was our relationship with my mother in law. I never set foot in her house after the traditional wedding. When I took kids to her I always made sure I was with the older kids or my husband who never questioned my decision but accepted it as it was. My husband loved me to a point where he would rather lose his family than see me suffer.

"I am sorry for all the damage I caused. I will apologise till the day I die. If I had not confronted Puleng she would have never killed that poor girl."

Ofentse: "Mom everything happens for a reason and there is a time for everything. Did you think that one day you will be

talking to me like this? No because I was so angry at you but look at us as close as ever."

Her: "I will keep on praying my son. Thank her for me tell her that I saw the money even if I do not deserve it. I told her to stop supporting me and start taking care of herself."

Ofentse: "You see she loves you because if not she would let you die of hunger. We love you mom and we are not angry at you."

I tiptoed to my room. Was I being unfair? Well I was not going to apologise for being distant. I was not going to feel guilty because I loved her in my own way.

Moipone well Qwaqwa is a very small place we met from time to time. Some days she was happy and greeted me some days she would pass me by like we were strangers. I was not going to lose my sleep over that as there was no love lost there. She was still the big mouth clever for nothing but I wished her all the good things in life even though she made my life miserable.

“I know you heard her I saw your shadow leaving the passage.”

Itu: “Am I a bad person?”

Ofentse: “You are someone with feelings. So as long as you keep her in mind and support her financially even behind my back I will always support you.”

Itu: “I am sorry my love but it doesn’t feel right for me to support my family while the person who is responsible for bringing my husband on the earth and grooming him is alive. She is not my favourite person but she also deserves a break. Your sister is abusing her financially.” He laughed hard.

Ofentse: “There is nothing like financial abuse but because my wife says so I believe my mother mustn’t suffer from it.”

Itu: “You are a blind follower.”

Ofentse: "Only of my one and only Mrs Mango-Lemon-Ntai."

We kissed which was interrupted by my rascals coming to our bedroom. Tumelo: "Mom may I go to town."

Itu: "Nope." Tumelo: "Come on ausi Itu."

Yes I was still ausi Itu in some instances.

Lesego: "I will go with him and make sure he will not over spend."

Ofentse: "It's like asking a mouse to take care of the cheese."

He said going outside. That was his way of saying "Deal with our kids woman they are all yours" I called him but he ignored me.

Lesego: "I promise I need a few items only."

Itu: "You know that all your cards are connected to my phone so every transitions report to me."

Tumelo: "Yes ma'am I promise I will never do what happened last time." Itu: "You better because this card will be taken."

Lesego: "I promise he will never misspend."

They left me with my rascals. There was no clean house with them in the house. At least they were sleeping I knew their granny always gave them sugar so when they woke up it was going to be a mad house.

When the older kids came I was surprised to receive presents.

Ofentse: "She is getting old forgetting her birthday."

I laughed at myself hard. I always remembered days before but on my day never. Well money well spend even though I was about to murder them. I wanted them to be responsible people who knew how to save. Their phones were only connected on Wifi which they had to contribute to at the end of the month. They rebelled at first but eventually came to the party.

I was truly blessed to have such a family.

December 20.....

Lerato: "This place is beautiful."

Nadifa: "I do not regret spending my money at all."

We were at our holiday place; which was once my plot that my late husband bought for me. We had been contributing for years to build a unique holiday home that was going to be for hire during the year except for December and January it was going to be for family time. It had ten bedrooms and two common rooms with bunk-beds for kids separated by gender.

Fusi: "DP told me about this place and I was sceptical I think this is one of the best decisions my wife has ever made."

Dipulelo: "I always make best decisions if I didn't decide to marry you I think we know what would have happened to you."

Fusi: "I would be dead and gone my love."

We laughed at them. They were always the mature and my favourite couple. On the other hand Nadifa and Lerato were unique as they represented two countries and their love was pure it defied borders and cultures.

Ofentse: "As for me and my loved one I think from this year moving forward I will switch off my phone on the first of December and switch it on the last day of January."

Itu: "I want to see that happening. Where are the grannies?"

We had brought the grannies and to them it was bonding time.

Tumelo: "They are at the garden already sipping on their tea Lesego and Kali helped me."

He said passing us with the bags. We looked at each other and laughed going to the patio. We had taken our time to build this spectacular place. It cost us an arm and a leg but it was worth it. Fusi: "We will go and rest."

Dipulelo: "We will bring refreshments."

We went to the kitchen to make something for them to snack on. We were going to enjoy this and it was a unique outskirts

place for us to enjoy. We were going to make memories for generations to come. Our kids were going to inherit the place.

We took a walk as ladies we were facing the lake that was just a few metres from the house. I was in the middle with Lerato and Dipulelo on either side.

Lerato: “I never thought that a wrong number was going to give me sisters that I never thought I had.”

Dipulelo: “I never thought Lesedi was going to introduce me to the person like you.”

Itu: “I never thought losing my family will bring me sorrow then happiness after this. I am glad I met you ladies. You made me laugh, cry and grow. You held my hand till this day. We brought together families that never thought will meet in this lifetime.”

I placed my hands on their waists as they did the same. This was my life. I was grateful to these encounters that brought so

much happiness after a storm. I had a name for them I called them “Fated Encounters”

.....**The End**.....



