

MY

WORTH

CROWNED

YOU

Ketso Madonsela

Chapter 1

As Mohato's royal, first, and only wife, I am expected to be awake every morning by 4am with the intention to make my husband breakfast. The king of Tholoana kingdom, i.e. my husband, is extremely busy (so I am continuously reminded) and is normally out of the royal house by 6am. Today is no different. It is 4:30am and I am already in the kitchen, in an apron, preparing breakfast for a husband who will only eat if his mood allows it. The perks. It has got better with time though. Mohato and I were complete strangers when we got married – we never cared for each other. With an extra exerted effort from my desperate side to make this “till death do us part” forcefully arranged situation work, he now eats breakfast after saying good morning to me, before he leaves the house to rule his country. I am the type of wife that does not believe in having another woman cook for her husband. The fact that I live in a royal house with more than twenty servants (who are hired for different duties that a normal wife would generally perform in her own house or hire a domestic worker to do) does not change my beliefs in taking care of my man myself.

Today is Mohato's birthday. In the two years that we have been married, we have never really done anything for his birthday - or mine for that matter. Our relationship has improved and grown over the past two years, therefore I am confident that my efforts will be appreciated. You see, I am a young lady born in a village and grew up in a city. I am the epitome of the conflict that exists between black modernity and black culture. I may have sat in debates concerning women rights, but it never took away the fact that my culture sees nothing wrong with the fact that I was kidnapped and married off to a king. My family was part of the planning of this kidnapping. I am married to an extremely cultural man – the rural type of cultural – protecting a cultural throne. When I say that we have come a long way in the past two years, I mean it. The past two years have taught me, harshly so, and continue to teach me that being a woman is an actual qualification. It is your ability to endure and persevere that gives you your credits – not your tears.

I woke up extra early this morning to bake him a cake for his birthday. I also made breakfast – but that is not special considering the fact that I make him breakfast everyday anyway.

I walk out of the kitchen and up the stairs with the cake placed on my one hand and a tray of his breakfast located on my other hand (the benefits of waitressing throughout university). I close the door with my buttocks behind me as I enter our bedroom. I place the cake and the breakfast on the dressing table. I change into lingerie. The lingerie is in his favourite colour – red. The lingerie displayed on my body is a cute little one-piece number that enhances the breasts through the art, discovery, and amusement of the cleavage. It shapes my behind – it is a tight number; literally and figuratively. Thank goodness I am one of those naturally thin people. I have no cellulite or love handles hanging from my body to worry about. Furthermore, thanks to my fairly golden brown skin, the red lace number does wonders for my skin tone. I fix my make-up and comb my Malaysian weave, ensuring that its length is only but an accessory to the look.

I walk towards the sleeping king who is lying on the right side of our king-sized bed. His cake is on my hand and his gift is in a paper bag that is hanging from my wrist. I place one hand on his face and begin to sing happy birthday to him – careful not let the swinging paper bag on my

wrist hit his face. He slowly opens his eyes. The wider they open, the greater the focus on me. He is first drawn in by my singing and then his focus moves from my voice to my face, then to the moment – his birthday moment. He smiles at the part of the birthday song where I sing “Happy birthday to my handsome king...” As soon as I conclude the song, he sits up and accepts his cake from me. He opens the duvet cover and signals with his hand that I should sit next to him. I get into bed and sit next to him as instructed. This is not exactly the response I was expecting, but I will take it only because he seems happy; euphoric actually. We have a brief moment of silence and then he says, “Kearabetswe...” he pauses, takes a deep breath and is unable to carry on with what he thought he would say. I hold his hand. He grabs my thigh and rips the bottom of my red lace lingerie. He puts the cake on the sideboard, crossing it over me. He pulls me by my legs and my head hits the pillow behind me. We roll and roll in bed – him kissing me and me handling his penis with my hands. After last night’s repeated heated sessions, neither of us slept in any piece of clothing therefore finding his penis under these sheets is not much of a task.

“You look amazing”, he whispers in a seductive tone and sexy “waking up” voice. Finally, the response that I was hoping for. Cosmopolitan taught me that a man’s morning erection is the best one for the day and I have been hoping that I will take advantage of that now that we never have duty sex anymore. His lips are already on my lips before I can even answer him. He exerts a kind of passion onto my body that translates to my hands grabbing onto his back and moaning like a teenage girl having sex for the first time to a boyfriend she has had a crush on for the past four months, and believed he is the love of her life. He releases it all inside me and holds onto me for dear life. We both try to get our breath back. He looks at me and says, “I love you Mrs Mohale”. I smile. I do not even know why I smile. Maybe it is because I am happy but I am still unable to say those three words back and actually mean them. I was forced to be this man’s wife. I have been learning how to be his makoti. Now we have advanced to the stage of enjoying our “sexy time”. Love? I am not sure if I am there yet. Until I get there, I will smile every time he says it. I do not think he loves me neither. Someone must have trained him to say it, telling him that is what husbands usually say to their wives. I think he

loves the fact that I really try in this marriage. I appreciate him as a person and he appreciates and loves that about me. Is what we have love? The “I love you” kind of love? Is it patient? Is it kind? Does it not envy? Does it not boast? Is it not proud? Does it not dishonour others and is it not self-seeking? Is what he feels for me not easily angered? Does it keep no record of wrongs? Does it not delight in evil? Does it rejoice in the truth? Does it protect, trust, hope, and persevere? Does what he feel for me never fail? Only further reading can tell. For what it is worth, my heart is hooked in this moment for sure.

He rolls over and I roll on top of him. He kisses my forehead. I close my eyes and take it in. “Happy birthday my husband”. He giggles. “Thank you my wife”, he says as he kisses my forehead again. I have all kinds of bugs flying in my stomach. The cake that I baked is now on the floor. I would be upset at him for not appreciating the effort that I put into making the cake for him, but I am too “sexed-up” to even argue with him. Never did I ever believe that Mohato and I would get to this moment right here; where we are a normal couple and there isn’t any pressure that consumes most of our relationship. I never thought there would ever be a

day where being his wife is based on something other than duty. This very moment, my soul is dancing to the rhythm of his heartbeat. My joy is summed up by being wrapped up in his arms at 6:30am. Maybe I do love him. Whatever I am feeling is cute and strong. I am sure I have read somewhere that these kinds of feelings are the chemistry of love.

“What are you thinking about?” He asks, intentionally disturbing my thoughts.

“Just about how far we have come”. I never really meant to put my answer that way but hey, I guess we can discuss it now because I have put my mind at the centre of this conversation.

“I really thought that the baby thing would ruin us you know. But all it has done was bring us closer in a real way.” What Mohato is referring to here is the fact that his sperm is unable to conceive. As a king, he should be planting his seeds everywhere and have baby Mohales running around this huge house within at least a year of his marriage. I married him understanding that I would have to bare him children and then accept a second wife soon after my marriage had begun; her duty and purpose would be to make him more babies. Six months into our marriage, I was

still not pregnant. I went to the doctor as the pressure grew for me to give Mohato a child. The early months of my marriage were characterised by duty sex – not what I just had with my husband this morning. I would literally lie on the bed and let this man arouse himself using my body, screw me for about five to ten minutes and after he came, he fell asleep next to me without even saying good night. He would return home every night and at least once a week, he would ask me if I were pregnant yet.

The doctor informed me that there was nothing wrong with my fertility. He put me on a diet regardless, “just to be sure”. I did not tell anyone about this appointment. I got home that afternoon and casually suggested to Mohato that we should both see a doctor and maybe the doctor will help us conceive. He hesitated at first but when the pressure of having a baby finally got to him too, he agreed. We found out that his sperm is, in simple words, useless. It does nothing but exit his penis during intercourse and that is about it. He was broken, to say the least. That is when he finally let me become his friend. Well not exactly. I got him to be my friend when I told him that I would take the fall for him. I told him we will make it seem as if I am the one with the fertility problem. I think

that is when he also realised how desperate I was to make this marriage bearable. We then agreed that no matter how hard the elders pushed, he would not take on a second wife. A second wife would mean that one more person knows about his problem and he didn't want that. I was just happy because this was my chance at a normal marriage and not having to share my husband.

Why did I even accept this life? Why did I not run away when he was away somewhere taking care of some political discourse for the sake of Tholoana Kingdom? My marriage is in constant conflict with where the black man comes from and where the black man is headed. We are told to get educated, but nobody tells you that you will still have to go back and nurture your culture – bow down to misogyny. I mean look at my life: I am the most educated housewife living in a palace. I am modernity locked in a palace that is draped in culture. I was once frustrated but now I breathe like a normal woman living in Tholoana kingdom. I am growing into being okay with it.

After a long pause, I respond, “[t]he baby thing would have ruined us if we defined our marriage by it. The time I have spent with you since we

found out that we are unable to have children has taught me to respect and honour you outside of a child. We found fulfilment in our marriage without the baby. As far as I am concerned, I began living my royal life after what we went through.” He is quiet for a while. He hugs me tighter while I lie on his bare chest... very sexy bare chest. He takes a deep sigh then says, “[b]ut you do want children don’t you? I see how you are when Mananya brings her children to come and visit. I see how you are patient with Thlokomelo. You help him with his homework, you help him study, make sure he takes his bath every night and then tuck him into bed with a story book, cookies, warm milk and love. Not even Mananya does that for him. I watch you with Marutle. You love that four-month old from your soul. You always make her sleep here with us in this bed when she visits. I can see it Lala. I can see that you also want kids.” I do not know what to say to this. Mananya is Mohato’s sister who has two children out of wedlock, has been shunned out of the royal house and lives with an unstable and abusive boyfriend. She brings her two children, Thlokomelo (who is 8 years old) and Marutle (who is 4 months old) over very often. Perhaps she tries to protect them from the crazy tall fucker she is staying

with. I finally respond, “Lala, I love your sister’s children because they are great children. Children only understand the language of love. This is their home. You are their parent. Therefore, they are my children. I don’t know what you mean when you say that you can see that I want children. I have children.” He knows that I am bull-shitting him. I do want children; I want to be afforded the opportunity to give birth to my children. Before my arranged marriage to Mohato took place, I had a man. He and I had planned to have three children. He made me fall in love with being a mother. He made me fall in love with meaning everything to a human being. Maybe I exert that on to Thlokomelo and Marutle, but I do not want Mohato to feel bad for something he has no control over. He was born shooting blanks.

His cellphone rings just on time to disturb this unplanned moment of his birthday.

“Mohale”, he answers.

...

“Yes”...

...

“Okay”.

...

“Let me speak to my wife and see what I can do.”

...

He hangs up.

I look at him, “Work?” I ask.

He passes me his phone and says, “Nah, it was Thabiso, the prime minister. He says he has something important to discuss with me so we should meet”.

“But Lala, it is your birthday. I had planned for us to do something nice today.” I protest.

“How about, I ask Thabiso to bring his wife, Princess, we do a quick breakfast meeting then you and I will get back to enjoying my birthday.”

Mohato has got to be kidding me right now.

“Mohato Mohale, Lala waka. You want me to sit and entertain Princess Mokoena. The same Princess Mokoena who only talks about stokvel meetings with other bored housewives, shoes, bags and all the soapies that exist on Tholoana K TV? That time you will be having a nice time talking business with Prime Minister Thabiso Mokoena? No Mohato, it is not happening.” We both laugh hysterically after I say this.

“So love, what will you have me do?” he asks.

“Cancel it baby. It is just one day, your birthday. Tholoana kingdom will not fall just because you celebrated your birthday. Whatever it is, it can wait. If it can't, you pay the prime minister a lot of money to make sure that things do not fall apart. Please exercise this power just for today”.

He smiles and looks at me. My emotional blackmail is working. I capitalise on my winning streak. I climb out of bed in my very torn Victoria Secrets one piece lingerie and unclip it from my body. He stares at me. He is thirsty all right. I stroll to the bathroom and as I get to the shower, I open the water. I wrap myself in a short white towel and peak back at him. His mouth is still open, and he is still frozen. Then I say,

“And when you are done showing the Mokoenas who is the king around here, bring that sexy, powerful and royal ass in this shower so that your woman can take care of you.”

I have won.

Now his birthday begins. I am dressed up in blue jeans (torn just at the knees) and a white Chanel short-sleeved t-shirt; plain but elegantly shaped around my neck. It sits elegantly on my body, shaping my slim figure and flat stomach. I accessorise myself with silver big thin hoop earrings, a chunky grey neckpiece, my stunning feminine Michael Kors wrist time-piece, and of course, my wedding ring. I comb my Malaysian hair, leave it loose, flowing, and looking all kinds of expensive.

My very handsome husband steps out of his walk-in closet dressed in black jeans, a blue golf-shirt and is accessorised in his super stylish Police wrist “time-piece” and his wedding band. He tops this look with a Mercedes Benz cap. I told him today was all casual. Mohato is a handsomely tall man. He has broad shoulders, naturally bold. A rather minimal beer belly, no six pack at all. He is a yellow-bone of note. His

mother is a racial mixture of a black man and a coloured woman, so her light-skinned genes trickled down to her very handsome son. He has small and natural bedroom eyes, but rather big ears, thick lips and a manly defined facial structure. I look at him spray perfume on his neck, and wrists. He looks up and catches me admiring his fine self. He steps closer to me. He whispers, “you look very beautiful, queen of Tholoana kingdom”. He kisses my forehead, then my lips.

I grab my Gorgio Armani handbag. He holds my hand and we walk out of our bedroom together and down the royal stairs. Here we are, king and queen of Tholoana kingdom, strolling down the stairs, hand-in-hand. It is a Cinderella moment, but we are dressed in jeans, t-shirts, and sneakers. Lol. All stars to be exact. Mine are pink and his are the classic black.

His mother, Mme Mathabo, meets us at the bottom of the staircase. She smiles, briefly and as she recollects her thoughts, remembering what she was going to say to us in the first place, she says, “Prime Minister Mokoena is here to see you.”

This Mokoena man seriously cannot take a hint. I had intended to make this a very special birthday for my husband, yet here we are sitting at a dining table with the Mokoena couple (Thabiso and pregnant Princess) and their three children. Thabiso and Mohato are speaking about serious political issues in Tholoana kingdom, issues that I am very much interested in. If I had it my way, I would be involved in that conversation. As Mofomahadi (queen), I remain silent – finding my place in this patriarchal country. I am irritated further when Princess opens her mouth and says to me, in the presence of Mohato's mother, "So Kearabetswe, when are you finally popping a child or two? I mean you and the king have been married for two years now. There should at least be one child who is potentially an heir to that throne. Thabiso and I got pregnant in three months of our marriage."

I know that every mother believes that her daughter is a princess and the more she grows, the more she becomes a queen. My mother took it too far when she took the sentiment literally. She wanted to fill a void that remains empty within her because she chose to marry my father as opposed to a suitor chosen by her family. She did herself a favour. She

would have never survived this life. Yet she shoved me into it. Two men are sitting in the same room as us talking about illegal miners building their shacks on the periphery of cities and how it is affecting the political economy of a country that I am a queen of; and us women are sitting here talking about having babies as if it is a competition.

I take a deep breath. I catch Mohato looking at me from the corner of my eye. I know he heard that question and I know that it got his attention. I answer her before he does, "Princess, my husband and I will have children when we feel that we are ready to have children. We refuse to succumb to all the pressure." Mohato's mother gives me a "skemp" look; the kind that creates tension on its own without any assistance. Princess puts her tea cup down, looks at me with what I believe to be a concerned face then continues to attempt to prove her point: "Kearabetswe, people are talking. This is Tholoana kingdom. Your educated and revolutionised ideologies do not mean anything to the people that your husband leads. They need to see their Mofomahadi reproducing and they need to see it soon. I am shocked that Mohato hasn't taken on a second wife, especially

with all the elders in his ear about it. The community truly believes that you are infertile.”

I see Mohato’s mother smiling; it is as if Princess is speaking life into her. I am a little shattered by this. Why would Mohato not tell me that the elders have been putting pressure on him to take on a second wife? I look at him. He is still looking at me. His and Thabiso’s conversation has come to a stop.

“Mr and Mrs Mokoena, if you do not mind, my wife and I have plans for today. Perhaps we can have this meeting some other time. My beautiful wife and I need to get back to our day.” Mohato finally says. His mother laughs; at the moment, at the expression on my face, and at the fact that Mohato is hurt on my behalf. Thabiso does not protest in the slightest bit. He gets up, his children follow suite and Princess gets up too, struggling with that bun in the oven. I am not even going to help her up that chair. She is a pro at this after all. She can fall for all I care, as long as she does not go into labour on my floor and expect my husband and me to postpone our plans to get her and her husband to hospital for the sake of

publicity. That is one big baby baking in there. They leave. Mohato walks them out on his own. Mohato's mother and I are left alone at the table.

"You know makoti", she begins, "Princess is absolutely right. These are our ways. You should let Mohato take on a second wife."

"That will never happen". I respond, my voice very low but my tone highly stern. I look at her. There are daggers in my eyes. They do not scare her. Instead, she pisses me off even further, "What do you think you are going to do? Are you going to continue using witchcraft on my son so that he only listens to you and no one else? This is not wherever it is where you come from. If you keep on fighting the elders regarding this matter, we will arrange a second marriage for Mohato whether you like it or not and you will have no say at all about your sister-wife."

This woman has some nerve. "I am not shocked that you support such nonsense. This is how you got your marriage anyway. Where I come from, we call your type the side-chick that got "wifed". You are not even referred to as the queen-mother. That title is reserved for the first wife. You want to accuse me of using witchcraft? Let's talk about the witchcraft that you used to ensure that your son inherited the throne even though

he is not the first son to his father, while the rightful queen-mother has two sons before him." I have completely lost it. So has she. She slaps me so hard across the face that a tear forcefully falls out of my left eye and my right eye remains blurred.

"Who do you think you are talking to?" she asks.

I look at her, staring dead in her eye. I remember my position. I maintain my class, and I declare that she recognises who she is talking to: "Mohato's mother, stay within your limits. You are in the presence of a queen."

She is completely defeated by this statement. She is bound by the laws of this kingdom to not say anything to the queen in this very moment; the queen has spoken. Mohato walks in, back into this moment.

"Love are you ready to go?" he asks.

I just grab my bag and walk out of the dining room and out of the house. I reach the outside of these walls that have trapped my "normalness" and I breathe. I start crying. Mohato is right behind me. He puts his arms around me from behind. We stand there for a while. Our souls are

communicating right now, a language neither he nor I understand. Somehow, we are finding healing in this moment to a situation we are not entirely sure of.

The drive to the birthday surprise destination is very silent. I decided to drive because he has no idea what I have planned for him. I am driving the Jaguar F-type. I say “the” because in as much as he says that it is my car, he is the one who still bought it. Now that I need to start preparing myself for a second wife, it is very clear to me that this Jaguar will no longer belong to me, it will instead belong to Mohato’s wives. Mohato is sitting next to me. He is also hurt by what happened this morning. He keeps holding my thigh. He always holds my thighs when I drive or when he drives or when we are being driven. Therefore, I guess I can get away with the fact that he does this all the time.

“It’s not going to happen Lala. I will not take on a second wife. I will never hurt you like that.” He finally breaks the silence.

“Are you scared that the truth will finally come out if you take on a second wife? Or are you genuinely making this decision because you know that you and I will be over if you ever take on a second wife?” I respond.

“Over? What do you mean we will be over?” Him.

“Exactly that. I am not going to stick around and watch you and your new wife get to know each other at the expense of our marriage and what we have built over the years. It is not going to happen Mohato.” Me.

“Lala, I am not saying that I am agreeing with this whole thing that the elders are trying so hard to enforce, but I am shocked that you are now saying that you will leave. You knew from day one that getting married to me meant that at some point in our marriage, I will have to take on a second wife”. Him.

I keep quiet. He is right. I have no comeback. Now that he has given me a normal relationship where it is just the two of us, I do not want another person. Maybe if he married during the months that the family engrained in me that I would have to prepare for a second wife soon but I will remain the only queen, I would be okay. Now, I do not want to share him, it cannot happen.

“Mohato, I will not satisfy what is not being satisfied in you or this marriage. I either am the only one you receive satisfaction from or I do not satisfy you at all.” I switch on the radio immediately after I say this, indicating that this conversation is over. I put in my favourite CD, Vusi Nova, and I play it. His hand is now off my thigh. His face is still stuck on mine, I catch it from the corner of my eye. He is quite bleak. The song begins, “Ndikuthandile”. If there is anything on this planet earth that will help me get back to the mood for his birthday and bring me back to a place where I know that I will make him have a good time, it is this song. This song is the one song that makes me realise that I have made “love” kind of sacrifices in this marriage. For that, I deserve to be his only one. This song confirms that I have given this man everything that I have to give that exists within me: even my heart is on pending mode into being his. A heart that belonged to someone else three hours before I married him. I have truly learned to like him, respect him and honour him over these two years. I think about the man who I thought would have been my husband from time to time. We had a normal life. It was not royalty, but it was love. Boy, I loved that man. He too had his flaws, but I loved

him. This song reassures me that it is okay to move on from what my life used to be. Mohato never understood why I love this song; this song and “Thandiwe” (also on this album), but he has learned to sing along with me.

“I love you Kearabetswe Mohale. Whatever we go through, don’t ever forget that. You have my heart, not just the title of a queen. You are more than just the Tholoana Kingdom queen, you are my queen too. Lala, the royal title was never meant for me. I am not the first son to ntate, and I am not the son to his first wife, the queen mother. I know that my mother hurt many people along the way to getting me this title. Ntate loved her so much; he made sure that she got everything she ever wanted. Sometimes, I honestly feel like it has hurt us, her children, more than it hurt her. Mananya has two children and is not married. I am married and want children but I cannot conceive. Sometimes I really believe that the ancestors are punishing us for my mother’s actions towards ntate’s first wife, the queen mother. You know the powerful seSotho saying that *“it is the children who will be punished for the actions of their parents.”*”

“Mo”, I respond, “Mananya made the decisions that she made because she wanted to, not because of your mother. If it were up to your mother, Mananya would be married. Her children are a blessing, not a punishment for your mother’s actions. I know you want children, but what is happening to you is a medical problem, not ancestral punishment”.

“Lala, you don’t understand. Black people do not get these weird medical problems. These are white people stuff. What is happening in this family is a family phenomenon that is linked to our ancestors trying to communicate with us. We go to western doctors and expect them to tell us the truth about our condition but in fact, they just use science to explain what is going on within us. It will never make sense. It will never define us. Science has never discovered the truth and solutions about the life and problems of a black man.” Him.

I do not know what to say. I never know how to engage with him when he starts with this conversation. He is right, I do not understand. Maybe I have received just too much westernised education and it is easier for me

to find reason in science and logic rather than “Setso sa baSotho (the seSotho culture)”.

I hold his hand with my left hand and keep my right hand on the steering wheel. I tell him the one thing I tell him every night before our eyes shut out the real world to greet our dreams. I say “If you want to quit being a king, I will support you. I would still be with you even if you were not King Mohato Mohale.” He squeezes my hand. He kisses my hand.

We finally arrive at Gold Reef City. I park the car. South Africa is only moments away from Tholoana Kingdom, just like Lesotho and Swaziland. The difference is that Tholoana Kingdom is closer to Johannesburg – very close actually. It is weird that he has never been to Gold Reef City and he loves theme parks so much. Every time I dance to Beyonce’s music video for “XO” he stands there (or watches me) and emphasises how much he would have paid millions just to be part of that music video. We step out of the car. He opens the door for me and I put my handbag in the boot. I pull out R2000 from my purse and shove it in my front right pocket. I put my phone in my left front pocket. He puts his

phone in his pocket too, takes the car keys from me, locks the car, then puts the keys in his pocket. We walk, hand-in-hand, to the entrance. He is so curious but he does not ask. He is captured by screaming and noises coming from the Anaconda ride. I put the tag around his wrist then I wear mine. We step into the field filled with rides and ... there is the million-dollar expression and reaction I have been waiting for since this morning...

“NOOOOO WAAAAYS! WHAT!!!!????!!!”

I laugh so loud and hard. “Happy Birthday husband”. I hug him. He cannot believe it. The hug that he returns is deep... it is passionate. It is beautiful. Then he says, me still in his arms, “Thank you my wife.” I can feel that he is about to cry so I push him away and tell him that we have Johannesburg mining rides to conquer. He giggles and runs to the first one. I run after him. We keep chasing each other from one ride to another. My goodness he can be such a kid. That old witch we live with did not give him a proper childhood and do things that normal mothers do, like taking their kids to Gold Reef City on the 16th of December every year until the kids are grown enough to have plans of their own with their

friends? Or even Rand Easter Show during the Easter period? He is so happy. He is so excited. The tower of terror is his favourite. I cried. I was so scared. For the first time ever, he laughed at my tears. But it is okay, I am just happy that he is so excited. We went on the anaconda and miner's revenge after the tower of terror, and he told me that it was such an anti-climax. Every time we were in line, waiting to go on the rides, he would kiss me, hold my hand or just be all over me. I love him when we are this affectionate. For a change, we were that random married couple, we were not the royal couple of Tholoana Kingdom; we were a normal 24 year old bride and a 33 year old husband. People thought that we were cute. We kept on taking selfies. It was incredible.

After Gold Reef City, we met up with my best friend, Gugu, and her husband, Zethembe, at a Shisanyama in Soweto. Gugu and I have been friends since university. She suggested that we conclude the day with a kasi vibe because we live a royal life all day every day. Mohato was just too excited. I have never seen anyone this excited about a ghetto dinner. Gugu and I screamed and embraced each other when we saw each other. Our husbands just shook hands and ordered beer. Gugu and Zethembe

bought him a gift – a beer mug with a crown engraved on it. Lol. Random, but very thoughtful. Zethembe and Mohato went to braai the meat while Gugu and I were left chilling at a wooden table with wooden chairs, drinking Fruitrea. Tjo! Because shisanyamas have not yet received the “wine memo” – I can’t deal.

Gugu tells me that the girls (aka my homies) are upset that they were not invited to “Mohato’s birthday party”. What party? We are literally having dinner at a Shisanyama then we are going to a hotel to get drunk so that I can give my husband some birthday sex and Gugu will give her husband whatever it is that she gives him. Lol. Gugu and I are the only two married people in our squad. Our other three friends, Kgothalo, Nandi and Lerato, are not married. They use their opportunities of hanging out with us and our husbands as an opportunity to meet their potential husbands all the time. Gugu once got very upset and told them that this thing of theirs needs to stop otherwise we will be “klapping” friends for sleeping with our husbands.

“Zala, we will have breakfast with them or something. I do not understand why you told them about today”. I respond to her.

“No Zala, I didn’t phone anyone and go out of my way to emphasise the fact that I was having dinner with the royal couple.” This girl though, really? She continues, “Nandi phoned me suggesting we have drinks and I told her that I was meeting up with you and Zala-in-law and I couldn’t drop you guys for drinks with her because it is Zala-in-law’s birthday. The next thing I know, Lerato and Kgothalo call me and accuse you and I of excluding them from Zala-in-law’s befday parrrrty because they are not married.”

Gugu and I burst out laughing. The way she says “befday parrrrty” and then rolls her eyes is just too funny. She is a character this one.

“Let’s do brunch with them sometime during the week Zala”. I suggest.

“Okay, but invite them to the royal palace. They will forgive us if you do it that way.” This crazy child. She is soooo beautiful. A very beautiful zulu woman and wife. She has this amazing modern afro that sometimes rests in weaves and braids; you know those girls that only show the world their natural hair as if it is a treat to the eyes. It comes out once every three months and every other day, her head is accessorised by fake hair with an expensive price tag – like me. We were both quite thin; but since she had

Zakhe, her son, she has remained voluptuous and curved in all the right places. Her body is perfectly proportioned. Those who do not believe in beautiful features being natural may assume that she took out the fat from her tummy and placed it where it is most attractive – the ass. My bestie ladies and gentleman, is all natural and she dresses very well.

Our husbands finally come back with pap and meat. Mohato sits next to me. He kisses my cheek and puts a humongous plate of pap and meat in front of him and I, then hands me another fruitree... orange flavour this time. I look at him. He smiles and says, "Yes my love, you are tasting all fruitree flavours tonight." All four of us laugh. "And the plate?" I ask. He giggles and says, "We are eating from one plate tonight, like a real kasi couple".

The evening is concluded by us checking into a Protea hotel. We had a lot of sex. He was quite tipsy when we left Soweto. I am glad he had an amazing birthday.

As we lie here in the bed, him fast asleep and me admiring his very handsome self... so light-skinned it's as if he walked out of a Tyler Perry movie, so tall, so incredibly built, very defined features on his face... we

really would make beautiful babies. By an arranged marriage we met, and by circumstance we fell hard for each other. "Happy birthday my husband", I silently whisper as I peck his lips and brush his face.

His phone vibrates. It is a private number. I answer it.

"Hello"...

No response.

"Hello?"

No response.

"Is anybody there?"

The private number stranger hangs up. That was random.

Chapter 2

Gugu is right. I have to make it up to my friends for leaving them out of Mohato's birthday celebration. If I could do it all over again, I still would not invite them. Lol. However, they do not need to know that so I will do my best to ensure that they understand that I do acknowledge that it was an oversight.

Our drive back from Johannesburg to Tholoana Kingdom was very great. My husband was happy and amazed at his birthday gift from yours truly ☺. He bought me a bunch of flowers, lilies to be exact, to say thank you. I am happy. I used this happy moment as an opportunity to ask him if I could invite the girls to the house. I told him that I was feeling a little bad that they felt excluded for not being invited to his birthday celebration. He honestly did not understand why I felt bad. Honestly, his reasoning makes sense. How are they catching feelings about something that was not even about them? It was his day and they are not his friends so they have no right really to be calling dibs on making this all about them. Even so, I cannot lose my friends. I disowned my family. My friends are really all that I have outside of my marriage and this royal life that has been

chosen for me. Mohato eventually agreed to let me host lunch for the girls in our patio. We know that my mother-in-law will have a slight issue with this but my very royal husband has promised to deal with her for me.

I called the girls and told them about the brunch. They are definitely excited. I made it a themed brunch, just for control and just to show that I really put some effort into this. The brunch is themed “Moroccan beauty”. I woke up at 4am to prepare breakfast for my husband and to start preparing for my brunch. I have already decorated the patio. I put out orange, red, gold and white balloons. The balloons are hanging from the ceiling and are thus forming a “walk through” curtain. I managed to get plates, cups and glasses with gold detail. Mohato helped me get fake green grass to place on the tiled patio floor then we put gold carpets and white cushions on the fake grass.

Mohato decided to wake up with me this morning. He decided that he would help me prepare both breakfast and brunch. Now he is sitting on the kitchen counter and watching me do all the labour. This is his idea of helping me. Oh, and he keeps eating the food as it comes off the stove. The husband I was given...

“So my love, how long will the friends be here? I am not asking the question in a bad way, I am just interested to know when I will have my wife back in my bed”, he says.

I giggle. “Lala, you have an abnormally high libido. Did we not have sex just this morning?” Me.

“You can never have too much sex, Lala.” Him.

We both laugh.

“Apart from having Kgosi (his penis) inside of me, what have you got planned for today?” I ask.

“I am just meeting with the royal council. The government has brought it to my attention that more skwatta camps are being built on the peripheries of the cities. These miners insist that they cannot be taking taxis with the little money that they earn when they can build houses right across the road from the mines. The people who live in these cities are not impressed about this at all. We are going to sit down and perhaps come up with a strategy that will remove the residents of these skwatta camps from the respective peripheries.” He says this with yogurt in his hand.

“Oh”. That is all that I can say. I am quite taken aback and he notices. He puts his yogurt down and as I decant the fish from the pot to a Tupperware, he waits for me to finish then he pulls me towards him – locating me in between his legs as he is still sitting on the kitchen counter. He kisses my forehead and finally says, “Speak your mind my queen”.

I smile. I begin:

“Lala, as a king, such cannot be rolling off your tongue. These skwatta camps are communicating a message that is far deeper than just ‘polluting the city’. These are people who clean the homes in the city, cut the grass, and keep the city domestically running. They work in our mines for crying aloud. You tell these people, in the law by the way, that they have a right to health and education. Where are these hospitals and schools where they have to access their rights to adequate health and education? In the city. The political system in most countries, including Tholoana Kingdom, is designed with the intention to force the townships to rely on the city. It is more expensive for them to have to take taxis everyday to either go to work, to school, to hospital, or even to the mall to buy some groceries. They already do not earn much. They place their shacks and

enforce a case of informal settlements on the peripheries of the city to be closer to it all. My love, they are claiming their right to the city.” We are both silent for a while. He is in deep thought.

“You know Lala, you are one incredibly smart woman. However, the people in the city – the suburbs – the ones who complain about these skwatta camps, these people are the ones who keep our economy healthy. Without them, we will not have much money to run this country. My love, the position that I have been put in is difficult. I have to either choose those who pump in massive amounts of money in this economy or those who get paid by that money.” He says.

“You know my husband, you rule everyone, poor and rich alike. You are supposed to look out for the best interests of all of your people; poor and rich alike. You cannot make decisions that will only be beneficial to rich people then overlook poor people because it makes no financial sense. That does not make you a leader; you are thus no less than another politician with twisted intentions.” I say.

He is quiet.

So am I.

“What should I do?” he asks me, deep in thought. I assume he is pondering on what I have just said to him.

“Make a decision that will be best suited for your people, my husband. All of your people. Poor and rich alike.” I say.

He hugs me. We kiss. It is a succulent kiss. I am literally drinking love off his lips and he is practically showering passion upon my lips. His right hand has cupped my neck while his left hand has cupped my butt-cheek. I have both of my hands around his neck. We passionately kiss like a couple in love.

We hear someone clear her throat. We both jump, frightened really. I try to jump out of his legs but he locks me in. He pulls me closer to him. I finally understand why. The bulge in his pants needs to be hidden from his mother who is standing right in front of us with her arms folded across her chest.

“Mah? What’s wrong?” He asks, a little irritated.

“Mohato, you are in the kitchen of a royal house. An elder or a servant can walk in at any moment. What the two of you are doing is highly inappropriate”. She says.

“Mah, this is my house and this woman is my wife.”

Silence...

She breaks the silence - typical Mme Mathabo. “I hear we have guests today.”

“Kea has guests. Her friends are coming over for brunch”.

“Brunch? What is that?”

Mohato giggles at his mother’s question.

“It is a meal that is had between breakfast and lunch. It is a meal that is too late to be referred to as breakfast, but is had too early to be referred to as lunch”. I say. My mother-in-law is not impressed at all.

“And the decoration? Are they necessary for a meal that is had between breakfast and lunch?” she asks.

“It is a themed brunch mah”. I say.

“Themed?” She says, confusion and annoyance fused in one tone.

I do not know how to explain what I mean by “themed”. Mohato thinks this entire conversation is funny.

“Mme, this is Kea’s house and home. If she wants to have friends over, I do not see a problem. It is not a party and it is not disrespectful to the throne at all. It will be outside on the patio. Please do not make this what it is not. It is really not a big deal.” My handsome husband, ladies and gentlemen, he has come to my rescue.

“Hawu... must be nice to be Kea neh? And what kind of food will these friends be served – I wonder”. Her tone is undermining, sarcastic, and just very Mme Mathabo.

I smile a bit and Mme Mathabo sees this. She separates her lips, ready to charge at me – probably ask me what is so funny about this situation. This lady has issues my friend. I remove myself from Mohato and excuse myself. I tell them that I need to shower and get ready for my brunch. I exit the kitchen, but I stand just outside of the door with the intention to eavesdrop on the conversation between mother and son.

“Mohato, have you been bewitched by this girl? What is wrong with you? You are not just her husband; you are a king with obligations to this

house, your throne, your elders and your people. This is not just Kearabetswe's house and home. This is the royal house. Where is your respect?" The way that she says this is so undermining on all levels. The tone can be interpreted as "You are allowing a commoner to just come here and run this house."

Mohato's response: "Mom, people who are bewitched seldom know that they are bewitched. So if she has bewitched me, I wouldn't know. Bewitched or not, I have made my decision, Kea is hosting her friends for brunch today. Bewitched or not. You have now made me miss my breakfast. Eish mama."

I giggle. This man mara. I actually forgot that this kitchen morning session was also meant to prepare his breakfast. It was disturbed by our DMC (deep and meaningful conversation) regarding his meeting today, our passion, and his mother. I quickly run up the stairs and get ready for my galz!!!

Oh yes, my galz went all out for our themed brunch. Yes, they look exquisite. We have totally rocked the Moroccan look; bling head bands,

lots of gold jewellery and maxi dresses. Gugu is a genius. This was definitely a good idea. By the time I walk out to meet them on the patio, they are already on their second bottle of wine and talking nonsense. I join in the festivities, sitting on a white cushion as well.

“Wena Rabi, wena, how dare you not invite us to your handsome husband’s birthday party. We could have met our very own handsome potentials as well you know. I do not understand why the married ones must always be so selfish. Do you not know that we only stay friends with married people so we can mingle with the rest of the handsome men who are also feeling the pressure of getting married? Your husband’s friends are probably handsome and rich”.

We all laugh. Lerato is the one with the verbal diarrhoea in this group. She just speaks with no concern in the world. If you want to know who has issues with who, go to Lerato. She is responsible for people calling me Rabi throughout varsity. She is cool and all, but I always find myself taking Gugu’s side every time they get into it. They do not get along at all these two. You see, Lerato was a problem in university. She just always ended up in bed with someone’s boyfriend. She was weird. She never

wanted the men that actually approached her. She preferred them taken. Gugu always called her out on this behaviour of hers and Lerato always felt like Gugu was judging her. Nandi was always taking Lerato's side. She always insisted that it was not Lerato's responsibility to keep men faithful to their partners. If the men wanted Lerato, Lerato had no business taking care of another woman's feelings. These two were weird. Their reasoning was always messed up, in my opinion anyway. This sisterhood ended when Lerato had a full-blown side-chick affair with Nandi's man. Kgothalo is the one who found out about it and told Gugu and I. Gugu could not wait to tell Nandi. When it came out, things were never the same again. The dynamics in our friendship changed. To be honest with you, I have no idea how we stayed friends with Lerato. I think she just never stayed away from us. We would plan to avoid her at all costs. We would plan that every time she came near us, we would run very fast or even just pretend that we are in a hurry to get somewhere and leave her hanging. She always kept coming back.

I begin, "ladies, Gugu and I wanted to invite you over so that we can hang out as just us girls."

“Be honest with us Rabi, the two of you do feel some type of way about hanging out with us because you are married and we are not, right?” Kgothalo. She has always felt like the third sister in the Rabi-Gugu-Kgothalo trio. Ever since Gugu and I got married, we definitely do hang out a lot more together without her – without all of the girls actually.

“It is not like that Thalo.” I try to protest. Gugu jumps in immediately to my protest and says, “Thalo, Rabi and I just have a lot more in common. We sort of go through the same stuff and we just relate to one another a lot more than we relate to the rest of you.”

Lerato, rolling her eyes at Gugu, says, “Gugu, quit acting like you and Rabi have the same life because you don’t. Zethembe is no king; he’s not even a prince or the grandson of some chief out there. You, my darling, are no queen.”

Gugu is offended. She fights this comment with another sharp one, “Nobody said that Rabi and I live the same life Lerato. Let’s be honest, out of all of us here, she chooses to hang out with me the most. Come to think of it, she never hangs out with you one-on-one ever. I wonder why.

Maybe, just maybe, nobody has ever really wanted you around their men since varsity Lerato. Your panties are too loose.”

We are all quiet.

“That was a low blow Gugu, but it’s fine. I would also feel some type of way if I were you. I had your husband in my bed not too long ago.”

Lerato says this with a smile on her face. I know that she is not joking. If she says she and Zethembe were in bed not too long ago, Gugu has every right to be upset right now. However, Gugu is not even upset. Gugu is beyond upset. Gugu is on top of Lerato, punching the life out of her. I am frozen in disbelief. How could she? Nandi is just laughing and indulging in more wine. Then she yells, “Rabi, you might want to keep the punches rolling too. She slept with Skhumbuzo”. She carries on laughing. I am shocked. I am emotional – dude, tears are rolling down my face. Kgothalo has her hand on my back, rubbing it so that I can stop crying. No one is stopping this fight. You know why? Gugu is doing all of us a favour.

Mme Mathabo and Mme Segametsi come running out. They are the only two who are sober enough from the drama to stop the fight. They pull Gugu off Lerato. Gugu carries on swearing at her, but Lerato is just there,

lying still. She is not moving. She does not even seem like she is breathing. Gugu lets loose from Mme Mathabo's and Mme Segametsi's grip and she pounces on Lerato again. Except this time, we all noticed that Lerato might be dead. So this time, I run to call the security guards to come help stop Gugu. She has gone bananas on behalf of all of us. The security guards grab Gugu. I instruct them to take her to one of the guest bedrooms and they do as I say. Kgothalo has already phoned the ambulance. I run to Lerato, I look over her. She is swollen and she is bleeding. I look at her. I want to help her, Lord knows I do. However, she has to be stopped. She has crossed the line with each and every one of us and none of us could be bothered with what happens to her. Mme Mathabo gives me one hell of a look. I know I am in trouble. I just know. This behaviour is unacceptably ratchet and she will let me know her – I just know it. I ask Mme Segametsi to take fresh towels for Gugu and go out to buy her an outfit or two.

While we wait for an ambulance to arrive, Mohato arrives. I assume Mme Mathabo phoned him.

“Kea, what is going on?” I cannot even answer him, I am too hurt. I let out some more tears, this time in his arms. He just holds me, but he genuinely is worried.

“Kea,” he says in a pleading tone, “is she dead?”

“I do not know Mo. I just don’t know.” I say.

I knock on the door of the guest bedroom that my hurt friend is staying in for a bit. Her husband, Zethembe, is downstairs. He is with Mo. Mme Segametsi prepared some food for us so I come to this room bringing food and wine. She opens the door. Her eyes are swollen. Before she lets me in she says, “I am not going to divorce him doll.” I look at her and respond, “I am not here to tell you to divorce him.” She takes a plate of food from my one hand, leaving me with one plate and then lets me in. I close the door behind me. We clean our plates. We are super hungry. Then, we do best with a bottle of wine. Now that we are full and tipsy, the talk begins.

“Zala, I knew about Zethembe and Lerato’s affair. I have been wanting to kill her with my bare hands since the day that I found out. I am sorry it had to be at your house.” Gugu.

I respond, unfazed at all, “Congratulations. She’s dead and we are not attending her funeral.”

“Please thank Mohato for me, for sorting the issue out with the police.”

Gugu.

Silence. My tears betray me again. They force their way out of my eyes.

Gugu looks at me, worried. I take her out of her curiosity and say:

“Did you know Gugs?”

She is confused.

“Know about what Kea?”

“Did you know that Lerato slept with Skhumbuzo?”

She is quiet.

“I didn’t know how to tell you Zala. I found out on the day that I found out about her and Zethembe.”

I am broken. Gugu understands who and what Skhumbuzo is to me. She knew that this would kill me. I do not even feel like she has betrayed me right now, if I were she, I would have kept this from me too.

“I am glad you killed her Gugu.”

“Me too.”

We sit in silence. I wish we told Lerato, all those years ago in varsity, that we did not like her and that we did not want her to be in our circle anymore. We should have told her that she just went too far when she slept with Nandi’s man, and for that, she could no longer “sit with us”. I think that to break-up with a friend may be more painful than breaking up with a fling – but having to deal with watching her breath leave her body is just awful. We could have dealt better with a broken friendship and wished each other well. Then she would have been killed by syphilis and we would all go shopping for her funeral and cry very hard, listening to relatives tell us how amazing she was while we knew exactly what her vagina was capable of doing. Now we killed her, and we are not even attending her funeral.

I go downstairs, take another bottle of wine from the fridge, and walk back upstairs again. We open it and we indulge.

Friendships are interesting because one does not really have a “type” when it comes to choosing a friend or subconsciously proposes a friendship. All you care about is the character that stands out in a room, the one who can keep a conversation going with you – even about the simplest things, and the one you share the most laughs with. Gugu and I have a friendship I will never give up on. It is not insecure at all. We are comfortable with each other – even in silence. Friendships with any other people may have ended as if they never existed – but with Gugu; I would fight for it. This is my Zala.

“Kea, Skhumbuzo is married. He married Queen.”

We look at each other. We burst out laughing. Then we pour more wine in our glasses and drink.

“Kea, that man is still in love with you. Judging by how broken you are by what Lerato did, I guess you still love him too.”

“I do love him Gugu. I will always love him. However, I am with Mohato. I could never do Mohato like that. Besides, he has Queen now. That girl has wanted him since she was introduced to adolescence. I am sure she is treating him way better than what I would have.”

We laugh again.

“Zala, remember that day when she came and beat you up at work? She was convinced that you took Skhu from her. That time, Skhu has always wanted you.”

“Mara Gugs, let’s be honest, Queen was right. She saw Skhu first. We always thought he was weird and super ghetto. Queen saw his potential way before we did. She even gave her virginity up to him hoping that it would lock him down.”

“Yho Zala, I would have never. Some women are brave. Kea, do you understand mara that Skhu used to wear Carvella with tracksuit pants? It made no difference to him. And he had the most interesting colour blocking combination with his outfits – and the Carvella.”

“Gugs, why did he have Carvella in the first place?”

We laugh. We laugh a lot. Now the wine is finished.

“Gugu, he still chose me. Queen gave him everything and he chose me. I will never forgive my parents for what they did. Never!”

“Ja neh... life, love and other like stories.”

Gugu and I fell asleep on the floor. It has been a while since we last drank, passed out, and woke up to a room smelling like a brewery. As we grow, we find friends in our spouses. Not all of our friends will welcome this “new found friendship” with your man. You hear the most ridiculous shades of unnecessary, the most common one being “when he leaves you, you better not come back running to us.” As a result, there will be the Lerato-kinds-of-friends who will sleep with your man just to get some kind of twisted kick out of it. Either that, or because they want exactly what your man gives you – stability and friendship. Some friends just stand aside and watch your friendship decompose. When you have become a pro at receiving such responses from your friends each time you have a man, you just let them be and move on with life with the bit of friends that your relationship did not take away from you.

Our husbands who apparently slept in the TV room wake up Gugu and me. We are hanging so badly. The headache. My goodness. Mohato is not impressed at all. Zethembe just feels bad so he has no business saying anything unless he is saying "sorry".

"I am sorry Gugu". He says.

"I do not want to talk about it. I don't ever want to talk about it. Zethembe, that had better be the last affair you ever had. You will never cheat on me ever again. Next time, I won't just kill your whore, I will kill you too."

Hhe banna, Gugu? What the hell? If this is a joke, it is too soon.

Zethembe just nods. Then he hugs her. Mohato and I leave the room with the intention to give them space. I get into our bedroom and step into the shower. He comes into the bathroom but sits on the toilet seat. My glass shower exposes the detail of his face. He is about to yell at me. He begins:

"Kearabetswe Mohale, this is a royal house. I told you that you may bring your friends over for brunch and I come back to a dead body. I stay up all night with my wife's friend's husband only to wake up to a drunk wife. What exactly are you turning my house into?"

I cannot even be a cow towards him right now. I was wrong. Mohato has been nothing but a good husband to me. He even allows me to bend the rules from time to time. He deserves better than this. In addition to that, he still cleaned up my mess after Gugu killed Lerato. I close the tap and step out of the shower. I stand naked, in front of him. He stares at me. He is weakened by nudity. I am taking it all the way.

“I’m sorry kgosi yaka. I truly am sorry. I never intended for any of this to happen. I am truly sorry. I am sorry I broke your trust, I am sorry I disappointed you when you did nothing but be kind to me. Forgive me my husband. I am sorry. It will never happen again.”

He looks at me. Mouth wide open, penis hardened... I go down on my knees.

“Forgive me papa.” I say.

I take his penis out of his pants and I start letting my mouth work on it. He groans. “Forgive me Mohato”. I keep going. He moans... and moans... then releases his insides inside of my mouth. I look at him.

I sit on top of him. I keep begging for his forgiveness.

“Okay”, he finally says. “I forgive you my wife. I forgive you, Ntombi.”

I stop. I stare at him.

Who the hell is Ntombi?

Chapter 3

I would be lying if I said that I have forgotten about the fact that my husband called me by another woman's name. My mother has always emphasised the fact that women do not easily forget the things that make them feel the worst about themselves. She always says that a man that cheats makes a woman question her worth, even when she is doing everything right – showing that she is, what Whitney Houston would sing, “every woman”. When I asked Mohato who Ntombi was, he blatantly made me feel like I was crazy. I know what I heard. This man is having an affair. I went through his phone and I went through his laptop and iPad, no sign of a Ntombi at all. The only Ntombi that exists in the story of our lives is the one who is part of our cleaning staff. Could Mohato really be cheating on me with the help?

This suspicion has me within my feelings and suspicious in a way that truly is going to make me go crazy. Yesterday, Ntombi the help took longer than usual to clean our bedroom and when I brought it to her attention, she gave me a stink eye and a stinking attitude. She practically

acted like a side chick who has been dick-matised and has clearly forgotten her place.

I have been stirring this tea and deep in thought when Mme Segametsi sits next to me and interrupts my thoughts. Mme Segametsi is also part of the cleaning staff. She and I have a bond that I cannot explain. She has become both my mother and my friend in the past two years. The entire staff has complained about it but whatever, at least, unlike my husband, I am not sleeping with the staff.

“Mofomahadi (queen)”, she begins.

“Good morning Mme.”

“Is everything okay? Are you thinking about that friend of yours that died?” she asks.

“Not really mme. I just have a lot on my mind. Is everything okay?”

“Yes mofomahadi, everything is okay. I am just a bit worried about you. You haven’t been yourself for the past three days – since that lady died here at the house”, she innocently says.

“I don’t want to talk about Lerato. Let’s talk about something else. I have been meaning to ask you; Mme how come you are a domestic worker? What was the road that lead you to this job?” I ask. I am genuinely interested.

She smiles at me. Mme Segametsi likes telling stories. It must be an old people thing. My mom loved telling stories as well to emphasise a point or two. I think I am as close as I am to Mme Segametsi because she reminds me so much of my mother – the mother I no longer have. I disowned my family the day they took everything away from me and tried to convince themselves that they were giving me better. However, that’s a story for another chapter. Mme Segametsi begins her story.

“You know mofomahadi, I was also in school once. I was in school up to grade 8.” She says this with so much conviction. She has a grade 8 and she is so proud of her level of education. She continues. “I was excited to go and get a matric then I would go and work in retail, make money and be a wife to someone whom I would help financially in the house.”

The simple life of rural areas honestly humbles me. All she wanted was her matric so that she could work in retail. All she got was a grade 8 and a job as a domestic worker.

“But life, culture, and poverty had other plans for me. I was walking back home from school one day when a group of men kidnapped me. I screamed, I cried and I tried to run away. When I saw my mother along the way, refusing to help me and almost relieved that this kidnapping plan was successful, I realised what was happening to me... nekishobediswa (I was being kidnapped and would be married off against my will to some man). I didn't even fight it. I knew that my family wouldn't even fight for me to come back home. I just accepted the fate for what it was. That old man that I was forcefully married off to raped me every day. To him it was sex, to me... I was a child. I did not know what was going on. I just laid there and this man, he just took away everything that was innocent about me. He was almost 40. I was 13. I was young enough to be his child. He didn't care. He didn't see a child when he looked at me. He saw his wife.”

I cannot believe what this woman is telling me. I am honestly at a loss for words. She notices, but she continues anyway.

“After six months of being married to me, he left me with his family and went to Johannesburg. His family would not let me be a child. They didn’t treat me badly, but they made sure that I understood that I was the wife to their first son. Their son came home every weekend. After some time, this was reduced to once every month and then he just stopped coming home. His family noticed that he was not coming home anymore and started telling me things like ‘you are not our responsibility’ and ‘you are clearly bad in bed because you couldn’t keep your husband home’. I was a teenager. I knew nothing about keeping a bed warm for a grown man.”

I start crying. I cannot believe this. The rural life may be simple, but it is very cruel too.

“I decided to find a job so that I could help out in the house. I knew that I didn’t have a home anymore waiting for me at my parents’ home so I had to make my situation work. I worked at a Chinese clothing shop. The working conditions were bad and the money was minimal, below minimum wages. They paid us enough just to pay taxis to get to work and

get back home. Nothing more, nothing less. My in-laws got annoyed with me. They kept saying that they didn't understand why I wake up each day to go to work if no one could see what I was doing with my money. They told me to stay at home and clean instead. I cleaned, did the laundry and cooked."

I am crying now. I just cannot hold it in. It is a silent cry. Only my tears are indicating the message of my heart, no sound at all.

"After some time, my husband came home. He came to fetch me and take me back to Johannesburg with him. He told me he had a job for me there and that I would never be poor again. I believed him. I was scared of him so even if I didn't believe him, I would still have left with him. We left and when we got to Johannesburg, I understood why it stole his soul. It is a city that is populated by too many lost people. They only put on display what they wish people could know about them. Then they learn tendencies from other people who are also trying to find new identities alongside finding ways to live. Then nobody really knows how they got to where they are in the first place. My husband was no different. He left us saying that he was going to work. Then he lost what grounded him in

the first place, the will to go home and be with his wife and family. He took me to what seemed to be a hotel. The room he took me to was full of men his age and they were all very excited to see me. I was so confused. Men do not behave this way, not from where I came from. Men respected themselves and did not behave like children. My husband..."

She keeps quiet. She is crying too now. However, she is not ready to stop the story.

"My husband undressed me. No, he ripped my clothes off my body and my panty hurt my vagina really badly while he was ripping it off me. Those men were taking turns with me. I couldn't even cry. He just sat there. He didn't stop them. They raped me for hours. They put their penis in my mouth, in my little vagina, my backhole... I would have four men raping me at the same time at some point. The only thing that raced through my mind was "how could my mother give me away to this?"

She carries on crying.

"The job was for me to be a prostitute. I was one for about three years. My life was played out in the devil's head office. After each day, I would have to sleep in the same bed as that man I called my husband. Who did he tell

these men I was? Did they know that I was his wife? I still wonder until this day. When I was seventeen years old, I fell pregnant. Honestly, I didn't know who impregnated me. All the men I slept with never used a condom with me and I was always too scared to ask for one. I'm lying, I never knew what a condom was. When I was pregnant, I knew I had to leave that life. My child would have never survived in that environment. I ran away. I ran until I found myself here in Tholoana kingdom. The queen-mother Nthatisi found me. She helped me through my pregnancy and gave me a job here. My daughter grew up here in this house. When the old king died and Mme Mathabo kicked everyone out except the elders who sit on the royal counsel and her children, my daughter was forced to leave too. Now she is a domestic worker at one of the houses in the suburbs. She is 17 years old".

I do not even know what to say. We both sit there in silence for a while.

"Don't feel sorry for me mofomahadi. I survived. I am okay. I am alive. I know life. I am a praying woman. Had I not gone through all of that, I would have never met you. You remind me so much of queen-mother Nthatisi. Now, I have my incredible man Josias. I barely see him because

he is always in the mines. He told me that he has a house now there in the city, so I will spend my weekends there with him. I am happy.” Her husband is one of the many miners that my husband and his government plan to kick out of the skwatta camps that have been built on the peripheries of the Tholoana city. Is she talking about visiting a man in a house that is about to be demolished?

Before I respond, Mohato walks up to us and greets. He realises that I have been crying but he does not say anything. He just asks Mme Segametsi to excuse us. She does. He sits next to me. He holds my hand. I am emotional. I am still mad at him.

“What is wrong?” He asks.

“Who is Ntombi?”

“Not this again”.

“Are you going to tell me?”

“There is nothing to tell”.

Silence...

“Is she that disrespectful cleaner?” I ask.

Silence.

“I came here to tell you that there is an urgent meeting called to counsel by queen-mother Nthatisi tonight. Please be there. She wants all of us to be there.” He says. Then he lets go of my hand and walks away. Nx!

Queen-mother Nthatisi can be summed up in two words: Beautiful and elegant. She is so beautiful; Mme Mathabo has nothing on her. You can tell that in her time, she was every man’s type. Her beauty was evident in every man’s type. Now at her age, you can tell why kgosi never left her for Mme Mathabo. Her beauty is refreshing and at the same time, it is timeless. She has caught me staring at her numerous times and on two instances, she smiled at me. I blushed.

We are all sitting here now at the royal table. Mohato is sitting comfortably in his royal seat and on his left, sits the gorgeous queen-mother Nthatisi. On his right sits his wife, myself. The rest of the royal counsel, Mme Mathabo included as well as two of queen-mother Nthatisi’s sons Morena and Reahile. Queen-mother Nthatisi begins:

“Good evening everyone. Thank you for meeting me at such short notice.”

She is so regal. She turns her head towards me and smiles at me once more. I smile back at her this time.

“You look beautiful my dear. Mohato, congratulations, she is incredible.”

Mohato looks at me and smiles. I just blush and look down. Mme Mathabo rolls her eyes. She is not impressed. I do not even know why.

Isn't it funny that side-chicks, even when wifed, have an issue with the first wife? I wonder why. Side chicks out there please give us some insight. This woman, the queen-mother, she is so over Mme Mathabo; she is as good as used toilet paper to her. Mme Mathabo's son got the ultimate royal gift that I assume Mme Mathabo was after to begin with, yet here she is hating on the queen-mother. The queen-mother is just here, oozing with elegance and beauty and has found a way to invest her energy in just being the mother of royalty.

She proceeds:

“The point of tonight is to address the fact that Mohato, the very king of Tholoana, has committed adultery and we, as the royal counsel need to find a way to deal with this matter in a dignified manner.”

I look at Mohato – viciously look at him. She notices. She giggles.

“My my my Mohato, you truly are your father’s son. Look at how beautiful your wife is. What were you doing with Ntombi?”

Oh my word, she knows about Ntombi.

“Ntombi?” I say. I am fuming with anger right now. Mohato has his head in his hands. I do not think that even he expected this to come out, especially like this. How did the queen-mother even find out about this? Her sons are staring at me. Morena is embarrassed for me – his look says it all. Reahile is just looking at me as if he feels sorry for what is about to happen to me. The queen-mother continues with her talk,

“Ntombi came to see me. This is why we are having this meeting. Unfortunately, we cannot just discard her, pay her off and make her disappear. She is pregnant. She insists that the child is Mohato’s.”

That is impossible. Mohato cannot even have children. The entire table is confused. They are mumbling things I cannot make out. I look at Mohato. He cannot even look at me. In the midst of this minor mayhem, Ntombi enters the room. Yes ladies and gentlemen, it is Ntombi the domestic helper whose attitude is bigger than her position in this house. Now we know why, she has been screwing the king himself. I stand up. I look at Mohato.

“Look at me Mohato”. I say, very softly. The mayhem dies down a little. He does not look at me. I shout this time, “LOOK AT ME MOHATO!”.

“Makoti, please calm down”, an elder says. I blatantly ignore him.

“That is not your child, and you know why. Therefore, here is what is going to happen, you will fire this whore, and there will be no wedding. I will not accept a second wife. It will not happen. If you defy me and want to take her as a wife despite the fact that she is trapping you with a child that is not yours, I will divorce you.” I say this with the utmost conviction. He is shocked. Everybody is shocked. The queen-mother is just frozen. I remove myself from this meeting and walk out to my car. I do not realise that I have someone following me until I get to the car. I

turn around, there she is, the Ntombi trash. About a few meters from where she is standing, I spot Reahile standing there with his arms crossed across his chest, he is staring at us.

“Mofomahadi, I am truly sorry. Please hear my cries. I cannot afford to lose this job. Please believe me when I say that this is Mohato’s child.” She says.

“Firstly, my husband is kgosi to you, not Mohato; I don’t care what you called him in bed. Secondly, what makes you think you can talk to me? What makes you think I won’t beat you up to a miscarriage?” I am quite angry, and I might just kill this bitch. Why is she here? Why is she opening her mouth in my direction?

“Mofomahadi, I understand that you are angry, but please don’t do something you will regret.”

“Regret? Ey wena, don’t test me. Don’t you dare test me. If you really want to know me, keep pulling your brave stunts. I am not Mohato, I am not sleeping with you. The last thing I will ever regret in my life is killing the child of my husband’s whore. Do not test me. When I get back here, I want you out of my house. Nx!”

I leave her standing there. I get into my car and drive off.

I just drove to a hotel and booked myself in. I got into the shower and I cried so hard. My tears were competing with the water falling from the showerhead. After I had myself a good cry, I dressed up and went to have dinner downstairs. The beautiful thing about hotels in Sandton is that I will have my space for sure. I sit at my own little table when a handsome man approaches me.

“Good evening Mrs Mohale”, he says.

I smile. He looks even better than he did the last time I saw him. He smells so divine. I look at him and am amazed by such an incredible creation of God, blessed with Zulu love. Dear reader, nothing says black love than being loved by a handsome Zulu romantic. I had it all. I had him. I had his heart. I had his love. At this very moment, I have his attention.

“Hi Skhumbuzo”.

“May I join you?”

“Please do.”

He sits down. My phone rings, it is my cheating husband. I turn my cellphone off.

“You not going to answer that?” he asks.

“Nope. I am about to catch up with the love of my life; the one who got away.” I say. I mean it. I do not even feel bad. He is shocked. He thinks it is the two bottles of wine that I have already consumed that are talking. However, I know the truth. This is how I really feel.

“I hear you married Queen. You married the one girl that boxed my face because I was your girlfriend after she gave up her virginity to you. Talk about betrayal”. I say and then I laugh. He just smiles. I am not sure if he is uncomfortable or shy.

“How have you been Rabi?” He asks.

I cry. I cannot help it. I literally just break down. Then I catch myself uttering the following speech:

“He cheated on me Skhu. He cheated and now that whore claims that she is pregnant. Even if she is pregnant. It is not his child. You know how I know? Because the doctor confirmed that he cannot have children. I never

told anyone. I let the entire country believe that I was the infertile one and that we could not have children because of me. This is how he thanks me? He cheats on me. Skhu... I gave you up for him. They made me leave you for him. Look at me now. Look at me, Skhu."

I just cry. He stands up from his chair and comes to me. He holds me. I know this hug. I am very familiar with it. He gave me this hug every time I was too hurt to breathe, like right now. He hugged me like I was the only thing that mattered. He is doing it again and I am being vulnerable all over again. I am rekindling those feelings that I have inside of me, that never really died. They were just stored in a file in my heart, saved as "the love of my life". I pull away from him and we look at each other. He is on his knees next to me. I am sitting on the chair. We just stare at each other.

"Skhumbuzo, I want to kiss you. I am too scared to kiss you because I know that I will want to make love to you. I am feeling very vulnerable." I say.

"Rabi, I want you too. However, I don't want to take advantage of you right now." He says this so sincerely.

"Please take advantage of me."

“I love you too much for me to only be a weapon against your husband because he cheated on you. If I make love to you, it has to mean something.”

“Skhu, I never stopped loving you. If we make love, it will have absolutely nothing to do with Mohato. I want you back Skhu. Your heart is mine. I want it back.”

He unbuttons my white shirt. My lace bra is visible. I stand up and help him up. We walk to the pool. I take off my pants and I get into the pool in just my lace underwear. He takes off his clothes and steps into the pool with his Calven Klein underwear. He stands against the wall. I stand against him, looking straight at him. We kiss. The passion is still there. The fire is still burning. His hands are all over my body - my half-naked body. I take my left hand and slide it under his underwear. He moans. We kiss above the body of water but underneath the body of water, our bodies are communicating and the message is very clear: “we are about to betray our wedding vows”.

I wake up in a hotel room that I did not book myself into. I am hung over and my ex-fiance is sleeping next to me naked. I look at him. I smile. I am happy. I truly am. My phone is next to me. I switch it on. I have 86 missed calls, 200 whatsapp messages, 10 smses and 56 voice messages; all from Mohato. I dial Mme Segametsi and she answers after three rings.

“Mofomahadi”.

“Mme Segametsi.”

“Where are you?”

“I am safe. I am fine. Is Ntombi still there? Has she left? Where is my husband?”

“Mofomahadi, kgosi is losing his mind. He has been trying to call you since you left. He actually told Ntombi that she should stay away until things are discussed again between the two of you. Please come home mofomahadi. Your husband needs you”.

“Okay Mme, I am coming. Please tell him that I will be home in a few hours.”

I hang up.

Skhumbuzo's phone rings, I look at the called ID, it reads "Queen". I giggle. Nothing cute like "wifey" or "my love". When I was his girlfriend, I was saved on his phone as "My love". But hey, Queen is not me. I wake him up. He opens his eyes. He yawns.

"Hey handsome."

He smiles.

"Hey beautiful".

I smile.

"We have to go back to our lives, my love".

"When last did you call me your love? I have truly missed you."

"I need to go back. The husband is calling".

"Let's just take a shower and head back. I am quite sure that Queen is also calling".

We giggle.

We get out of bed and shower. After this, we go to the mall and he buys me a new dress, new sandals and a light cardigan. After this, we go our separate ways. We go back to face the lives we escaped from last night.

I am back. I am at this house. I walk in and my husband looks at me.

“You betrayed me Mohato. That child is not yours. How could you?”

“That child is mine, Kea. I think the doctors made a mistake. I think you have a fertility problem. I have to marry Ntombi”.

This bastard.

“Mohato, do you want me to leave this house?”

“I love you Kea, I do. But this is my throne that is at stake.”

“MOHATO DO YOU WANT ME TO LEAVE THIS HOUSE?”

He cries. Why is he crying?

“I love you Kearabetswe. I truly do. Please my love. Please bear with me one more time. Just one more time my love, please.”

“YOU ARE SICK! YOU ARE SICK!”

I push myself past him, leaving him crying there all by himself. I walk up the stairs with the intention to pack my clothes and leave... go back to Johannesburg and fight for my love. I walk in our bedroom, on my bed lies pictures of Skhumbuzo and me from last night... a picture from when we hugged at my dinner table, a picture of us in the pool...

Oh my Lord, I was never ready.

Chapter 4

Mohato and I have been giving each other the silent treatment for a week now. I took an emergency morning after pill. I do not need a child to be born into this mish-mash. We may sleep in the same bedroom and in the same bed, but there is no communication at all. That king-sized bed is as big and as cold as it was on the night of our arranged marriage. There have been days where I woke up wrapped in his arms, I do not know why or how but it happened. Everything is a mess. My marriage is a mess. I now wake up and make him breakfast and let him eat it by himself. I am just walking around this house, always trying to find something to do then I end up sitting in Mme Segametsi's outside flat and then she fills me up on domestic workers' gossip as well as the hopeful love stories between her and her boo, ntate Josias. Mohato got upset the one day and said, "You spend way too much time with Segametsi; what must the other servants think?" I just looked at him, starting from the top and my last sight ending at the bottom, and responded, "You got a servant pregnant. What must the rest of the staff and the rest of this royal house think? What

must they think of you? Of me? Of our marriage? And what must they think of your ability to control yourself around a skirt?"

He never raised the issue ever again.

Last night, we had a massive fall out. You see, the biggest challenge in my marriage is that when there is conflict, our differences shine through to a detriment. We are in a constant conflict of him and I; culture and modernity; i.e. cultural royalty, its wealth, its ways versus modern lifestyle, education, and wealth accumulated through being a young professional. When we fight, we constantly attempt to find a place for our views and perspectives not in the modern world, but rather in the contents of our relationship and marriage. Let me tell you something, we hurt each other a lot in the conflictual aspect of our marriage. Last night was no different.

The elders called a meeting for Mohato and I so that we can all discuss a way forward. Sometimes I genuinely feel out of place in this family. I gave up everything for him. I gave up my life, my career (even though it was only at the beginning); I gave up my chance at a normal life and a normal family. I gave up the love of my life. At some point in this marriage, I

learned to give up my want to have children – a family. I gave that all up so that I can learn to love him, no matter how unfulfilling it has been for me; for my life. I had to accept another dream for my life because the package that Mohato brought into my life demanded an adjustment skill on my part. The biggest lie that I told myself all these years was that the compromise was a two-way street. I am only learning now that culture suits the man best when it comes to satisfying a cheating appetite. We just hide the shame by dressing the act very nicely with “polygamy” or “the second wife”. Some people understand it. Some people forcefully accept it. Some people leave their marriages. And me? I need to decide, soon, what category I will be falling under.

Queen-mother Nthatisi began:

“Mofomahadi, I know that you are very hurt right now. I know that it is very difficult for you to think rationally now. But my child, I am pleading with you, do what is best for this country.”

Silence...

I looked at him. I searched for an answer from him. Was he really expecting me to say yes to this mess that he created and expects me to clean up after him?

I responded, "Mme, please forgive me. I would be more open and willing to accept this situation if I knew that it wouldn't blow up in our faces and make all of us look like we are fools. Mme, that child that Ntombi is carrying is not Mohato's child."

Everyone in the room looked at me like I was speaking Chinese; but the kind of Chinese that they have heard before. I have been saying this and people ignored me. Right now, ears are willing to listen because I am definitely showing them that I will not leave this lying down.

"Mofomahadi, you have been saying that for far too long now. What exactly makes you so sure that this child is not going to be one of yours and Mohato's?" queen-mother Nthatisi asks. Lol, as for mine and Mohato's. I am not going to be part of Ntombi's plans to get out of poverty. It is not happening.

I look at Mohato. He is looking at me and his eyes read "Please don't do this". I don't care, before speaking to Mme, I look at him and say,

“Mohato, are you going to say something or should I? Are you going to tell the elders what’s going on here or should I?”

All he had to say for himself was “Don’t do anything you will regret. You have made me believe all these years that...”

He does not finish his sentence.

“That what Mohato? That you were unable to have children?” I say.

The entire room gasps.

“Yet look where we are now. I am the one who impregnated another woman after only sleeping with her once, and I could not get you pregnant after sleeping with you everyday for two years. Maybe your doctors were mistaken. That expensive education that you received in Johannesburg does not mean you know more than the ancestors. The ancestors have blessed me with a child and it didn’t come through you. Maybe you are the one with the problem. Maybe the ancestors are trying to communicate something about your position in this house through this entire situation. Women who are unable to bear children here in Tholoana kingdom cannot stay in the royal house. Therefore, we, the Mohale’s truly

want to save you and your reputation. So let me take Ntombi as my second wife, then you will remain my first wife and the queen.”

“SAVE MY REPUTATION?! MOHATO MOHALE, NTOMBI IS A MARRIED WOMAN WHO LIVES WITH HER HUSBAND. SHE PROBABLY SLEEPS WITH HER HUSBAND ON A DAILY BASIS LIKE YOU SLEEP WITH YOUR WIFE!” I yell.

“Makoti please. Respect your husband. People can hear everything when you yell like that.” Mme Mathabo protecting her son yet again.

“Mme please. Your son is...”

“Watch your mouth! Kearabetswe, you are in the presence of a king!”

Mme Mathabo.

“Mme Mathabo, with all due respect, you are in the presence of a queen!

Stay within your limits.” I respond.

There is dead silence.

I look at Mohato who is now looking at me like I’m an unleashed animal he does not know. He knows that it is coming. He knows that he has pushed me over the edge and now there is no turning back.

“Mohato Mohale, how dare you. How dare you disrespect me after everything! Now you want to bring ancestors into this? Maybe my ancestors are the ones that are protecting me from you! You are an animal and all that you care about is that damn throne and yourself!”

He stands up and viciously walks towards me, charges towards me actually. He is furious. He sticks his finger on my forehead and shouts, viciously shouts “YOU BETTER COUNT THE WORDS ROLLING OUT OF YOUR MOUTH FROM THIS MOMENT BECAUSE I WILL NOT BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR MY ACTIONS IF YOU CARRY ON LIKE THIS”.

I am not even shaken. I fight back. “NO! NO MOHATO. YOU FAILED ME. YOU FAILED ME JUST LIKE YOU FAILED THAT THRONE.”

The room gasps. He is hurt. My words have stabbed his soul. I still fail to stop my mouth.

“Mohato, you have a semen blockage that you were born with. You were there when we both went for fertility tests. You saw the results. The doctors explained it to you. You were born with blockages in parts of your testicles that prevent sperm from forming into semen.”

“WELL IT IS VERY EVIDENT THAT IT IS NOT TRUE!” He yells, very frustrated.

“And what has made this untrue? The fact that a married woman who is sleeping with both you and her husband says that she is pregnant with your child? How does she even know that this is your child? How convenient that her husband is not the father of her one child out of three after she has been in the arms of her employer and king. Wow Mohato; of all the games a woman can play on you, this cannot be the one you fall for.”

He looks at me, silent yet angry.

“Okay fine, Mohato. Let’s say you marry this woman and you bring her into this house. Then that child is born. You believing so passionately in your ancestors, explain to me how you will take that child to the throne or to the kraal and introduce him or her to the ancestors? That child is not your blood.” I sincerely say.

He hears me. I know he does. He walks away from me and sits on his chair. The elders are looking at me. I am even crying; I did not realise. Mohato genuinely hurt me. That night with Skhumbuzo did not take any

of the pain away. It just made me live in the life that I could have had if Mohato was not around.

“Mohato, what do you want us to do?” Queen-mother Nthatisi asks him finally.

“I want to marry Ntombi”. He says with conviction and spite.

I look at him.

I stand up and attempt to walk out of the room. He stands up and grabs my arm. He stares at me and whispers; “If you ever see him again, I will kill him.”

I know exactly who he is talking about. I know exactly what he is referring to. I know that he thinks that is where I will be headed after this. But me, I got way too much dirt on this Negro, I will show him exactly who he is dealing with: Kearabetswe Mohale. I respond,

“If that woman sets foot in this house, I will kill both her and that bastard she is carrying in that adulterous womb”.

He is shocked. He stares at me in disbelief. Then I hit him with the gusto - whispering, “Mohato, that marriage will not happen. I will never

approve. The wedding will not happen. If you keep sleeping with her, I will go back and sleep with Skhumbuzo. And when I do fall pregnant, you can come back and look me in the face and challenge my fertility when I am pregnant with his child.”

He lets go of my arm. We stare at each other. The elders are shocked. Queen-mother Nthatisi stands up with the intention to walk up to us and before she reaches us, his hand viciously meets the right side of my cheek. The force between the two objects meeting leave me on the ground and a tear involuntarily falling out of my right eye. By the time I look up towards him, Reahile is grabbing him by the collar of his shirt and with every punch from Reahile to Mohato, Reahile keeps asking what is wrong with him. The queen-mother is screaming and shoves both Mohato and Reahile out of the room. Mme Mathabo is telling me that if I did not disrespect him, he would have never hit me. The queen-mother is at least fighting in my corner, not so much because she believes that Mohato putting his hands on me is wrong, but because she wants to put an emphasis on the fact that this marriage is being punished because of Mme

Mathabo's evil doings. I just think Mohato is an ass-whole, a coward, and a bully. Hence, I slept in Mme Segametsi's flat outside of the royal house.

Mme Segametsi brings me a glass of ice-cold water with lemon. She also gives me breakfast and lets me know that she made breakfast for Mohato as well. She insists on cleaning the cut that Mohato left under my right eye before I cover it with make-up. I do not protest. Before she brings up what happened as a topic of discussion, I bring up the issue of domestic work as she invests herself in cleaning my eye.

"Mme, have you ever worked for white employers before?" I ask.

"Yes I have, Mofomahadi." Her.

"What was it like?" Me.

"They were white, Mofomahadi. They are known for looking down on black people so we expect very little from them. As long as they pay us on time, we don't mind." Her.

Disturbing, but okay.

"Do you prefer working for black employers or white employers?" Me.

“I prefer working for you Mofomahadi.” Her.

I am moved. We both giggle, lightly so. Then she does her serious face, the face that says “we are about to get really deep” and she says:

“Mofomahadi, white employers know that we are here to work and nothing else. They may have their flaws and they may treat us in a way that we do not appreciate, but when it comes to our payment, it is always on time and it is never short – not even by ten cents.”

“The black employers that you have worked for in the past paid you your salary late?”

“Yho wena, you have no idea. They will tell you stories about their employers and how they have to pay off debts as if we do not have debts. I am not a social worker. I come to work to get paid, not to listen to their problems. I also have problems of my own”. She says this and then claps once. LOL. I love this woman. She carries on and says:

“With white employers, we had a commission of some sort. They paid us a monthly salary and when they had events that they hosted, they would

let us domestic helpers cater at those events and pay us – almost like it works here at the royal house.”

She stops working on my eye and puts her version of a first-aid kit away.

I take my foundation out of my bag and apply it on my face. She put a small plaster there by that cut. I carefully apply my foundation around the plaster. I then apply powder to mattify my face. I use my brow gel to perfect my brows and wear a nude lip colour. When I am done with my make-up, Mme Segametsi has cleaned up and is sitting down on her couch in her bedroom, staring at me. She giggles and says, “You are very beautiful Mofomahadi. I can understand why kgosi will never let go of you – all the Ntombis and all.” I giggle too and move away from the topic of Mohato and back to our discussion.

“Mme, tell me more about working for white people and black people, please.”

She smiles, then she continues:

“There would be times when our white employers would even allow us to work at functions that were hosted by their friends. They all were always hosting functions, for charity events and just to gossip and show

off who has the best servant – but hey, they paid us so we worked at those events on our off days.”

I am a bit confused. I have to ask, “Mme why would you work on your off days? When did you rest?”

She responds, “Rest? I will rest when my children don’t have to be domestic workers too. It has become a cycle in my family. My eldest daughter, Boikarabelo, is seventeen years old and is already a domestic worker in those city houses here in Tholoana Kingdom. My youngest daughter, Khumo, is only twelve but I know that when she is sixteen years old, she will have to work as a domestic worker too. That is the reality of my life Mofomahadi. Our employers know this and that is why they will just treat us however they wish but as long as they pay us, we keep going back. The money from the functions truly did make a difference.”

I am quiet. I honestly do not know what to say to her. Before I can even respond, she continues with her story as if she is not telling me some serious documentary-type of story.

“We do expect better treatment from black employers. Black employers understand what domestic work actually means in our culture. One does

that activity if one is too young for real responsibilities or is a family member who does not have a source of income. They do house chores or domestic work just to keep busy. In a black household, we expect that at some point they understand the background of the nature of our work. Why must they degrade us further by not paying us on time or paying us too little? As if they are doing us a favour. Aowa”.

I gulp, painfully so. Is it at all possible that I am guilty of this kind of treatment too? Luckily for me, the pay is hopefully not an issue. Their salaries exit our bank accounts alongside other accounts via debit orders. We meet all legal requirements – we actually pay our staff more than what the law requires and we give them medical aid benefits. To what extent do I or any of the other employers treat her, and the other employees with such disregard? Even the lying pregnant Ntombi.

She continues, “You know, one of the black employers once told me that the reason why she prefers to hire migrant domestic workers such as myself and other domestic workers from Zimbabwe or other South African neighbouring countries is because we are here illegally.

Therefore, domestic workers such as myself will never stand at her gate demanding better pay”.

Wow.

“Mofomahadi, the truth is that the black people that we work for may be “middle class” now, however, somewhere in their families’ generations before them, they have women who were domestic workers with no rights. If I see a daughter in you, how do you not see a mother in me? Where do you get the audacity to make me clean your bedroom where you sleep with your husband? That’s why I say that I love working for you mofomahadi. You may have your western ways, but you know respect and you know how to take care of kgosi. I don’t know why he let Ntombi come between the two of you.”

I do not know what to say. I really don’t.

I tell her my idea, “Mme, I want to start a magazine. I am going to do an entire feature on domestic work. Can you get me more domestic workers to interview? Talk to them and have me write articles about your experiences as domestic workers in black middle class families? Would you be willing to be part of the interviews too?”

“I would love that Mofomahadi. I know women who are willing and ready to talk. I will get them. But for now...”

She pauses.

“Yes Mme?”

“Please go and talk to your husband. He has been asking for you.”

I look down. There is truth in what she is saying. I am going to stop running. I will handle Mohato. I cannot camp in Mme Segametsi’s flat tonight again. If she wants to go and visit bae Josias, how will she excuse herself from me? I am still her employer after all.

I walk into the main bedroom, mine and Mohato’s bedroom. There he is. He is sitting on the bed with his head in his hands. He seems to have been sitting in that position for a while now. The click of my heels disturb him and he raises his head to see me standing there in front of him. He stares at me. I stare at him. How did we get here? We had a good marriage. We found a way to laugh together, have kinky moments and inside jokes. We were friends at the very least. Our situation was not ideal, but we made it

work for us. We were that strange couple that was forced to marry one another and chose to make it work as oppose to let him flood this place with many other wives. Is it up to me to make things okay again? Why can't we all just have men who would do anything for us? Why can't we all just have men whose only flaw is loving us to their own detriment? You see when a man truly loves you, you can work on him; you can mould him. The love may be flawed but it is especially dedicated to you and that is what makes it worth fighting for and worth staying for. However, this right here, this situation I find myself in... me being his option. It hurts. Whether I planned to love this man unimportant, all I know is that his actions have hurt me. I know that I am meant to be like queen-mother Nthatisi and find a way to make peace with the situation for the sake of this kingdom. Here goes nothing.

I break the awkward silence and staring competition, "Lala".

Him: "My love".

Me: "I don't want to fight anymore."

Him: "Come sit here next to me, please."

I walk towards the bed that he is sitting on and as I attempt to next to him, he grabs my waist. I flinch. He notices – we are no longer at the ‘playing rough’ stage anymore, not after he hit me. Then he gently takes my waist and directs my butt to sit on his lap. I do not fight it. I just sit and wrap my left arm around his neck, his arm is around my waist, and the two free hands lock into each other.

Him: “I am sorry I did this to us. I am sorry I hit you. I am sorry that, for the first time in two years of our marriage, I pushed you to sleeping outside of our bedroom. I am sorry. I do need you Lala. I need you to please help me fix this mess that I have created. Please my love.”

We are both quiet for a while...

Me: “I am sorry for... Skhum...”

“No, let’s never discuss that ever again.” He interjects.

Me: “I am sorry for the role that I played in getting us here.”

Him: “Ours is a life chosen for us by our elders. We did not end up together by choice, but we made it work. We cannot throw it away; not because of the weakness that overcame me”.

I am silent for a while.

Me: "Do you really believe that this child is yours?"

No answer. No shaking his head, no nodding his head.

Me: "Or do you want to believe that it truly is yours so that you don't have to give up this life, this house, and this throne?"

Him: "This throne is all that I know Lala. I have been groomed for it since the day that I could walk and talk. I don't know a life outside of this throne or without this throne. My mother has hurt people along the way of getting me here."

I see. I do not say that but, I see.

Me: "I will support you Mohato. If this child truly is yours, I will accept it."

He is shocked. Honestly, so am I. I continue, "If Ntombi is carrying a Mohale, that child will rightfully be raised as a Mohale in the Mohale royal house. But I have conditions..."

Him: "Okay?"

Me: “You will not marry Ntombi. It will not happen. The child can live with us and visit its mother during holidays or weekends, whatever, but you will not marry Ntombi and Ntombi will never set foot in this house again.”

He is shocked. I hope he didn’t honestly think that I would let this wedding happen. That child is not even his. I am not giving that woman the keys to this royal house, even if it is for the remaining seven months of her pregnancy.

Him: “But how...”

“I am not done.” I interject. He may only object when I am done saying what I have to say. “For the remainder of the pregnancy, she will interact with me if she needs anything. We will pay for her hospital bills now that she no longer has a medical aid cover as a benefit from here; she is officially fired. We will buy her groceries – food that will prepare for the arrival of this child. That is it. Nothing more. When the baby is here, we will take the child for a paternity test. Should the baby be yours, he or she will live with us and she will be visited by that child during weekends.”

Him: "Except, culturally, the baby cannot leave the house for the first three months. And I doubt that she will be okay with not seeing the baby for three months."

Me: "So what do you want? For her to live with the baby or for the baby to be here for the first three months?"

Him: "I want the baby here."

Me: "Then the baby will be here. She will start having the baby visit her after three months. I will do the baby drop-offs and picking up."

We are both silent.

Me (I am on a roll here): "Under no circumstances can she phone you or you phone her. I am serious. It is over between the two of you. That is the only way that this situation will work out."

Him: "Do you think that she will agree to this?"

Me: "I don't give a damn what she does or doesn't agree to. What she will acknowledge though is that I am being kind. I'm giving her a very good deal considering that she did sleep with my husband. She shouldn't have expected more from me."

He nods. I am not sure what he is nodding about. Then I say the one thing that definitely has to be said, no sugar-coating:

“And if this child is not yours, and this entire fiasco costs you your thrown, I will still be your wife. I will still stay. I will still support you, my king – my Lala.”

The African culture is summed up by the principle that lies behind the fact that God created the woman from a man’s rib. You see, a rib is a bone and a bone symbolises strength. She is the pillar of strength for her husband. The modern woman sees this principle as the woman being created from his side to be equal and not from his head for him to be superior. The cultural woman sees this principle as the woman enduring more than she should because her very being is created from physical and emotional strength. The cultural woman should be like a lioness; she hunts for the food, fights the dire battles, but allows her man to be the king of the jungle.

The modern woman in me has options – I can and should divorce this man. No matter what corner I may run to with the intention to seek

advice, I will always be turned away by being told that I need to find peace in being a lioness. I need to suffer, hunt, be strong, and allow my husband to shine as a king.

Today, I was confronted with a road that splits at the fork; the modern woman in me clashed with the cultural woman I am expected to be. I kept left at this fork – I chose culture, endurance, and my husband. I chose to be the queen of Tholoana Kingdom.

Chapter 5

A country like Tholoana Kingdom has been colonised by empires from outside of the country. As a country, Tholoana has had to be exposed to the power of the gun. You see, for many years, there was a system that operated to control the movement and progression of the black man. The coloniser populated the city; his businesses were there. He used, however, the labour of the rural side as well as the township side of Tholoana Kingdom for the obvious purpose of cheap labour. The chiefs and kings of the time were placed in charge of the rural areas only. Their sole purpose was to instil discipline into young men, discipline according to the instructions of the coloniser, so that they may be obedient to “work” in the city. At a specific age, the young men would move into Tholoana city; and if they are successful, they work outside of Tholoana altogether; in Johannesburg. The problem with moving to Johannesburg from Tholoana is that you need a passport. And seeing that administration was never on top of anyone’s priority when it came to work, the village flocked in the city.

The result of this was naturally the suffering of farming. You see, everyone wanted to do well and according to the coloniser, doing well meant being in the city; even though there was more money made from farming. Farming was, and still is, a stable way to make money because, particularly in a country like Tholoana, the people use livestock to perform various cultural rituals therefore someone is always in need of livestock. The coloniser saw potential in farming, came into our village and took the farms away from its owners and made the owners work in the farm so that the coloniser may come and use the livestock for purposes of meat; selling the meat in commercial space.

Decolonisation is a violent event, directly and indirectly speaking. The colonialists have implanted in the minds of the colonised that the essential values, i.e. western values, remain eternal despite all the errors that are attributable to man. The colonialists implant these ideas by the way of its academics. That is how they got to some of us. We went to school and got ourselves a stellar education. Coming back home to a place like Tholoana, for example, emphasises even further how difficult it is to look up to the

values of the village when you have been educated according to the values of the colonialists.

Tholoana may have regained its freedom from its colonisers, but the colonisers left a society categorised by class. My parents have a business, businesses actually. I was the chosen bride for Mohato because the wealth of my parents made me worthy enough to be married to royalty. My mother's and father's love was shunned upon because of their class difference. My mother was from a royal family but my father was labelled as the "scum" of the kingdom right here in Tholoana. In a country like Tholoana, when people refer to you as the "scum" of the kingdom, they are referring to the fact that the opulence of the village is a scandal that was built on the backs of the hardworking "scum". It fed on the blood of the "scum". It owes its very existence to the soil of the underdeveloped homelands of the village.

When my parents started their businesses and built their wealth, they may have never regained royalty status but they did upgrade their status – it is that upgraded status that got me into the royal house.

Mining is a big deal in Tholoana Kingdom; it is one of the many driving forces of the economy. There have been minor issues of illegal mining but today, we are confronted with a protest from the miners. The doors of the royal house have been locked and everyone on the inside is very afraid to go outside and address the miners who want to be heard. This family never ceases to amaze me. Mohato has been very much aware of the problems that have been discussed by the miners. This is not the first that he is hearing of this. However, Mohato is an ignorant leader, very clueless about the impact of such socio-political instability for Tholoana Kingdom. He has spoken to union leaders; well union leaders have spoken to him about their problems. The problems are black tax problems really, and it all boils down to the fact that they are just not earning enough money.

We are talking about men who have families back here in the homelands while they are working in the city. They need to support their families. They are complaining about the inability to send money back home – nevermind the fact that they are unable to go home often to see their families. Furthermore, it is customary that when a black man starts the journey of employment, they are expected to either extend their parents'

houses, or build outside rooms. These rooms and extensions of the houses require furniture. Conveniently, furniture shops sell these men debt. They arrive and allow them to take furniture on credit knowing very well that with their salary, it will take them years to pay off those furniture debts. Every month when their salaries come in, furniture debt collectors are there to collect their debt. They have to send some of what is left of their money home, then survive on what is left of that money for the rest of the month. This may include paying rent as well. Then you end up with most of the miners creating greater debt via the use of loan sharks. They are a workforce that subsidises their salaries with loan sharks, meaning that this is a working poor.

I have tried to communicate this with Mohato, expressing passionately so that this protest would happen out of frustration, but he would hear none of it. If someone is not talking about Ntombi and the baby, Mohato the great leader is not listening. Now look at us: we are hiding from protestors in our own house. I heard queen-mother Nthatisi's sons talk about it a few times in the past few weeks; Reahile the sociologist was quoting all kinds

of academics with regards to the points he made. Why were they not discussing these points with their brother-leader, Mohato?

“Mohato, you need to go outside and address those men before they decide to burn this house down”, I tell him.

“They will not burn the house down, Kearabetswe. I am still their leader and that means something to the people in Tholoana Kingdom.” He responds.

“What does your silence and you locking them out of the royal house mean for you as a leader? You need to be out there speaking to your people, Mohato”, I keep emphasising. He is not hearing me at all.

“She’s right, Mohato. Someone needs to go out there and say something to these men, negotiate something with them if necessary. Someone needs to walk out of these doors and start some form of communication with those miners because they are not going anywhere”. Reahile tells his half-brother. The bad blood between them is so cold it ices the room. I can just tell that Mohato is tempted to say that no one will go out there only because it is Reahile’s idea, but I think he also knows that he would be cutting off his nose to spite his face.

“I will go out there and address them”, I say.

“Are you a comrade now? What do you know about addressing masses of people? They won’t listen to you. These are men in an “all men” industry of work. How are you, as a woman, able to communicate anything with them in their language? Just because you are educated, it does not mean that you know and understand everything. In fact, the fact that you are educated puts you in an even further place to understand the first thing about the problems that these men encounter.” Mohato says this. He is irritated at Reahile, I get that, but must he be such a sexist dog towards me?

“I will go out there with her.” Reahile says this.

“I am the leader. I will go out there with my wife and address my people”. Mohato. Amazing what a bruised ego can and will do to a man huh?

“And what will you get there and say exactly? Do you know anything about their socio-economic stance at all? Do not go out there and make all of us look ignorant. You can come out with Rabi and me out there, but let us do the talking.” Reahile says. I am offended for Mohato actually. That was a really low move from Reahile and I think he knows it.

“My wife is Mofomahadi to you!” Mohato says this to Reahile, takes my hand and we walk to address the crowd. I look behind us and see Reahile giggle to himself, enjoying the fact that his education has given him one up on his “king” brother.

He then says, “Mohato, I think we should get a tent out there. It is very hot and these men are probably exhausted from all the singing in the blazing sun. This will show that we actually are taking them seriously.”

“Where the heck are we going to get a tent from? This needs to be done right now so that we can get these people out of my yard!” Mohato snaps. I do not blame him. Reahile is actually annoying right now. However, I cannot lie, he is cute and funny.

I interject what seems to be a battle of egos and say, “How about we get chairs put out in the patio and let them sit there. We will organise them some water and then we speak.”

Reahile smiles at me. I am not sure what this means.

Queen-mother Nthatisi organises for the chairs to be put out in the patio and I organise with the security guards to please direct the protestors to

the patio. Mohato suggested that the servants take the water out to the men, but I told him that this is not the time to be pulling rank as an employer to domestic workers when their husbands and boyfriends are this angry. Reahile agreed with me. Reahile, his brother Morena, queen-mother Nthatisi, and I took the water to the protestors. Mme Mathabo and Mohato were annoyed to say the least. I then went to tell Mohato that his people are ready for him to address them. He grabbed my hand and we went outside to them. Reahile followed us, together with queen-mother and Morena. Mme Mathabo just stayed inside the house with the rest of the staff.

As we stepped onto the patio, Reahile quickly separated my hand from Mohato's, told Mohato to allow him to speak to the men. He did not give Mohato an opportunity to protest. He just started speaking.

"Our fathers, we are sorry it has had to come to this to get our attention. We are here to have a conversation with you. Your mofomahadi and I will personally see to it that the counsel does something about what you have to say today."

Mohato is boiling with anger. Did Reahile just really do that? Before anyone can do anything about the bold statement, including Mme Mathabo who has now decided to join us outside, Reahile turns around to face us and says, "Mofomahadi, please join me by my side to address the people of our beautiful kingdom." I look at Mohato. His eyes are blood red. I do not know what to do. Reahile smiles, extends his hand to me and I am pressured to accept his hand and stand by his side. I choose to walk to his side instead, not accepting any hand of some sort in the presence of my husband. He giggles. Morena giggles. The queen-mother giggles.

"Good day to you all", I begin. "I am here, please talk to me."

"We have nothing to say to a woman. What do you know about having to provide for a family with very little?" A man from the crowd responds.

"Gentlemen please, if you are going to disrespect our mofomahadi, then you can all just leave because this conversation will stop right here." Reahile.

"We apologise. However, please hear our cries. I have not been home in six months. I do not know how well the bit of money I send my family actually feeds them. You must understand, we are black people. My

family does not only compose of my wife and my children. It includes my mother, my unmarried sisters, and their children. I am a husband, a father, an uncle, a brother, and a grandfather. It should say something to you that it took all of us miners six months to save for us to come here and be heard by you.” Another man responds.

This touches my heart. I turn around to look at Mohato, he is not even interested in any of this. He is sitting on a chair now next to his mother and they cannot wait for this to be over.

Another man says, “It is our wives and sisters who are cleaning your royal house just to help us make ends meet. We have daughters that are cleaning houses in the city. How do you think it makes us feel as men when the women in our lives must work hard because we are not making enough money? That time, mofomahadi probably doesn’t even wash dishes.”

I look at Reahile. He looks at me. He squeezes my hand and whispers, “Just be strong. I am here”. For some reason, I am comforted by his words and feel protected.

The men go on about their struggles. They highlight that their living conditions are terrible. There are deaths in the mines. Their fellow colleagues are arrested for trying to make a living with their skill – i.e. illegal mining. They argue that their houses are too far and therefore they even have to budget taxi fare in their already minimal budget. When they tried to build their houses closer to work, they were demolished because the “rich” people complained about having them as neighbours. It is clear to them that all that leadership cares about are the rich people in Tholoana Kingdom. According to them, the policies in Tholoana do not affect the comfortability of the rich but rather affect the very livelihoods of the poor – yet they are the ones who work the hardest. Reahile asks the men to give us two days to take this matter to counsel and get back to them. In the meantime, the miners will be escorted to a hotel and stay there – all expenses paid. After two days, we will come back and talk to them, together with counsel, and communicate a way forward. There were no “boos” and “whatever”. We fed them and had them taken to a hotel.

The counsel meeting is terribly disturbing. These men that sit on this counsel are not impressed at all that myself, the queen-mother, and Mme Mathabo are sitting in this meeting to discuss “men stuff” with them. I have honestly become numb to the thinking of the people in this place. They will just have to be strong just like I have been strong since I walked into this marriage.

“You cannot just give them an increase in their salaries by a mere R2000 and expect the problem to go away. For as long as they have a problem, we have a problem.” Reahile.

“I think we are being very generous. They don’t know any better. They will be happy and we will have them out of the village and back at work within five minutes.” Mohato.

Mara why must Mohato embarrass me like this? How does he say such with so much confidence?

“Mohato, there is so much more from where that anger comes from. That R2000 will only temporarily cover some of their problems. What happens when the problems become more or are unsolvable? They will protest

again. They will come back here again. What will you do then? Give them another R2000?" Reahile.

"We all have financial problems. We just budget and make sure that we do not spend beyond our limits." One of the elders.

Is this man seriously saying that he and these men are on the same level?

"Bagolo, with all due respect, the size of your budget and the size of the budget that these miners can afford to have is nowhere near being on the same level. The class difference between you and those men displays a fundamental cleavage between the majorities of our people who own little or nothing beyond their labour power, and the small class that owns or controls the means of production – the mines that these men work in."

Reahile. The mind of this man is incredible.

"Reahile, these men said that they want work. We give them work and now they think they can tell us how much they should be paid. We are already paying for them to be in a hotel. Where do they see people in the world of their status sleeping in hotels? They must work. We pay them, do we not? They are exactly like the cleaners in this royal house. If they do not get what they want in terms of money and benefits, they sleep with

the king and get pregnant. The things that servants would do just for a 2% portion of wealth and status is incredible.” The elder.

Mme Mathabo is so hurt she cannot hide it. I think Mohato is also hurt on behalf of Ntombi. I am just irritated at the fact that this man thinks the garbage coming out of his mouth is okay. I cannot hold back any longer. Plus, Reahile is not exactly handling this matter like I thought he would. I will speak to them in the language and tone that they understand. I am their queen after all. Here goes my place on this counsel.

“And do you think you are any better than them malome? You do not even own any of those mines. You can say the things that you say in the capacity of the power given to you by the owners of those mines who are sitting in another country and watch the money come in every month. You are just a man that they use to exploit those miners. Your power only extends to what the king gives you and what is bestowed upon you by the owners of those mines.”

The entire table is silent – one can hear a pin drop. I do not look at any reactions because I will lose my confidence.

“What did you just say to me, makoti?” The elder finally responds. Mohato stands up with the intention to stop me from responding, but it is not happening. I am not walking away from this fight for my people.

“With all due respect to all of you, Reahile has a fundamental point that none of you want to truly see. We say that these men are citizens of Tholoana Kingdom, but what exactly is it about their working and living conditions that portray their citizenship status in this country? Not just with them, but with our domestic workers too. Work is used as a tool of inclusion when we sit down and have a conversation about citizenship. In other words, if I work, then I am able to have access to water and electricity. I can have access to credit to buy a house. I should have access to healthcare. I should have access to education. How much of these do these men actually have access to in their capacity as workers?”

“Makoti, now you want us to take them to school, give them medical aids and credit to houses?” The arrogant elder.

“No malome, they are workers but they cannot afford much even though these are all the basics that they should be able to afford. It is almost as if we are using work as a form of exclusion towards them because they do

not even see the benefits of their citizenship statuses, which should be promoted by work.”

Silence.

Reahile continues my argument, “We continue to commodify basic necessities of life such as water and electricity. They are employed but it does not mean that they have full access to the citizenship benefits of Tholoana Kingdom. The social conditions that their income feeds and falls into makes them precarious workers. These are employed men, who have employed wives, but still subsidise the joint income of their households with loan sharks.”

“But Reahile, there is only so much that we can do. We cannot push these people into an elite class within two days. Resources and money also restrict us. We also do not have much to share with them. That is why we give them work and ask them to reproduce for the benefit of the country and pay them. That is what we can afford.” Queen-mother says.

Her son responds, “Mme, a wealthy liberal who clings to all the benefits of the elite and royal wealth, housing, and education is perhaps not the

right person who is best qualified to tell the working poor how they should react to the circumstances of their poverty". Dankie Steve Biko.

The queen-mother looks down.

"Except for the police who go into the living spaces of these miners to arrest them for illegal mining and perhaps other crimes that they may commit, how many of us actually go there to see what their working conditions are like? How many of us even know where they live or how they live? Do you know kgosi?" Reahile is challenging the table and specifically challenging Mohato. He is making great points, but I think that he is also using this opportunity to show the counsel that the wrong king is sitting in his late father's chair.

Still looking at Mohato, he says, "They cook for us, and clean our houses. They know everything there is to know about us and the ways that we live. These are people who see their children for a couple of hours after work, or once in a while if they are stay-in employees. They grow up in the village and play on these streets or in the township. They grow up to work in houses and mines in the city or in the royal house. They try hard to work towards moving their children into better lives, but they are

restricted by the system that is operating under your rule, Mohato. They only receive the education that your system will allow them to get. However, they see this life in the royal house, they see the life that is lived in the city, and they begin to recognise their poverty a whole lot more. They realise that as a child born in poverty, smart or stupid, they are born into the periphery of wealth and the elite class. They too will clean our homes and suffer in our mines. They too will protest for bare necessities, and the king and his counsel will sit in his royal house and only offer them R2000 more to their issues.”

If Reahile were king, I would be married to him. I would be married to intelligence. I would be married to genuine care and thorough consideration of the people of my country. I smile to myself. He catches my smile and when our eyes meet, he winks at me. Nobody notices because they are still blown away by this thought process. Mohato is just angry – I am not sure at what. Where is Ntombi to help this man calm down? She is obviously better at it than I am.

The meeting is adjourned and the women are told, by prime-minister Mokoena –husband to Princess and father to an entire crèche – that we are no longer needed moving forward with regards to this matter.

The miners were transported back to the city.

I am very interested in what was discussed in our absence. I spot Reahile and Morena having a conversation in the TV room. I like their relationship. I have also noticed that Mohato is a tad bit jealous; he is the excluded brother. I approach Morena and Reahile and overhear their conversation about someone called Mimi and how this Mimi person is cool but she just gets a bit much sometimes. Morena says something about Mimi wanting to get married and Reahile laughs, highlighting that she is an interesting breed of “marriage material”.

Whatever that is about.

I interrupt the casual brother moment to ask Reahile what the conclusion was, keeping the interaction professional and to the point. He told me that the miners were given medical aid benefits, a fat pension benefit, and a

free signing to a funeral policy that will be subsidised by the royal counsel. At the end of the day, it is not about the money. It is about what is done with the money. The miners tried to argue for housing subsidy. However, when they were promised a funeral policy that will be paid for on their behalf, they were more than happy and grateful.

It is sad isn't it? While white parents invest in trust-funds for their children, black parents invest in funeral policies.

Reahile also said that they negotiated that next time, the miners should talk to them first before protesting. Protests are bad for business and therefore the kingdom's economy. They need to find alternative ways to communicate their frustration.

Mme Mathabo finds me in the kitchen making myself some coffee. It has been a rather long day and I am not interested in this woman and her drama or her feelings about me speaking up in the meeting. However, that has never stopped Mme Mathabo. She begins,

"Nice speech at the counsel meeting, mofomahadi".

I do not know where she is going with this but I will not say much. I would rather just let her say what she has to say then she must just leave me in peace.

“You know, you keep on insisting that this child that Ntombi is carrying is not Mohato’s child. Please explain to me what you mean by that.”

“Mme, the problem is not with me. The problem is with Mohato. The reason why Mohato and I are unable to have kids is because he has a medical issue that explains that he is infertile”. She asked, and I answered.

She is hurt. I can understand why. Coming from where she comes from, there is not a lot of information that is provided on male infertility. This society looks at kids as a “must have” between two married people. When the kids are not arriving, it is either an ancestral communication strategy or the woman is the one with the problem.

“This is my fault. My children are being punished for what I did to Nthatisi.”

Her tone is melancholy at the very least. I feel so bad for her. I do not even know why, but I feel bad for her and her dirty deeds. I pour myself and her coffee and we sit down around our kitchen table.

“You know Kearabetswe, I too was just a cleaner in this very royal house when my husband approached me.” It is always the husband that approaches the side dust isn’t it? Where is their responsibility in the mess that they create in another woman’s family? They are never at fault. It is always the husband that researches their bomb vaginas and force the affair to get too far. Now they sit here and expect us to listen to their stories, and try to make us understand that it was not as simple as people made their situations to be. It is simple actually – just keep your legs closed.

She continues her sad story that I honestly couldn’t care less about, “My husband may have been married to Nthatisi but he noticed me. For someone who was in my position, that was a big deal. I had Mananya back at home who needed a secure future. I did not want my daughter to follow the family cycle of being a domestic worker. My husband knew that and he offered me the stability that I needed. He married me. Luckily

for me, when I fell pregnant with Mohato, Nthatisi was not as hard on me as you are on Ntombi. My husband wanted to marry me and I was happy. I was happy that I would be marrying into royalty. I didn't care that I would be sharing a man. Besides, where I came from, polygamy was not a foreign concept."

Hanhle hanhle, where is this woman going with this conversation exactly?

"I never meant to hurt Nthatisi. She never protested my becoming our husband's second wife. It is our way of life after all. However, I did hurt her with the measures that I took to ensure that my son becomes king, as opposed to Reahile and Morena. A second wife never threatened Nthatisi because a second wife never threatened her position as the queen-mother or the position of her children as the heirs to the throne. But me, I left no stone unturned to ensure that my children would be the ones to inherit everything –including that throne."

She is quiet. I am still trying to figure out where she is going with this.

"When I was pregnant, I was stressed out throughout my entire pregnancy. Remember that when you are married to royalty, it is not

enough that you are having children. The children, at least one, must be a boy. I have never been happier when I saw that the baby I gave birth to was a boy. I knew that Mohato would be my only chance at maintaining this security that I worked so hard for from the day that he was born. I groomed him to be a king from the moment he could walk and talk. I made sure that I hurt the necessary people and even kill the necessary people to ensure that my child – my Mohato – would be king.”

She smiles to herself. What is the point of this monologue exactly? Now she kills people? Really mama sgebengu?

Let me participate, “Mme, my mother always told me that people’s tears never fall on the ground. She always emphasised the fact that one needs to be careful when one’s happiness is built on someone else’s tears and genuine heartfelt pain. We all kneel down and pray to one God and that God loves us all – He has no favourites. If you feel that you deserve to be loved more, you will have a problem because you will not see people for who they are. You will see pawns in a game that you are playing. You know the seSotho saying that children will be punished for the sins of their parents. From what you are telling me, this is what is happening to

Mohato. You may have groomed him in every possible aspect to be king, but you could not and did not groom him to be able to produce children.

Now his chieftancy is on the line.”

She is hurt.

“When they brought you to marry my son, I was excited that you were educated. However, I also knew that you would be a bit of a problem because you educated women do not know your place. You are worse than women who get married at an old age and defy every instruction given to them because they are the same age as their elders.”

My jaw drops. Dear reader, please give me permission to shove this coffee in this woman’s face.

“You take our culture for granted. This is how we lose our culture.”

“Mme, do you ever think about how frustrating this marriage is for me?

My husband has betrayed me....”

“Betrayed you?” She interjects. “There is nothing wrong with what Mohato did.”

“He cheated on me! What would you do if you were in my position?” I emphasise.

“Nana, you and I have different situations. You have options. You went to school. You can leave this place with your education, with your beauty, with everything. You can easily find another man. I did not have that option. I did not have education or men chasing after me. I had a man who gave me a child and left me. The king was giving me my happily ever after. This was not a love wedding for me, it was security and everything that I needed in my position. Therefore, you cannot ask me what I would do if I were in your position. I could never be in your position. You will always be in a better position; a better position than Ntombi. She does not have your options. You can walk out of here and be okay. She can't. All she has is this claim that she is carrying Mohato's child.”

“Mme, what exactly are you getting at?”

“I heard your speech when you were talking to the counsel. I heard you emphasise how much your situation pushes the choices that you make. It was a beautiful speech. This Ntombi situation is tailor-made for you to be

an ambassador of your word. I do not like the fact that my Mohato will be fathering another man's child. However, if it will save his chieftancy, I am willing to pretend alongside everyone else. I worked too hard for this. Save my child's chieftancy. Accept Ntombi, accept that child, and move on. Your husband cheated – deal with it like a real woman. We will support that woman and you will be okay with it.”

The anger that comes over me right now cannot be put into words.

“That girl was me all those years ago. Had I not made the decisions that I made, you would not be mofomahadi right now.” The arrogance.

“Don't get it twisted Mme waMohato. I do not need this house or this position. Before this life, I had a life, I had a fiancé who loved me, and I had job offers. I don't need any of this. I am not here because I do not have options. I am here because I respect my parents, and I stayed here because I respect Mohato. What do you think will happen when that child is introduced to the ancestors? Have you not thought as far as how you will manipulate the cow to bring out the glorious sound that comes from the ancestors? Will you use people and kill more people to ensure that the ancestors accept this little bastard?”

There is silence...

“Mme, if you do not stay in your lane and out of my marriage, I will start putting in requests that we find you a better-suited house. You will have your servants and your own space like every other mother out there who has a married son. We will make sure that you are comfortable but you will not be in this house. You are done complicating my life. Always remember that I am the woman that Mohato sleeps with – my power to convince is clearly greater than yours. Do not test me!”

I stand up and leave her there with two coffee cups and her bottom lip too far from her upper lip. The nerve of this woman.

I walk out of the kitchen and as I approach the staircase, I see Ntombi cleaning. I am uncomfortable at first, but then I tell myself that I will not let this woman make me feel uncomfortable. This is my house. And isn't she fired? I lean against the kitchen door and stare at her, analysing every last detail about her. She starts feeling uncomfortable. If only she felt this uncomfortable when opening her legs for my husband.

Mohato walks down the stairs and witnesses this.

“Is everything okay?” Mohato.

“I am just staring at betrayal. I want to take it in all at once so that I never have to feel this betrayed and disgusted when I look at the two of you in one room.” Me.

Awkward silence.

“How many times did the two of you screw each other?” I ask.

“Kea, do we really need to this?” Mohato.

“I just want to know how many times, that’s all. Like I said, I just want to take in this entire betrayal all at once” Me.

Ntombi starts crying. Why is she crying exactly?

“Baby, it only happened once.” Mohato.

I look at Ntombi and say, “And now you are pregnant with his kid? I guess it’s the quality and not the quantity that matters huh? With all other factors remaining at zero of course, factors such as you sleeping with your husband on a regular.”

She is embarrassed. Good.

“You know sisi, I am starting a magazine on domestic work. I was thinking of featuring your story of how the domestic worker ends up sleeping with her employer’s husband. It would be very interesting to hear your perspective on why the employee sees it fit to do such, don’t you think? I think it would be an incredible feature that us wives who hire domestic workers would definitely like to read. Plus it would make my magazine sell like hot cakes.”

Mohato can see that I am being a bit of a bully now.

“Kea, this is very unnecessary”. Mohato.

“I would really like to know. These are things we do need to research. We must address these risqué topics. These are things that are happening. When this baby is born, I can interview her again and she can tell us what it is about her employer’s husband that makes her want to lie about the paternity of her child just to keep my husband in her life”.

“Makoti!” That would be mme Mathabo yelling at me from behind, feeling uncomfortable on Ntombi’s behalf.

I side-eye her, I side-eye her son, and I side-eye his mistress. I walk up the stairs, pushing Mohato out of my way. He follows me to the bedroom. I slam the door in his face and lock it.

He can sleep with Ntombi again tonight with the hope of having a significant change in the paternity of that little bastard.

Chapter 6

I am in the kitchen once again making breakfast for the husband who cheated on me with the domestic worker of the year – in his eyes anyway. She should actually be doing this. I do not know why I even bother. I woke up this morning missing Skhumbuzo terribly. I think about all the pictures of myself that I used to put in his bags when he had to go away for a few day. Does he still have them? Does he still look at them from time to time? I wonder how Siyabonga is doing. I wonder how grown he must be now. Is he a stubborn child? Is he as sweet as he was when I was still his mother? Did my leaving him affect any attachment issues he may or may not have? Does he have a girlfriend now? What is he like as someone's boyfriend? I wonder what Siya's relationship with Queen is like. What did my mother do with Skhu's engagement ring? It literally just disappeared. I started stalking him on social media and he seems to be happy with his Queen. He tried to contact me a few times after our hotel business, but I think he realises that I have chosen to be a sad, submissive, nonsense-accepting wife instead and I think it hurts him more than it hurts me. I do not even know why I keep doing this to myself.

Sometimes, I do believe that we are to blame for the positions that we put ourselves in. Skhumbuzo is the one man in life who has never disappointed me; why is it that I never choose him? Mohato was just forced on me, yet here I am choosing him over the situation that he put me through, and most significantly, choosing him over the man who will always choose me.

I am so bummed that I cannot even study while I am in this house. It is not like I do not have the time to do so. Somehow, the title of being the king's wife is synonymous with busy although I cannot map down for you what it is that I do exactly. These are one of the many differences between the modern wife and the cultural wife: the modern wife can have a career or study further. Mohato's wife has to "kotiza" for the rest of her life. Thanks to the fact that I married the king and we pay people to do my "makoti" duties, I now have to supervise the chores.

Another thing that dawned on me this morning is the extent to which I miss my family. When the man's family pays lobola for you, they make it very clear that you are no longer part of your family anymore; your new family is now your marital family. I barely go home and they barely visit

me. Even if my parents and I were on speaking terms, there would be limitations on the amount of times that my family would be able to visit me. Some cultural practices go to the extent of changing the bride's name altogether. This is why black families are unable to comprehend the township practice of married men spending more time with his bride's family than he does with his own family; in places like Tholoana kingdom, it is unheard of. Gugu and I were actually having a conversation, the other day, about the kind of power that in-laws have. Your spouse can protect you from every threat that in-laws bring your way, but the cruel types keep a tab. They wait for the day that your husband dies and then they show you who runs these streets. Where do you run? Especially after they have successfully extracted you out of your own family.

Mohato walks into the kitchen as I place the last piece of steak on his plate. He looks at his plate and smiles. I made him eggs, steak, fried mushrooms, and baked garlic bread. I made his breakfast just the way that he likes it. He is already suited up and he is really happy. For the first time ever, I am glad he is going to give me some space and be out on some business

or cheating shenanigan today. I just need to sit by my pool with my shades and swim wrap, have wine, and think about how grateful I am to be sad and depressed within the boundaries of the walls of a royal house, draped in real makoy jewellery; we have certificates to support my claim.

“Good morning”, I say.

“Hi. You look beautiful”. He responds.

I say nothing.

“Are you joining me for breakfast?” He asks.

“Nah. I think I will go back to bed. I am not feeling well this morning. I think I am just tired and need to sleep a little bit more. I have been having trouble sleeping lately.” Me.

He is quiet. He nods his head and grabs his plate. He looks at me. I look back.

“What?” I ask him.

“Skhumbuzo Ntshangase was here looking for you. The guards turned him away.” He says this like he just told me that he has chosen to watch Uzalo over Isibaya and if I want to watch Isibaya, I have to select a

different television set. I am both dumb-founded and excited. I don't show the excitement.

"Oh". That is all that I can say.

"Oh? Did you tell him to come see you at my house?" Him.

"I didn't even know he was in Tholoana Kingdom, let alone outside my gate. I haven't spoken to him since..."

"It's fine, I get it. He's gone now. You better tell him that next time he steps out of his limits and comes anywhere near my house or my wife, especially in my territory, I will organise a hit on him." He interjects my sentence before it is complete. I just look at him. Did he really just threaten to kill Skhumbuzo? He leaves the kitchen with his food and I just stand there. I grab an apple and head to take a shower.

...

I settled comfortably (leggings and long t-shirt) in my bedroom with my laptop, after my very long and hot shower, and started the planning of the first edition of the magazine that I want to write. I have not been able to discuss it with Mohato yet, but I will one of these days. I have already

done all my mind-maps. Mme Segametsi has arranged about ten domestic workers for me to interview tomorrow and I just want to be prepared. I need to prepare interview questions for them. I will interview them one by one, but I also want to perform with them a focus group of some sort, assess their interaction with each other about the jobs that they do and then take it from there. Mme Segametsi tells me that they are all excited to meet me and be in the royal house. I would have arranged a different meeting area but now that she has made promises, I guess it is best that I just have the interviews and the focus group here over a period of two days. I will arrange for the west wing to be set aside for them to sleep. I assume this entire research process will take me a week at the very least.

Mohato walks in as I am still typing all the necessary preparations and features of my magazine. He stands at the door for a while. I carry on typing and not look at him. He takes off his shoes and settles next to me.

Him: "What are you doing?"

Me: "I am starting a magazine."

His eyes pop out of their sockets. I think he was expecting me to tell him that I am writing poetry or an electronic diary entry about the events that have been taking place in our marriage. I cannot help but giggle.

Him: "A magazine?" He asks this in a very belittling tone actually and it offends me. Just because I make him breakfast and look pretty by his side for a living, it does not make me stupid. He has officially inspired me to pitch my magazine idea to him.

I respond, "The magazine will be discussing the relationship between black employers and migrant domestic workers. It will be set from the domestic workers' point of view. From what I have gathered thus far, there is a lot of ill-treatment."

Him: "Ill-treatment? How so?"

Me: "Think about it. They are in a very vulnerable position as human beings already. They have very limited education, which already puts them in a position where they have limited job opportunities. They have to settle because this is all they know to do to make money."

Him: "It is a job my love. Even secretaries then clearly qualify to be underlined as vulnerable. They may be told that their job is office administration then they find themselves working over-time to sort out personal matters happening in the employer's life. What makes the domestic workers more vulnerable? The fact their labour is in toilets and the secretaries labour is in the office?"

He has a point, but my argument is still slightly stronger than his.

Me: "You have a point; but now secretaries have the assistance of the PA. Furthermore, office work is definitely far more dignified than domestic work. This is not even according to me, it is according to society at large."

Him: "But what about it has become undignified? Domestic work is not a new phenomenon. Women have been doing it for years and if anything, service is not who you are, it is what you do. Don't get me wrong, this comes across as a very interesting topic, but just be careful. The way that I see it, migrant domestic workers are identifying problems now that their employers are black. They had never had issues when their madams were white. What are we insinuating about our wives and daughters who

perform chores around and in our homes? Are they now also put in an undignified position?"

Never in my life did I think that Mohato Mohale would be helping me decorate my magazine with so much insight. This is beautiful. I think that this is very close to his heart because his mother was a domestic worker.

Me: "Do you perhaps think then that the problem may exist because black employers understand what domestic chores mean in a black household. With this, the black migrant domestic workers expect treatment from black employers that they did not and still do not expect from white employers? Or that some ways in which they are treated are more acceptable coming from white employers?"

Him: "The problem with domestic workers is that they confuse the employer trying to be nice with thinking that they are part of the employer's family. The minute they think that they drink tea from your tea-cups, they think that there are no boundaries. My mom drank tea with queen-mother Nthatisi and ended up marrying her husband. Segametsi drinks tea with you all the time and now she knows our business and thinks she is the most prestigious employee in this house".

I am offended. How dare he. Not with mme Segametsi. And did he just throw shade at his mother? I have a come back on behalf of Mme Segametsi and my mother-in-law.

“And look at Ntombi. She cleaned my room and tried on my jewellery once too many, and now she is making claims that she is pregnant with your child even though we both know that it is not your child..”

He saw this coming, I can tell by the look on his face. He just didn't expect me to carry on with my campaign about this child not being his because he probably thinks that now that I said I have forgiven him, his infertility has been forgotten. I am a woman; I do not forget such things. Six months from now when the truth is out about the paternity of this child and we have moved on like a happily married royal couple, I will not have forgotten what he put me through. I want that to be clear right now.

We shamelessly stare at each other.

Mme Mathabo runs into the bedroom. She is out of breath. Mohato and I get up from the bed and stand next to her, trying to make her talk to us and tell us what is going on. She cannot talk, she is still trying to catch her breath. Mohato and I are worried, very worried. The fire drill alarm goes

off. It is just a drill, it can wait, and this woman must tell us what the hell is going on.

“Run!” she utters.

We are confused.

“It is not a drill. It is a real fire. Ntombi has set the royal house on fire. Run before we all burn in here.” She says this and runs ahead of us. Mohato and I look at each other. This information sinks in in seconds and we run out too, managing to save my laptop, my laptop charger and my phone. He just saved his phone.

I watched my home burn down to ashes. This psychotic side trash poured petrol around the house and set it alight. All of this because she was no longer welcome in the house of the man who apparently impregnated her. Mohato stood next to me with his hands in his pockets. He was in deep thought. He was disappointed. I think the truth finally dawned on him – he is not fit for this title. For starters, he is unable to control his whores. If chief Azwindini on Muvhango can get three wives to live under one roof,

how is he unable to control the domestic worker he shagged on a regular?

What exactly did he promise her when he whispered sweet nothings in her ear right before the orgasm?

“What are we going to do Mohato?” Mme Mathabo.

“I don’t know mah.” Mohato.

There is silence. I walk away from them to make a phone call and book us into a hotel just until we figure out what it is that we are going to do about our living arrangements. I manage to find us accommodation. I walk back to tell Mohato and his mother and I find them in a very heated argument. I am not disturbing this one. I just want to hear everything.

“Mah, there is no way that a house can burn down like this if it was just a fire set alight by Ntombi. I think the ancestors are trying to tell us something regarding this throne. Mah, we cannot even spot where it is within all of these ashes.” Mohato.

“Mohato, stop it mahn! What you need to do is get rid of Ntombi. That woman is far much more trouble than what she is worth. Then we need to take Kearabetswe and put her in bed with Thapelo until he impregnates

her. Then the two of you will raise that child. It has always been done that way." Mathabo.

Bitch what?!

"Mah, I told you that my wife will not be forced into bed with another man. I don't care that he is my cousin. Kea is my wife and you will not do that to her. No!" Mohato.

"Mohato, if Nthatisi comes here and finds out that Ntombi burned down the throne, and that you are really infertile – especially after we told her that Kearabetswe was just taking it hard that someone else conceived for you because she couldn't do it –she will remove you from the throne and put one of her sons there." Mathabo.

This woman is pure evil.

"Maybe she should. I am not pimping out my wife for this throne. Forget it." Mohato.

"Mohato stop being stupid. Without that title, you are nothing. You don't even have adequate education. Do you think an educated woman like Kearabetswe will stay with you if you have nothing to give her? Then

where will you work? Will you expect her to support you while you become a house-husband? Will you become a garden boy or a mere advisor to Nthatisi's son? Stop it mahn! Grow up and phone Thapelo." Mathabo.

"What?!" Me.

They both get the fright of their lives. They stare at me.

"Kea how long have you been standing there?" Mohato.

"I won't do it. And if you even think that you will force me into sleeping with your cousin, I will get all of you arrested for rape." Me.

Mathabo laughs her lungs out. She laughs so hard that tears stream down her face. Then her laughter gets so intense that she can no longer stand on her two feet; she sits flat on the floor before the ashes that lie before her, and she claps her hands as she laughs. Both Mohato and I look at her. She finally gathers strength to talk and she says,

"Rape? My darling, oshobedisitswe. There is no longer a claim for rape in that process. You are a married woman who is merely doing her duties. Don't come here with your ideologies and think that they will take away

what you are supposed to do in this house. Tjo, you really know how to make me laugh shame.” She stands up from the ground and walks away from us. Mohato looks at me. I am crying.

“Mohato please do not let them do this to me.” I plead with him, tears running down my face.

“Kea, let me marry Ntombi. It is either that, or you have to sleep with Thapelo.”

My marriage has gone from sad to miserable. I am always crying. I am always hungry. I am living in a hotel. My best friend has become my laptop. Can you believe the audacity of this side chick? But why am I shocked? All these TV shows and series are promoting this side chick nonsense – thank you very much Scandal/The Fixer and Being Mary Jane. There truly is no place for love in this society of ours; in this world of the rich and the royal. People get married for a purpose now, not for love. I cannot be with the one man that I truly love because culture has dictated otherwise. I taught myself how to love the man that I married because I accepted that I could never marry the man that I actually love, and now

he has taken my love and indirectly taught me how to keep it. I replay the first time that I fell in love with Skhumbuzo in my head repeatedly. I smile as if it only happened yesterday. I think about the day that Mohato and I started loving and caring for each other. I trace our journey in my head each day. I play our love story. The most handsome man out there was set up to marry basic little me who merely got a degree and was in search of a good job; the one thing that I planned to rely on. The matter was always awkward for us. He wore weirdly hanging suits and I wore tight knee-length dresses that outlined the frame of my curvy yet very thin body, and left my skinny calves exposed. I wore heels as opposed to pumps. I had patterned headscarves and not simple black ones. I wore proper jewellery and I wore make-up as my face's best accessory. I was queening – literally. His mother always attempted to put me in my place, but Mohato... he was always gentle in his voice and pure in his intention. He made a promise to me that first night that the elders locked us into a room and practically forced us to have obligatory sex; this was his very first promise to me that very night... not a big promise but a promise kept nevertheless. He promised me that he would do his part and try make this

work and that we would wait until I was ready, then we can start making kids. I was his first, Skhumbuzo was my first. The first time we slept together, Skhumbuzo was all that dominated my mind, but after a few bedroom moments, I was Mohato's to have. Today, he is ready to pimp me out to his cousin so that I can give him an heir. His side-trash has burned down my house and is lying about being pregnant with his child. I need help. My marriage is a joke.

I finish washing my face and am only left in a towel. I forgot that I do not have any sleepwear, it burned down with my house. I step out of the bathroom and I find Mohato standing in the middle of the bedroom. He is standing as if he has been waiting for me. I freeze at the bathroom door and look back at him.

"You can sleep in my shirt. I will just sleep in my boxer shorts". He says.

"Okay". I respond.

I walk past him, towel covering my head and another covering my body. I lotion myself with these hotel free-bee creams that will probably wake my skin up with the shock of eczema in the morning.

“I am sorry Kea”, Him.

I do not respond. Honestly, I do not even know what to say to him. I know I said that I forgive him but I just feel like we take two steps forward only to take three steps backwards.

“Lala, I am thinking of going home tomorrow.” I say.

He is shocked. He is far more shocked than I am. He is shocked and worried at the same time. He knows what my mother did to me and he knows how I feel about it. My mother made up for her life through my sisters and I. Honestly, she did well. My two sisters never imagined themselves being with a man who was like my father before papa met mama. They love the life of the Great Gatsby. Thuto, the eldest, married a pilot who ended up opening his own international Airline. He is mixed-race, deliciously tall, delicious smile, very handsome, and very Zulu... just her size. Zulu men are romantic like that. In my experience with Skhumbuzo, Zulu men possess the kind of love that gives birth to poetry. She has that kind of life with him; living it up in Saxonworld. Kgosikgadi, the middle sister, is a real queen. Her husband is a property-owner, owns some petrol stations, bottle stores and an illegal human trafficking

business. I judge her for allowing him to continue with that business and sometimes even keep some of the trafficked girls in her house until they have buyers. When I was “taken” to marry Mohato, I was terrified. My heart was beating in my throat. I said all my Catholic prayers that I could think of because I genuinely believed that I was going to die. Can you imagine how they must feel knowing that they are “taken” for prostitution? What does she even say to them when she bumps into them in the passage of her four-story house in Rivonia? No wonder she was so supportive of my “taking”. She probably helped my parents plan it with her skills. Then there was me. When I seemed to be headed in the direction of marrying an ordinary man with enough money to give us a comfortable lifestyle, they chose royalty for me instead. My mother did well. Her daughters are all married to men who exploit the vulnerable in the country. The government sits down in meetings and considers the cash injections into the country’s economy that comes from Maphodile Lentsoe’s sons-in-law when they make big decisions. Imagine that.

However, I need my mother right now. I do. She needs to help me fix my marriage. I need her to come and lie to me. I need her to come and tell me

that feminists are not on to something with their debates that surround the oppression of women. I need her to tell me that a woman endures, that her strength comes from being her husband's pillar; that I need to accept the situation and love my husband anyway. I need her to lie to me. I need her to tell me how shameful it is for me to divorce a king. She needs to come and tell me that the world and black culture is not ready for a modern woman with a Masters' degree.

By the time that I snap out of my thoughts, he has already dialled my mother's number. He hands me his phone. The phone rings twice.

"Maphodile, hello." The elegance, the royalty-born queen viciously pierces through the grace in which she says her name then says hello afterwards. I remember now why I fell in love with taking care of myself. I wanted her elegance in me.

"Mama".

She is quiet. So am I.

"I need to come home. I need to see you. I need to talk to my mother." I say.

“No worries baby girl, I am on my way to you.” She says, tears choking on the lump stuck in her throat.

“Mama, our house burned down. We are at the Your Highness hotel. I will book you a room. Please just come.” I say. I am crying. I missed my mother. I am desperate.

“Okay baby girl. I am coming. Book Kamo and his wife a room too. I am coming with them.” The phone call ends. I am in tears. Mohato holds me; he hugs me from behind, trapping my arms around my chest. He turns me around and lets me cry on his bare chest. All I have is his t-shirt, no underwear. All he has on are his boxer shorts, no t-shirt. He is a man. I am a woman. We are half-naked. Nature takes over. We are defeated by the moment. However, it is okay, we are a married couple.

The way in which we make love is soul-full. It is rich in emotion. It is slow to being rough, and quick to being love. We are connecting again. He starts crying while grinding on me and lying his head on my shoulder. Our hearts are communicating a language neither of us understand. We know, we just know, that our hearts will betray us, their owners, and decide on something that will either hurt us or fix us; but either way, we

will live with the consequences of it all. We both reach our happy ending satisfied, emotional, and still clinging onto each other. We are both silently praying, "Lord, I cannot say it with my mouth, please listen to my heart".

I think I love my husband.

Chapter 7

Mohato took me out for breakfast – a very late breakfast. We slept so late from all that “sexy time” and did not really want to get out of bed. However, we got hungry. I received a text from my mother indicating that they had finally arrived at the hotel. I have not seen them yet. While we were out for breakfast, my husband the king, decided to take me shopping for some clothes. I think that it can be concluded that I have nice-life problems – sometimes anyway. The drive back to the hotel is filled with giggles for the first time in a very long time.

“Lala, we are going to have to save and work on a budget now, and probably get insurance for the house once it is rebuilt.” I tell him. I have never understood why that house was never insured. Every time I suggested that the house should be insured or that we all should get life-cover, I was confronted with high resistance. Apparently this is because it is believed that you are calling into existence the things that will essentially cause one to need insurance. Look at us now... building from our pockets with no insurance assistance at all.

“Lala, I don’t know how the elders will receive that. You know that we don’t believe in that. White people always have a smart and convincing way to make us spend money.” He responds.

“Lala, we need to build a home from scratch. That insurance money could have come in very handy right now. That psychotic thing you slept with could have killed us all, burning us in the fire. With life cover, we would leave millions behind with and for our families.”

He is quiet. I know I hit a nerve.

“Sorry”. I say as I see him beginning to tense up.

“Will you ever forgive me? Will we ever be okay again?” He sincerely asks.

The car bumps hard as he drives into a pothole he evidently did not see. He does not apologise for my head bumping the window. He just pulled a face that indicates that he is upset and he felt his car almost getting messed up by the roads that his government was meant to fix years ago already.

“We will be fine Lala – soon. You will see”. I say.

“But we need to get insurance.” I continue.

He giggles. I giggle. He holds my hand.

“If you want insurance, you have it. Grab my phone there and start dialling an insurance company.” He says.

I grab his phone and start googling good insurance companies. He looks at me and he giggles.

“What?” I ask him, a bit confused but finding him funny too. I do not know why I am finding him funny; maybe it is because I really missed this part of our lives.

“You should work alongside Desmond and Lillian Dube; you clearly have them covered”. He says. We both burst out laughing. In the midst of our laughter, I think aloud and he hears me, “My goodness; I swear SABC now pays them soapie time. They appear on those television screens on a daily basis. Every morning, without fail, between soapie omnibuses. Can you ever?” We carry on laughing.

“Maybe we should take the cover with them.” He says, still laughing.

“For what? SABC pays them enough. We are not taking a funeral cover, or life cover, or whatever other cover they have with them.” I say.

We stop laughing. My thoughts get the better of me and I sit in silence marinating them.

“What’s going on in that beautiful mind?” He asks. I guess he noticed how deep in thought I suddenly am in.

“I am just thinking about the difference in mentality between us black people and white people. White people work hard, gather their wealth and opulence and give their children trust funds as a monetary legacy. Us black people work hard, gather wealth and opulence only to take out funeral covers that we spend most of our adult lives paying for on a monthly basis.”

He looks at me. I continue, before he calls me naïve...

“We are waist deep into black tax. Black tax is not only giving money to family or helping them out or whatever. This black tax that I am talking about is the tax we are still paying because of the inequalities of the past.

We are paying for the fact that we are years behind even though the law

states that we are all equal. We are paying for the fact that even though black people are now professionals, we are boosted by affirmative action and black economic empowerment; just going to school has not yet put us on an equal standing with our white colleagues – we rely heavily on equity.”

“So what are you saying? That equity should not be something that is implemented?” he asks.

“No, that is not what I am saying. What I am saying is that the fact that equity is necessary means that there is still huge problems in our society. Furthermore, not all of us are benefitting yet. Many black people are making it at the expense of leaving others behind. I mean, look at Tholoana kingdom for example. We have many black domestic workers and very few black professionals. As a result, there are far too many people who are accused of being jealous and thus supposedly resort to witchcraft to make sure that people do not become too successful, leaving them behind in poverty. My mother could be a domestic worker. Then when I start working, I do not necessarily take care of my mother and make her quit her job. The first thing I want to do is move the hell out of

this village and live in the city – leaving my mother to keep on letting capitalists and wealthy men build empires on her back: that in itself is black tax – or the beginning of it at the very least.”

He is quiet still.

The drive to the hotel gate is silent. We park the car nicely and before he unlocks the doors he says, “I support you baby. Write that magazine. Talk about domestic work and communicate your truth about the realities of the people who serve us most. These are the people who will never drive to breakfast with their partners like we just did. I will fund you, I will give you whatever you need. Start your magazine. All you have to do is tell me what you need.”

I smile. I look at him. I know his mother was a domestic worker. I know that in a way, he too is paying black tax. He is the man who gave up the ability to dream beyond Tholoana kingdom because his destiny was his father’s throne. His mother may have been a domestic worker, but she slept her way to the top to ensure that the monetary legacy that she leaves for her son is a lifetime legacy with never-ending money. These people do

not even have insurance. I must admit the respect that I have for her: she left no stone unturned to ensure the security of her children.

I kiss him. I wrap my hand around his head and pull him close to my face. His hand finds my thigh and the other hand finds my waist. We kiss passionately. Then we finally get out of the car to meet with my mother, my brother and my sister-in-law.

“Good day mme,” Mohato addresses my mother. He shakes her hand and shakes Kamo’s hand as well, addressing him as Abuti Kamo. They are the same age but he is respecting the brother to his wife. He does not touch Kamo’s wife, just acknowledges her by nodding his head. All of these gestures are signs of respect from his part. My family refers to him as Morena (king), except for my mother, she refers to him as “son”. After they have all greeted each other, Kamo is the first to greet me...

“Hello baby bear”.

I smile. We have always been close. I clicked with him the most. We lost contact because of my forced marriage but I never stopped loving him. I

know that he is not my mother's son, but I love the way he loves my mother and for that, I will always respect him. I hug him. We hug for a while. After a while, I greet his wife, Aus'Kantse (short for Kemoikantse), shaking her hand and genuflecting in her presence. I respect and love my older brother therefore, I acknowledge her as my elder sister. Then I look at mama... I freeze. She smiles at me.

"You look so beautiful Maphodile Lentsoe", I say. My mom is a very beautiful woman. She reminds me so much of Connie Ferguson; the older she grows, the more beautiful she becomes. One would think she cannot get any prettier than she is. However, she shocks us all each time she opens her eyes to greet a new day. My sisters and I took only a portion of this beauty. We are beautiful but Maphodile makes us question the essence of our beauty. She smiles at me. Why would she do this to me?

"I missed you my beautiful queen. Come here." She says this and she embraces me. I cry. She holds me and I am reminded once more how important a mother is in a daughter's life, no matter her flaws. I am one of the lucky few who are given a second chance at making things right; not everyone gets this chance.

After our emotional moment, all five of us sit down and we catch up on life.

“How is Ntate Lentsoe?” Mohato asks.

“He is getting better thank you. However, he has two wives. He doesn’t need me there all the time. If I am absent, his second wife is always there.”

My mom says with a very “don’t care” attitude.

“But mama, no one can take care of papa like you do. We all know that.”

Kamo says. Kamo honestly believes that my mom is everything perfect and amazing that ever happened to him and papa. He is the only reason that my mother never left my father when he cheated with Kamo’s mother and decided to take her as a second wife. Poor mama, she was so hurt. Even I had never seen her that way. Kamo begged my mom to stay, cried day and night, and my mom stayed – for him. I cannot act like I did not hear that she said that my father is getting better. Better from what?

“Mama, you said that papa is getting better. Was there something wrong?” I ask.

Mama and Kamo look at each other.

“Baby bear, papa was shot.” Kamo says this. I am so shocked. I seem to be the only one who is shocked. Mohato pulls a green frog and just sips his tea, and I know that he is indirectly saying “but that is none of my business”.

“Shot?!” I say; worried but partially unmoved.

“Don’t worry baby bear, Morena paid all his hospital bills and ensured that he got all that he needed.” Kamo says.

“Mohato you knew? And you didn’t tell me?” I say, looking at Mohato.

“No baby girl, everything happened so fast. He needed a blood transfusion. Can you believe that Bontle wanted to donate blood? That girl is too forward.” Mama mara.

Bontle is Kamo’s mother’s daughter who already existed when the two got married. However, she grew up believing that papa is her dad too. The strength of a woman who leaves no stone unturned to ensure that she has security for herself and her children knows no limits. The entire family knows that Bontle is not one of us by blood, but her... I feel sorry for her. My mother continues her story,

“That is when Kamo told her straight that she should not even bother; papa is not her father so she is just wasting resources”.

“Hawu bathung Kamo”. I say, shocked that he would be this cold towards his sister. Bontle is more his sister than she is mine.

The table is silent.

I look at Mohato.

“A few years from now, this will be a classic case of you and Ntombi’s child”. I say.

He is crushed. Everyone else is confused. The rest of the meal is enjoyed in silence and to the sounds of crockery and cutlery banging against each other.

The evening is young, and so are my mother, Kantse, and I. We had a great day together, but right now, it is just them and I having wine by the pool in our bikinis – lying on beach chairs.

“Mama, Aus’Kantse, Mohato cheated on me.” I say in the still of the night.

They are quiet.

“And he wanted me to accept this woman as a second wife because she claims to be pregnant with his child. She is lying.” I continue.

“What makes you sure that the child is not his?” Aus’Kantse.

I look at her. I think that I see more of a sister in her than I do in my actual sisters because of the love I have for Kamo. Thuto and Kgadi always left me out. They always went through situations that I could never understand because I was too young. By the time I got to a stage where I could understand marriage, they were long gone and only came to attend the celebrations of my arranged wedding. Aus’Kantse is the type of sister-in-law that loved and cared about everyone that Kamo loved and cared about. We lost contact yes, but I still trust her.

“Aus’Kantse, I just know. This woman is lying. I know for a fact that she will break Mohato; Mohato genuinely wants children. Ntombi is married. She lives with her husband. They probably have sex all the time. What makes her think that this child is my husband’s”?

Aus’Kantse is quiet. Then she says, “Nana, what if she is pregnant with his child? Would you accept and love that child? She clearly burned your house down for a reason. What if it is true? What will you do?”

“It is not his child.” I say, aggressively.

All three of us are quiet. I am surprised that mama has not jumped in to Mohato’s defense yet. Perhaps she is waiting for the right time to do it.

Aus’Kantse breaks the silence and says,

“Nana, you are a queen. You have no allowance to bastardise our culture.

The rest of us learn from you how to be good women and good wives in our homes. If Ntombi is really carrying your husband’s child, do not air his dirty laundry for all of Tholoana to see. Let him marry Ntombi so that his image is protected. If he has a child out of wedlock, not only are you hurting Ntombi – which I am pretty sure you are not even close to being concerned about – but you are also providing his followers a platform to undermine him as their leader. Just think about it.”

The manner in which the people in this country speak truly troubles me.

I feel like a radical and I am not even that bad. Seriously, this is not an ideal way of thinking as far as I am concerned. This is exactly why men will believe that their hunger for anything under a skirt is justified.

Moreover, apparently I should be the most understanding because I am a

queen? What fuckery is this? I change the subject before these two women believe my mind to be colonised by all my years of receiving an education.

“I am starting a magazine. I am still trying to figure out what the overall theme and purpose is but I think I can conclude at this very moment that the magazine will be centred on the phenomenal woman.”

Mama and Aus’Kantse look at me, very intrigued. I sit up from the chair that I am lying on and then explain further.

“The first issue is looking into domestic workers; particularly those who are migrant and undocumented. It focuses on the relationship that exists between those domestic workers and their female black employers.”

“Bathung Kearabetswe, what exactly is it about domestic workers that makes you think this is a necessary topic to build a career on?” Mama asks.

“Mama these are the women who work behind the scenes in successful households. The first sign of a woman or man who has made it in life is she who has the financial ability to hire a domestic worker. Behind a house with clean tiles, carpets, and windows, is a low-paid domestic

worker. Behind every well-cooked meal is possibly a domestic worker. How much do we truly know about them? About what it takes for them to provide the service that they provide?"

Mama: "That is none of our business. That is their personal life. How many times do bosses come to work and sit with their employees and ask them about their lives? All those secretaries, PAs, even junior management; what boss asks them what it takes for them to keep a company thriving? The fact that people like you feel the need to put an emphasis on the domestic worker being a vulnerable part of the work-chain makes them vulnerable. Domestic work is a job."

My mom has a point. However, at the end of the day, not all the professions that she has listed are as vulnerable as domestic work and she will see it at the end of my first edition. Kamo and Mohato come and join us holding beer, wine, and some glasses. My husband is so handsome it is incredible. He is wearing the jeans I chose for him when we went shopping earlier on today as well as a nice black short-sleeved shirt with two of the top buttons undone. He is wearing slippers, but he makes this look very attractive. Kamo sits next to Aus'Kantse and Mohato sits next

to me. They put the alcohol and glasses down, then Mohato gently places his hand behind my lower back. My mother looks at the two sets of couples in front of her and smiles.

“Are you all done gossiping?” Kamo asks, trying to be funny.

“Kea was just telling us about her magazine.” Aus’Kantse.

“Magazine? You have a magazine?” Kamo.

“I am starting one. I will launch it in the next three months. My very supportive husband here has promised to finance it. I am very excited actually.”

“That is really beautiful. Thank you Morena.” Kamo.

Mohato is silent for a minute.

A very long minute.

Then he says, “I love your sister abuti. I am a flawed man and I know that sometimes, I do her wrong. I know what she has given up for me and what she has given up to make this marriage work. I am sorry, Kea. I am sorry that I wasn’t always a team-player. I am sorry that I hurt you the way that I did. I am going to try again. I am going to try to be a good

husband to you. I know that at first, I was your husband because it was my duty as the king of this place. However, I did fall in love. Now I want you to know that I will try to be a good husband to you because I want to first be your husband before I am a king. I want to first lead this marriage before I lead this country.”

I have a tear in my eye. I know that, culturally speaking, I cannot be affectionate in front of other people, especially elders in the family. But you know what, this is my husband – a husband that this very family picked for me thank you very much. I hug him, I cry on his chest and then I kiss him.

He lets me.

Chapter 8

My phone is vibrating. It is 2:30am. I first thought that it is Mohato's phone vibrating and when I woke him up, he pulled the blanket over his head and rolled furtherer away from me. The vibrating stops. Okay. I will check it out in the morning. The vibrating starts again, this time I answer it – and this time, Mohato sits up and is interested in the 2:30am persistent caller.

“Hello” I answer, hoarse voice and sleepy tone.

“Mofomahadi it's me Segametsi. I am at the Royal Mohale public hospital.” Mme Segametsi says this in absolute hysteria. She is loud and is crying. I am even awake now, Mohato is very curious.

“Mme, what is going on? Why are you in hospital? Did something happen to you?” I ask. I put her on loudspeaker so that Mohato and I can both hear what the matter is.

“Mofomahadi I am so sorry to phone you this late, I did not know who else to phone.” Mme Segametsi says, crying harder this time.

“It is okay mme, just please tell me what is going on.” I plead with her.

“Boikarabelo has been raped.” She says. She screams. She hangs up.

Mohato and I look at each other.

“Who is Boikarabelo?” Mohato asks.

“Her daughter. Love, I have to go.” I get my naked self out of bed and quickly get dressed in jeans and an open v-neck t-shirt. I wear white all-stars. Then I tie my weave into a high ponytail. I grab the keys and leave.

He asks me to phone him when I get to the hospital and heads back to sleep.

I arrive at the hospital. I notice that the nurses as well as the doctors bow their heads as I walk past them, and it dawns on me: I am their queen.

However, I am not here for all of that, I need to find Mme Segametsi. As

I search for the reception desk in this crowded hospital filled with people who either are waiting to be attended to or are practically holding their drips in their hands themselves, Mme Segametsi taps my shoulder from

behind and cries when I turn around to look at her.

“Mme, where is she?” I ask.

She points at one of the many people in the que waiting to be attended to. She is sitting there crying and has two nurses yelling at her, telling her not to waste their time or the state’s resources. They say that she probably had an affair with her boss and is now upset that the boss is not leaving his wife for her.

“We know your type very well”, they keep saying.

I rush to them and as I get there, I look at these nurses. They recognise who I am. They bow their heads.

“What the hell do you think you are doing?” I ask, very upset.

They are quiet.

“Is this how you treat patients who come here to ask for your help?”

Silence.

“They do this to people all the time Mofomahadi. Sadly we do not have medical aid.” Mme Segametsi. What does she mean they have no medical aid? We give our staff medical aid. I have noticed that she did not put any of her children on her medical aid; I just never got around to asking why.

I look at these women. They realise that it is over for them. I am not here to play games with them. I read their badges and capture their names in my memory. They notice.

“We are sorry Mofomahadi warona”, one of the nurses say.

I look at her. She can tell that I am beyond pissed.

“Ausi” me addressing Boikarabelo, “Let’s go. I am taking you to a decent hospital.” I help her stand up and we start walking towards the exit door, Mme Segametsi grabs her bag as well as Boikarabelo’s bag. I look back briefly and say to the two nurses who are still in awe, “I am coming back for you. What you did today was unforgivable. I question the wolves that raised you. Nx!”

Boikarabelo is attended to with the politeness and care that she needs in her state, at King Kwena private hospital. Naturally, they were weird about the fact that Boikarabelo has no medical aid, but I am paying for her medical bills in cash and I guess that mattered more to them. Nobody

asked me questions so I assume the money is as good as a medical aid; or maybe it is because they know who I am.

Mme Segamentsi and I were told to wait in the waiting area two hours ago already. We are both quiet and worried. She keeps praying and humming a song that I cannot seem to pick up the tune to; all I do know is that this song is making me too unsettled. I stand up, go to reception, and ask to use their phone. I seriously need to get a portable charger to always have a charged cellphone. I phone Mohato.

“Mohale hello”, yep, that is how he normally answer his phone when I am not the one who is calling.

“Mohato, hi. I am still at the hospital with Mme Segametsi and Boikarabelo.” I say.

“Hey love. How is Segametsi’s child doing?” He asks. I really hate how he calls her “Segametsi” as if he is referring to someone his age. How is Segametsi removed from the chain of respecting elders? Is it because she works as a domestic worker in his house?

“Well, I arrived at the public hospital that they were at and I found the two rudest nurses just speaking the lowest form of garbage to her. She was in tears, traumatised and needed help, and they were there uttering rubbish instead of doing their jobs. I was so angry. I am going to escalate that behaviour. How dare they.” I am getting upset all over again.

“Love, calm down. Those nurses are not important right now. How is the child?” him calling me back to the point at hand.

“Well, I took her to King Kwena private hospital. She was traumatised for the most part but now a few nurses and a doctor have attended to her. You know these private hospitals love, there are four nurses to every one doctor. So the patient is well-attended too.” I say. He giggles. I do not realise that I have said something funny. Then he annoys me by saying, “Why did you take her to King Kwena? Who is going to pay for those medical bills because we both know that Segametsi cannot afford it?”

I respond, “As Mme Segametsi’s employer, you should be ashamed of saying such. When the remuneration that you pay your employer cannot afford her decent health care, it is a reflection on you as the employer – and a mere indirect reflection of the employee’s circumstances.”

He is silent.

“Anyway, I was just letting you know that I don’t know how long I will be so I may be coming back later than expected. I will see you later.” I say.

“Kearabetswe, the sun is not even shining outside yet; you should still be in bed and not be out at the hours where the witches are brewing their spells. It is unacceptable for my wife to be out of the house at this hour. You have to come home now.” He says. It is that Tholoana plaas jappie in him talking now, I am sure. I will forgive him just this time around and pretend I did not hear him give me curfew.

“Mohato, Mme Segametsi and her daughter need me and I am going to be here for them. If you are worried about my safety, you can come here and be with us. If not, let me do what I need to do and I will be back when I can.”

I cannot even say that I will be home when I can because that hotel is beginning to give me cabin fever. I needed to get out. I need the fresh air. I know that I have also pissed him off because I have never wanted guards around me 24/7. I fired each one that was assigned to me and I told Mohato that I wanted a little slice of normal. As it stands, I have no guards

and no driver. He has a million of each; drivers and guards. They give us our space when I am around. Maybe they just feel awkward about our sexual appetite, who knows? I finally hang up and walk back to Mme Segametsi. She is talking to the doctor and she is crying. The closer I get to them, the louder her cry becomes, almost a scream. Boikarabelo cannot be dead. I have never heard of people dying from rape – they die when they are killed after rape (most times). I stand next to them. I do not know if I even have a right to ask what is going on. I am not even family. I do want to know if Boikarabelo is okay. Mme Segametsi looks at me and her head falls on my shoulder, the scream gets louder. Okay I need to know what is going on now. Before I can even ask, Mme Segametsi screams (within her cries) “she is pregnant, my daughter is pregnant. They cycle will never stop. If she gives birth to a daughter, she too will forcefully have a child out of forced intercourse and become a maid just so that she can survive; just like her mother and her grandmother.”

The depth in this statement kills me inside. The doctor is just shocked at the statement. Clearly, this is a unique case for him. Many of his patients are probably always excited about a pregnancy. I sit mme down on the

closest chair to us. There is already a nurse running to us with a huge glass of water. The nurse hands the water to Mme Segametsi and Mme's response does the most to everyone around us right now, including Dr. Van Schalkwyk, she says: "Do you not know that water kills a person? You want to give me water so that I can stop crying? What must I do with my pain? Swallow it with every gulp I take from that glass and die inside where nobody can hear me or see me? So that I can die at an early age of a heart overflowing with problems and thoughts that haunt me at night when sleep fails to come to me? Take that water away from me right now and let me cry so that my heart can release everything that it needs to for me to find peace".

The entire room is silent and is staring at us. Mme could not be bothered. She just goes back to her screaming. The doctor walks away and I run after him and quickly stop him.

"Doctor, I am confused. She was raped just this morning, last night latest. I know that it hasn't been 24hours. Isn't it too soon to tell whether or not she's pregnant?" I ask.

The doctor looks at me. Please Lord, let this man not tell me about doctor-patient confidentiality or say that he cannot give me certain information because I am not family.

“Mofomahadi”, the doctor begins. Good, he knows who I am. “Please don’t put me in an awkward position. I know that with all the education that you received in Johannesburg, you know I am not at liberty to say anything to you without the permission of my patient.” Oh wow, he knows about me too.

“Doctor, please,” I beg and sincerely make my eyes smaller, pleading to his sense of conscience and concern. “Her mother is my aunt and I don’t know if she fully understands what is going on right now. I need to know so that I know how to help them. Please.”

“Mofomahadi, all that I will tell you is that Boikarabelo is four months pregnant. We cannot even perform the abortion that she wants because her pregnancy is now past the 12 week mark...” he keeps talking but I am zoned out now. Not because of his thick Afrikaans accent, but he said 4 months pregnant. The child is clearly not her employer’s child if the rape happened for the first time a few hours ago. Perhaps she is sexually active

already. However, why would she want to abort the child? Is the baby daddy a loser? Isn't it funny how I keep stumbling upon pregnant woman who have upsetting stories behind their pregnancies and I am unable to get pregnant just to give my husband a happily ever after?

"Mofomahadi?" the doctor calls me back to the moment and out of my thoughts. He notices the tears that have formed in my eyes.

"Are you okay?" He asks.

"I am fine." I say.

"Would you like to see her? Boikarabelo?"

"Yes please doctor. I can get her mother as well." Me.

"Have you not been listening to what I have been saying? Only you; I am doing this favour only for you. Visiting hours have not yet begun. She will have to wait. Our patients are sleeping and I cannot afford for her cries to wake up the entire ward." Dr. Van Schalkwyk.

"Okay, I will go by myself." I say. I follow him as he leads me to the ward and walk in as he stands at the door. Boikarabelo... her yellow-bone skin

is now red (her eyes too) from all the crying. Her eyes are so small. This is one beautiful girl – even in her pain.

“Kari, may I come in?” I ask. She nods, sobbingly so. I walk in, and Dr. Van Schalkwyk closes the door and leaves. I walk towards her bed and I hug her. She holds on so tightly; I can feel her need to not be alone.

“I am here now. Askies girl.” She lets go. I sit down on the chair next to her bed. She is quiet. We have never really met before, but I am happy she was able to hug me and find something warm in me even though at this very moment, this is the longest conversation we have ever had. I am not going to ask anything. She seems like a genuinely nice person, but she has been through so much that I won’t be shocked if she bites my head off. She plays with her fingers. Then realises that I am not going to say anything so she might as well break the ice. She begins the conversation.

“Mama has told me so much about you. She has told me how much you have become like a daughter to her. Thank you for taking care of her for me.”

“She is an incredible woman. To be honest, she has taken care of me more than I have taken care of her. You are really lucky to have her.” I say. I mean it.

She is quiet.

“That is why I cannot have this child. I hate it. I will never love this child like mama loves me. I will never love this thing that is a violated combination of Suraaj and I; can you imagine a mixed child of an Indian and a black person running around in Tholoana?” she is so disgusted. Suraaj is her employer. Mme has told me about him. I am beginning to think that this rape is not happening for the first time.

“Kari, may I ask you something without stepping on your toes?”

She nods.

“This was not the first time this man raped you, was it?”

Awkward silence.

“The first time it happened was the second night that I was working there.” She finally says. I am so shocked. She has been working there for a year now.

“Kari, why did you not report him to the police?” I ask. I am really shocked right now. She looks at me with an expression that reads, “Are you being serious right now?”

“Mofomahadi, nobody would have believed me. His wife would have even defended him – she told me to my face.”

“His wife knows that he has been raping you?” What the hell is happening in that house.

“I went to her the day after it happened for the first time. She said to me that I must not act like it is something that I didn’t want. She said she noticed how I looked at her husband – I didn’t even know that I looked at him in a particular way. Then she said that if the events of the house ever left their walls, she will stand by her husband no matter what; even if it means oathing that I am a liar. The one time it happened, I was cleaning in the kitchen, I was on my knees and washing the floor. He came in and...” she sobs, she cannot even finish the sentence. I think I know exactly what that man came in and did to her in that kitchen. She continues, “And I knew that his wife was there so I screamed and all she

did was come into the kitchen and said that we are making noise. Then she went to watch TV and left me there with that animal.”

She breaks down, cries, and continuously says, “I cannot have this baby Mofomahadi, I cannot have this baby. I do not want it.”

I wake up around midday realising that I slept by her bedside here in hospital. Kari is still fast asleep so I decide to step out of the ward and check up on Mme Segametsi. I find Mohato and about two bodyguards sitting in the waiting area with coffee. I find Mme Segametsi with my eyes, sleeping on two of the chairs. Mohato walks up to me and says, no hug or kiss or any other husband-like affectionate gestures,

“Kearabetswe, what is wrong with you?”

“What is wrong with me?”

“Yes, what is wrong with you? How do you, as my wife, leave our bed at the wee hours of the morning and think it is okay for you to stay out until midday? When do you imagine to be coming back to your husband and perform your wifely duties? Today is the wedding of the prime minister’s

sister and we are invited. At what time do you think you will get ready so that we can go there? We are the guests of honour. And don't you dare think that you will tell me that you cannot make it because you have to be here with Segametsi and her daughter".

I just roll my eyes.

"Who is the coffee for?" I ask.

"It was for you. I thought you might need it. But it is very cold now so there goes that gesture." He says, annoyed.

"You could have given it to Segametsi. She has been right there all night and she probably needs it far more than I need it". I say. I do not know how this man's brain works.

"I pay her salary. Coffee is not an added benefit." He says. My jaw drops.

Did he really just say that?

He can see that I am not impressed with what he has just said. He passes the cold coffee to one of the bodyguards standing next to him so that he can put in the bin. Then he sticks out his hand for me to hold onto, a clear sign that we must leave now. I contemplate holding it, consenting that I

am ready to go, because I do need to say good-bye to Kari and tell Mme Segametsi that I will come back after the wedding. I completely forgot about that wedding, to be honest, and I need to evidently buy a new outfit. However, at the back of my mind, I know that this wedding will do Mohato and I some good. Our strained marriage is beginning to make him someone I did not think he is. Perhaps seeing other people get married might just be what we need to be inspired to try again to make this marriage really work – Ntombi and her bastard child and all. I ask him to please let me at least say goodbye and let Kari and Mme know that I will be back later – perhaps even give them a chance to talk about what has happened to Kari. She has really been through a lot. Mohato is annoyed, but he lets me – then rushes me to be done already. I go back to him, hold onto his hand, and we leave the hospital. At least he was nice enough to settle the hospital bill while he was waiting for me. I am assuming some private hospital clerck went to him and informed him about it and he just had to settle it because his wife is the one who called “tab” when she brought a girl with no medical aid into a private hospital.

Aus'Kantse has already bought me an outfit. Her taste in dresses is rather interesting, but hey, I will wear it. The sishweshwe she bought me is blue and white, with a fishtail finish at the bottom. I wear it with the platform heels that she bought me – pearl white in colour.

I apply my make-up. Foundation and powder by Mac, lipstick (Plum in colour) and brow gel (as well as concealer) by Clinique. I finish my face with glittery-pearl-pink blush. Mohato walks in as I stand up from the mirror.

“You look beautiful”, he says.

I smile at him. He looks very delicious too. He is wearing a navy blue suit: scotch navy blue pants and a plain navy blue jacket. He is wearing a white shirt and no tie. He then has his leopard skin throw of royalty over his shoulders/suit. He too is wearing sunglasses.

“And you look like you just stepped out of a GQ magazine”. I say.

I walk towards him. Hug him. After we hug, I kiss him. He kisses me back. Something is just not right in my soul because of his mood. I cannot read how he feels but I know that something is very off about him. I grab

my bag and take his hand that is already extended to me. My mother, Aus'Kantse, Kamo and Mme Mathabo are already waiting for us. Our bags are also already packed. We were told that we can move into one of queen-mother Nthatisi's houses while we wait for ours to be complete. Mohato still needs to be king. Tholoana still needs a leader.

We drive to the wedding and make our grand entrance. We, the loving couple arranged at marriage, hold hands and walk in importance as if it is the ultimate blessing of this wedding. We have two high chairs reserved for us where we sit; I, on the right hand side of my husband. He has his Italian-made walking stick on the one hand, and my hand on the other. Our families are sitting somewhere in the crowd.

Cultural weddings are the most beautiful decoration of African culture. It is so rich. I honestly do not understand why we stress ourselves and invest so much in white weddings. There really is nothing to them when compared to traditional weddings. From the traditional attire, to the singing, to the cultural practices that take place; one finds pride in one's blackness just by sharing in such experiences. As soon as the festivities are over and all that is left are people headed for seconds and more

alcohol, I tell Mohato that I need to head back to the hospital. However, I want to take a nap first. He says that he is not ready to go. I tell him that he can stay but I would like to go. He has not looked at me at all throughout this conversation. He is staring in a particular direction and as I follow his eyes to see what has intrigued his attention: there it is – Ntombi... inunu engafi. I look at him, disgusted and disappointed. I stand up. He grabs my arm and pushes me to the chair.

“Don’t make a scene”, he says.

“I am going home, Mohato. Leave me alone.” I say. I grab my hand from his grip.

“You better go straight home.” He says.

“Or what? You will bring in Ntombi to sleep in the bed that is supposed to have me in it?” I say. He is shocked.

I stand up and rock my heels out of the place and straight to the car.

I get to queen-mother Nthatisi’s house. I see that Thapelo is there. I look at him and all I can think of is the fact that this family actually wants me

to have sex with him so that I can give Mohato an heir to his throne. But shame, let me not be rude.

Me: "Hi"

Thapelo: "Hey, I didn't think you would be here so early. I was only expecting you later."

Me: "Expecting me? Why have you been expecting me?"

He is quiet. They have briefed him, haven't they? Oh great, now to keep my distance. But first,

"Stay far away from me. Or else..."

He does not flinch. I walk away and up the stairs. I go into the bedroom designated for Mohato and myself. I lock the bedroom door. There is something about the fact that it is just him and I in this house, all alone, that unsettles me. I step into the shower and take a long and hot shower. I step out and wrap myself in a towel after lotioning myself. I step into the bedroom and Thapelo is there... sitting on top of my bed and dressed in only a gown.

"What are you doing here?" I ask.

“I am here to impregnate you. I have had a shot of whiskey, I think you should to. It works best that way.” He says.

“Please get out of my bedroom. For your sake, I will pretend this moment never happened. I won’t tell Mohato”. I say, confident and very much threatening him. He laughs out loud and says,

“Mohato set this entire thing up. Do you think he would just let you come home without him from a wedding of some random?” he says, still laughing.

This is not happening. Mohato would never do this to me. My lips are stuttering but nothing is coming out. Tears have already filled my eyes. Mohato already believes that Ntombi is carrying his child. Why would he do this instead of just having sex with me more frequently if pregnancy is the sole reason for this? This makes no sense at all. I take a step back, trying to run back to the bathroom but he is in front of me before I can even take another step.

“The harder you fight this, the more it will hurt. I came here to fulfil a duty and I am not leaving here until my duty is fulfilled.” He says to me.

“Are you going to rape me?” I am shaking. I am crying. I am scared.

“Rape? No man, I am going to make love to you.” He says. Then he grabs my towel off my body. I run away from him, screaming and naked. He runs after me. I manage to get out of the bedroom and run very fast to I do not know where. He snatches me as I am on the stairs, I fall and hit my wrist and I can almost feel a bone snap. He lies me on my stomach and I feel his entire body on top of me. I beg him to please not do this but he does not listen. He tightens my already broken wrist and I feel the pressure of his penis forcing its way into my vagina. I scream. I cry. He just keeps thrusting. He then groans like an animal so I assume he is done. Nope he is not. He turns me around and lies me on my back.

“Why are you treating me like a stranger? Why are you treating me like I am hurting you? Mohato told me how you like it”.

I cry even harder.

“You are hurting me. Please leave me alone.” I beg, screamingly so.

He just puts himself inside of me again. This time he is whispering things in my ear as he thrusts in and out of me. I just cry. I hear zero of what he

is saying to me. Eventually, I stop fighting him. This is a painful experience. What hurts me the most is that Mohato was part of setting this up. If I even tell my mother, would she care? She got me into this. This is what she has chosen for me as a life of happiness and wealth. I thought I would be able to forgive her. I will never forgive her for this. She has stolen my soul. This animal on top of me reaches its climax and then it stands up and leaves me lying at the bottom of the staircase. I guess baby Mohato has officially been conceived.

Mohato came back home at 9pm and found me sitting on the bed, dressed in pyjamas and sobbing. I heard queen-mother Nthatisi's sons come in earlier but I remained locked in this bedroom. I contemplated going to the police to report the rape but I thought twice about it. This is Tholoana kingdom after all. What happened to me may be read more as a duty than it is rape. Mohato walks past me and into the bathroom. He walks back into the bedroom dressed in pyjamas and gets into bed.

"Mohato, Thapelo raped me." I say. I am hoping that he will say something that will prove that he knew nothing about it. He opens his

mouth and I know for sure that my heart is done with this marriage; he says,

“Kearabetswe, you did what you needed to do. We don’t ever have to talk about it ever again. Goodnight.” He then switches off his side-lamp and I guess he goes to sleep.

You know, in the times of slavery, white women were the only women who were considered to be “rape-able” if unconsented sex happened between them and men who were not their husbands. Black women, any man could have sex with you and it would not be considered rape. All you have to do to see proof of this is watch any American slavery movie. Feminists, particularly black feminists, have many fights to fight before they fight feminism on the level of a white feminist women. If what just happened to me is a duty rather than rape, then I am the slave in my marriage. For as long as I am married to Mohato, what I am is unrape-able like the black slaves on white farms in America during the slavery period.

I feel Mohato’s phone vibrate. He is clearly not asleep because he answers after what I assume to be a ring or two. He briefly speaks and jumps out

of bed and out of the bedroom. He comes back after about ten minutes and tells me, furiously so, that Ntombi slashed the tyres of his car and scratched on the paint with what seems to be scissors or a razor. I cannot believe Mohato. He is more concerned about that psycho that does not know its place and is disturbed by her scandalous behaviour with a married man. She evidently has problems that are rooted far deeper than we can help her. Now I understand why her husband/baby-daddy left her. It is definitely “house-to-let” in that brain of hers.

I get into bed and not respond to what he has told me or his frustration. I have to begin my own healing process anyway, without him. I pray for someone to please rescue me. Rescue me from this man and that side-trash of his – inunu engafi.

Chapter 9

I woke up this morning and listened to metro fm while I made breakfast for Mohato. The warm and soothing mood of Robin Thick's cover of Whitney Houston's "Exhale" gathered tears in my soul, weakened my knees and I fell on them. I never grew up with grandparents, but Gugu's mother and grandmother always filled that void for me. They told me that I always needed to feed my knees their food. That is the only way that I would find my inner strength. I cried – painfully cried. I kneeled on the ceramic tile in queen-mother Nthatisi's kitchen and cried. I needed to exhale. It is too much. My marriage is too much. It is draped in agreement, characterised by me not having much of a choice in anything, and as of yesterday, it has now featured a hopeful conception of a child because of rape. I do not know what arranged sex with my husband's fertile relative means. What breaks my heart the most is that my husband let it happen. I am literally having a breakdown. None of the bones in my body can hold me up straight – they are too weak. My gut, my inner strength, my soul – they are all failing me. Perhaps it is because I have failed them. Thapelo

left me on the staircase very pleased with himself when his work was done.

The eggs are burning on the stove. I can smell them, but there is nothing in my body that is motivating me to stand up from this ceramic tile. My face is stiffly tucked into my knees, knees that are bare on the tile. I feel hands on me. I have no energy to raise my head to look at who is holding me right now.

“Rabi”, a voice calls me by a name that I went by in university. I assume it is a voice that accompanies the hands. I still do not look up. The hands let go of me, I assume they switch off the stove, then come back to me. The hands raise my head. I look at him. I have no idea what to say to him. I have never really had a conversation with him. He helps me stand up from the ceramic tile, my knees are too weak and they almost collapse when he catches me. He cradles me like a baby and he walks out of the kitchen, with me in his arms, then out of the door. He puts me in the front seat of his gold Mercedes Benz G63 V8.

“Where is your passport?” He asks me.

Huh? I do not answer him.

“Can I find it in your room? In a handbag?” He asks me.

“I lost it in the fire. I never got around to getting a new one done.” I say through my sobs.

He closes my passenger seat door. He then walks around the car and in seconds, he is in the driving seat and we are driving out. He is on the phone negotiating a passport for me. The arrangement is done and he is told that it will be waiting for him at the border gate. He hangs up. Where is this man taking me? We say absolutely nothing to each other. I do not even ask questions. There is nothing more that this family can still do to me that will hurt me anymore than they already have.

This is a very long drive. We drive out of Tholoana kingdom. The only time we utter anything is when we cross the border into South Africa and get our passports stamped. I was able to walk myself this time. I look like a mess though and I know that all these women at the border gate judged me. My face is naked and eyes are puffy; no make-up what so ever. My weave is tied in a side bun, and I am wearing a pink Adidas tracksuit with black all-stars. Reahile, on the other hand, is wearing a black Adidas

tracksuit but you can tell that he actually planned to leave the house today. He smells great.

Reahile is Mme Nthatisi's first son; the one who was initially supposed to take over the throne. He is very handsome, very well put together, and very educated. Mohato used to tell me about him all the time. I was never sure if Mohato was jealous of him or just admired him. Reahile is a qualified legal specialist and he owns a very successful law firm in South Africa. The head office is located in Pretoria, and the branches of his offices are in various provinces in South Africa. He is also a sociologist – that already screams “sexy mind”. I have always admired the radical nature of the manner in which sociologists looked at the issues in society and I always enjoy having conversations with them. When Reahile was cheated off his title and throne, he focused on building himself, his education and his career. He gave himself options. I am shocked that he is single though. I know that he is divorced and has two children with his ex-wife. His children are 10 and 3. They both live with their mother and her new husband; the man that she cheated on Reahile with. I guess Reahile is just a broken man. Even the music that we are listening to in his

car is just sad but very fitting of my mood at the moment – I guess his mood too.

After an eight hour drive, we arrive to a very dull place that practically still looks like Tholoana, except there is a board that reads “Pilgrim’s rest”.

He steps out of the car. I am very curious now. He comes to open my door.

I look at him. I am confused. He pulls out his hand for me to hold on to it

as I step out of the car. I step out of the car and he locks the car. He notices

that something is not right with my wrist. He looks at me and expects me

to tell him what happened. I just look down and not say anything. He

pulls out a t-shirt from his boot and carefully wraps it around my wrist.

It really is painful. He notices that I keep on flinching.

“I think it might be broken”. He says.

I do not say anything.

“Do you think you can hold on a little while longer? We will get a doctor to check it out as soon as we get out of here”.

I nod.

He hugs me, very tightly. I am so confused right now. But I need this hug, I really do. I melt in his arms. My arms wrap themselves around his waist and just above his buttocks. I cry. He lets me. He leans against his car and I just lean on him and cry. When I am done, he looks at me and he says, while still holding me:

“I know you are confused but I need you to trust me. Do you think you can do that for me?”

I nod. I am confused but I nod.

“Okay, come on, let’s go.” He says this and he gently holds my hand. We walk up a hill. It is a very rocky hill. It has too many steps. Just when you think you are done with the steps, the steep leads you to another staircase. He seems to be having a good time. I am annoyed, out of breath, in pain, and overheating. I take off my tracksuit sweater and wrap it around my waist. I stop a bit and catch my breath. He waits for me. After what feels like three seconds, he tells me that we need to keep on walking. We walk up an even steeper step and more steps. My pace is slower now. He looks back and laughs at me. I am pretty sure he is tired too. He is just laughing at me and pretending like all the stops are because of me. You have got to

be inhumane to find all of this normal. He keeps saying that we are almost there, but we walk another umpteen kilometres after that and I still stop to sit down and catch my breath. Finally, we get to the top, the destination, the awe: God's window.

"Wow, this is incredible." I say. I am so taken. I have only ever seen this place on google.

"Isn't it just? It is the most amazing place. Everything about it is magical – including the fact that the weather is always like this – misty with drizzle." He says.

We are quiet. Something inside of me breaks into prayer and I say it aloud, "God, save me. I feel like I am ready to just break and start life all over again – without this royalty life. Please Lord, rescue me." Tears run down my face.

"You cry a lot." Reahile says, giggling this time.

"I have been through a lot. The sad thing is that none of the stuff that I have been through have been my choice." I respond.

"If it were your choice, would you have chosen Mohato?" Reahile.

“No. I would have chosen Skhumbuzo. However, we have both moved on. He is no longer the person I knew in university. He is married now, and he has become more of a crutch than my love. I fall back to him because I know that he will always be available for me but I don’t think it’s love anymore. He just reminds me of a time in my life when I controlled what happened to me, to my body, and in my marriage.” I say.

We are both very quiet now.

“You know, if I were the king, you would be married to me. I definitely would have treated you better.” Him.

I look at him. I catch him looking at me, sincerely so.

“Reahile, what is this? What are we doing here? I married Mohato and tried to make a normal relationship out of what was thrown at us. I failed. I cheated on him with Skhumbuzo because I felt betrayed by his affair with Ntombi, and I still don’t regret it. Then, your family plans for your cousin to rape me so that I can fall pregnant with the next heir. What do you want from me now? What is your role now in this marriage that I have with your brother?”

He looks at me. He is so shocked.

“Rape?” He says, shocked.

“They say it is arranged sex. They say that it happens when the husband cannot conceive. I am wrong to have fought it. However, in the real context of what happened and how I received it, it was rape. I have a broken wrist to prove it.” I tell him.

He is quiet. Very quiet. We both stare into God’s window. I just cry and pray in my little heart. I sit my little ass down and cross my legs, taking in what my mom has got me into. Then I look at God’s creation, nature: ubuhle bendalo. Reahile sits down next to me.

“Did you know that I am a divorced man?” He asks.

“Mohato told me.”

Him: “She cheated on me. She said that I had no time for her. I was trying to build a good future for her. I was securing my career. It was difficult and I will admit that it came at a cost. All I needed from her was for her to love me. I needed her to understand that relying on my family was not enough for me because the royal house is not for someone who is not

prepared to sacrifice anything that gets in the way of the throne. How many times has Mohato sacrificed you and your heart for that throne? At what point is he capable of loving you? I didn't want that life for her. But women, you lack patience for all the right obstacles and compromise your intentions because you just couldn't faithfully wait."

Me: "I guess the problem is that men have disappointed us so much that we find heroes within ourselves. We forget to stay for love because love only ever does hurt us. We stay for battles that we can fight. Like if a man cheats, you can fight the other woman – curse at her, make her feel like rubbish. But your career? How do you fight something that can never be replaced or erased?"

Him: "Would she have rather preferred it if I stayed as Mohato's advisor? And never blossom in my own light?"

Me: "I don't know. I cannot speak for her. However, she has no idea what she lost. I think she never took time to really know you and love the essence of you – not what you represented or what family you came from. I think she is a classic example of someone who fell in love with your leaves and not your roots; so when autumn came, she had no idea what

to do. She thus followed the desires of her flesh and in the process lost the food that fed the real desire of the human's heart."

Him: "And what is that?"

Me: "Love."

Silence...

Him: "Do you believe in love?"

Me: "I do. I wish I had love. I wish I receive love before I die at the very least."

Silence. ..

"Kearabetswe, I am going to take you to a hospital now and they will treat you accordingly. Then we can do something fun, something you like. Then we decide what to do after that."

This man... I stand up and help him up with the hand that still functions. There is more effort from him than there is from me though. We hug, briefly. We then hold hands as we go down the hill and back to the parking lot. I twisted no ankles therefore I qualify as fit 😊.

We got to the hospital and I got treated. I ended up spending the night at the hospital. The following morning, Reahile brought me new clothes (a maxi-dress and sandals) and toiletries. My wrist is wrapped in a cast and is due for check-up in the next four weeks.

We then met up with Gugu and Zethembe for lunch. It felt normal. I felt normal. I told Gugu everything that has been happening in my life and she is no longer a Mohato fan. She was so disappointed and just sad that she was not there to be my friend. I do not blame her, I never said anything to anyone. I appreciate her so much. I appreciate her friendship so much. Our friendship is in no way insecure. We have the kind of friendship that acknowledges that we have lives but we remain besties. I love this girl. Zethembe warmed up nicely to Reahile. They let us have our time to catch up, to cry, to laugh and to just be “Zalas”.

The drive back to Reahile’s place is filled with questions about mine and Gugu’s friendship. I laugh a lot as I update him. I enjoy filling him in. It is great. He says we should buy food for dinner but I insist that I will cook today so he should not worry. He does not protest. I have been dying to use that kitchen anyway. It is big, has two ovens, and is beautiful. His

place is stunning, but it definitely needs that female touch. The awkward question finally arises, and it comes from him.

“Are you planning on heading back to Tholoana? I told Mme that you are here. But at some point, you need to make a decision about the way forward.”

I do not hesitate to respond. The recent events of this marriage and just being with Gugu made this decision a whole lot easier to reach. I tell him, bluntly so.

“I want to divorce him as soon as possible. I don’t want anything. He can have everything. The only thing that I want from him is out of this marriage.”

I asked him to leave the Mohato issue alone just for tonight after we agreed that his law firm would handle the divorce proceedings. Right now, I am enjoying this amazing kitchen and he is enjoying watching me enjoy his kitchen. I am having a glass of wine while I prepare us dinner with one hand and a half. I am baking garlic bread from scratch, making

some greens, steak and fried onion rings. He is having Heineken, sitting on one of the bar stools in the kitchen and taking three hours to chop the food I asked him to chop. We are having a conversation about Isibaya – of all soapies. I love Isibaya and he has never heard of it. Where has this man been living? Under a rock? I fill him in. I love that show. I watch the actual episode, the repeat, and the omnibus. I tell him about Thandeka and Sbu and how they are the reason that I wish I had true love. Then Mabuyi, the mother of all issues that are happening between my two favourite couple. Eish. He laughs so hard at the way in which I am so emotional about this show and situation.

“But Rabi, it is just a show. These people get paid to portray these stories.”

“Oh whatever”, I say and we both laugh.

I tell him how doomed poor Sengwayo is because both of his children fell in love with the children of his enemies. I fill him in on the Zungu-Ndlovu conflict, and the Zungu-Ngwenya conflict. He says the issue is clearly the Zungus because they are forever at the centre of the Bhubhesini conflict. I tell him that is not the case, this is what happens when people do not believe that you too deserve for things to go well for you. He promises

that we will now watch Isibaya every day at 20:30 together. We shake on it. Our dinner is ready.

I set up the table for our dinner with scented candles, and put up a vase of flowers. He is very impressed with my effort. I tell him that I want to take a quick shower then we can eat. He has no problem. I take a quick shower and dress in a knee-length beige dress. I tie my weave into a ponytail and wear studs. I wear pumps and head downstairs. He is there, looking at me as I come down the stairs. I bring a bowl of warm water for him to wash his hands. When I return from putting the water away, he opens the chair for me and I sit. He plays some mood music, some nice Brian Mcknight, then we indulge in our meal. I put my foot in it indeed.

“Tell me about your job. Do you enjoy what you do?” I ask.

“My job is something I hide behind when I cannot deal with the realities of what life presents before me. Law is an interesting way to deal with problems and I suppose my job gives me perspective on mediation.” He says.

“So you went the business route? You wished to sprinkle your wisdom across South Africa?” I ask.

“Partly, yes. But also so that I can hire a lot of foreigners who come to study law in South Africa but are unable to practice here. Even though I have limited powers in having them work in a court of law, but I can definitely use their intelligence in most of my cases. When they have citizenship, I let them go to court. We are definitely sleeping on a lot of talent here.” He says.

I truly am amazed at the intelligence of this man. It is incredible.

“I am in the process of starting of a magazine. Well, I have conducted a few interviews already. I need to now compile it and get it out there. My first issue is focussing on migrant Basotho domestic workers who are working for black employers.” I tell him. I do not know why, but I do feel as if he will give me a lot of insight. He seems very interested in the idea.

“Tell me more”. He requests as he stands to dish up a second plate for himself. He comes back and sits down, focusing his attention on me.

“Well”, I begin, “I have an incredibly close relationship with Mme Segametsi, one of our helpers, and we spoke. We engaged so much on her life in Lesotho as well as how she became a domestic worker. I have come to learn about the work experience of the black domestic worker in a black

madam's house, and how most – if not all – domestic workers prefer to work for white employers. I have now been updating myself with past research and want to see what others have found. It is a platform to discuss the social issues of our country and society actually.”

“I think the relationship between the black maid and the black madam stems from the fact that domestic chores do not necessarily have a good connotation amongst black families. I mean think about it: the aunt who does not have a job or the cousin who never finished school, is living with a relative, and does not contribute much in the household is the one who does the cleaning chores. This is just one of the many things we overlook when hiring domestic workers.” He says. This man is smart. He continues, “The truth is that we need domestic workers so that our homes remain clean. We are all so busy that we need someone to do it.”

I am quiet. I take in what he has said. He looks at me and smiles.

“We can share my office here at home. You can use it as your creative space and office. I am supporting you 100%. I love the initiative. You are one smart woman. Good luck.”

I smile and say thank you.

“If you don’t mind me interfering, think about looking into illegal miners or miners in this issue as well. The miner is married to the domestic worker. Their work is under similar conditions. They have the same socio-economic issues and matters. Just think about it. I want you to just do some research on it and when you are comfortable, I will introduce you to some clients of mine who are illegal miners and in jail.”

I look at him.

“You would do that for me?” I ask.

“I would. Just think about it. But for now, let us wash these dishes and watch a movie.”

We giggle and clean up. He cannot wash dishes to save his own life. I cannot exactly help him because of my wrist.

The movie idea was a great plan, but the execution is hopeless. The medication I have been given from the hospital knocked me out in seconds; I am not sure if it is the painkillers or the meds they gave me to prevent any pregnancies and/or STDs. We both fell asleep on the couch – cuddled.

Since Reahile and I started hanging out and me informally moving into his house, we have never kissed or had sex. It is beautiful. We even sleep in different rooms. He allows me to heal. He does not make me feel uncomfortable. I am happy here; I feel safe. I also do know that this is the calm before the storm. Soon, I will face the Mohale family and deal with the divorce. I know that I cannot live here forever, I need to find my own place. I also need to find a job. I have nothing now. I am starting over. I, Kearabetswe Lentsoe, will get to start my life afresh again.

Dear God, please bless my journey.

Chapter 10

Morena: “Mohato is pissed off that you left with his wife, Reahile. I know that you have a strange soft spot for mofomahadi, but this is not how things are done”.

Reahile: “Morena, I have mofomahadi living in my house with a broken wrist. She is on medication because her body forcefully engaged in sexual intercourse. Is this how we treat our queens now?”

Morena: “Reahile, you are my big brother and you know that I will jump over a cliff for you. But mama is not impressed, Mme Mathabo is protesting to have your head on a plate, and Mohato wants his wife back in the royal house – no matter the cost.”

Reahile: “Well that is too bad. I am not scared of Mohato. Rabi stays here for as long as she wants. Besides, I have bigger things to worry about right now, than Mohato’s feelings.”

There is a brief silence between them.

Morena: “Bigger things like telling mofomahadi that you have always had your eye on her?”

The men giggle.

Reahile: "She is incredible, Morena. She is that long-needed drop of ice-cold Coca-Cola on a scorching hot day. She is so refreshing, so intelligent, and so beautiful. Her strength humbles me. There is something so angelic yet so human about her at the same time. I really am looking forward to getting to know her a little bit more."

Morena giggles.

Morena: "They should have just asked you to impregnate her. It would have been a much smoother process for everyone involved."

Reahile: "I would have never agreed to Mohato raising my child with the woman that was evidently meant for me. Remember, Morena, Rabi is the wife to the king. Mohato is illegitimately sitting on that throne. I am convinced that Mohato is being punished for his usurping of the royal power. It was never his power to usurp in the first place."

Morena: "I hear you. Listen, let me go home before Mimi gets angry."

Reahile laughs hysterically.

Reahile: "Mimi grabs you by the balls for breakfast. I have never met a man who is this bullied by his lady."

Morena (laughing): "Well Rabi is about to do it to you. Do not say that you were never warned. It is not us – it is love. That is why it is important that one falls in love with a good woman. When we are blinded by love, she is our eyes."

Reahile: "And you really think that Mimi is a good woman?"

Morena: "You do not think so?"

Reahile laughs.

Morena: "One of these days, we must do lunch together with our ladies; double-date nyana. I think it will be nice."

Reahile: "No thank you, I do not need that kind of influence around Rabi."

Morena and Reahile both laugh hysterically.

“Good morning”, I say to Rea as he climbs down the stairs. He is suited up and ready for work.

“Good morning to you too. Did you sleep well?” He asks.

“Yep. And I made breakfast. Please have a seat and have some breakfast”.

I say.

He notices that I am all dressed up. I am wearing a pencil dress, heels and a light scarf around my neck. Gugu hooked me up with some clothes for my interview. The only awkward accessory I have on is this stupid cast.

“Going somewhere?” He asks as he dishes up his English breakfast.

“I am going to find a job. I need to be able to fund my magazine and get a new place. I can’t stay here forever. Gugu hooked me up with an interview at her workplace for a position in corporate and Media communications. It will pay the bills. The package is really good.” I tell him.

“If that’s what you want then I support you. However, you are not crowding my space. I like having you around. You can stay here as long as you wish.” He tries to convince me.

“Thank you but I do need this. I need to do this for myself. Your support will be much appreciated.” I say this and he smiles.

“You are welcome to use the other car, the Range Rover. You look too beautiful to be using public transport.” He offers me his Range Rover; Sport to be exact. It is as if he knows that I have no idea how to catch taxis. The last time I was in a taxi, I was in university. I accept the offer and we have breakfast. I tidy up a bit afterwards and grab my bag. As we get to the garage he says,

“I am going to start the divorce proceedings today.”

“Thank you” I say.

“One more thing...” him

I look at him, waiting on him to proceed.

“My kids are coming to visit this afternoon. It’s school holidays. They never really sleep over but I do hope that they will enjoy the few hours that they will spend here.”

I smile. I walk to him and hug him. I guarantee him that we will have a good time and he has nothing to worry about. We say our goodbyes and wish each other a good day. He drives off in the Merc and I drove off in the Range.

My interview is over. It was a formality more than anything. I got the job and I start next week Monday. I have a week to prepare and shop. I phoned Rea and told him the good news. He wanted us to go out and celebrate but I told him that we would celebrate after my first paycheck. Right now, let us prepare for the children who are coming to visit.

“Are they allergic to anything?” I ask him.

“Not as far as I know. But I will phone their mother and find out.” I am cool with that. I start at the mall, Makro, and do some shopping with the card that Rea gave me for I do not know what. I bought food, snacks, and

ice-cream. I went straight to Rea's place and started cooking. Man I love this kitchen.

Rea walks in at about 2pm. He says hi and starts panicking, fixing things and moving things and just being weird. I walk towards him, put my hand on his shoulder and say, "And now?"

"I just want everything to be perfect when they get here. They never want to sleep over. At 8pm, they phone their mom to fetch them. I just want this to be home for them. Maybe we should order some takeouts. Kids love takeouts."

"Rea, calm down. If you are nervous, they will be nervous. Just calm down. We have cooked for them. The best you can do for them now is love them. They will do with it what they will. Give yourself a chance. Now, tell me their names."

He smiles.

"My eldest, my daughter, is Kefentse. The younger one, my son, is Pule."

I smile and tell him that I look forward to meeting them.

They are here. Their mother, Thandeka, has brought them. She is so beautiful but she is very unfriendly, well to me anyway. Rea opens the door for them and after the kids hug him, she walks in and notices me standing in the kitchen. She observes me carefully and says,

“And you are?”

“Excuse me?!” I say as an immediate response, no thought put into my response at all.

“Who are you?” she repeats.

I look at Rea and he has his hands on his head.

I look at this woman.

“If you will be spending time with my kids, I need to know who you are.”

Her again.

“Lady, listen here. I don't know what version of nyaope you smoke but you don't get to talk to me like that. Who I am, is none of your business.

If I give you that information. I am in your children's lives because Reahile sees me fit to be in it. He can make the call about my presence in their

lives. I am not sure how I have suddenly become answerable to you." She is shocked at my response. So is Reahile.

She turns around, looks at Reahile and says, "I see you got yourself a fast one. I'll fetch the kids later."

Reahile looks at me then her, then she leaves.

As the door shuts behind her, Reahile and I burst out laughing. I mean seriously? What the hell is her problem?

Tjo!

I promised myself that I will reserve judgement for and about Thandeka until after the children have left, that way, I will have a holistic idea of what kind of children they are. But listen neh, Kefentse takes after her mother with that vicious tongue. I prefer Pule, he is only three and he is naughty but sweet; he takes it as it comes. I promised myself that I will just be me, nothing more and nothing less. Besides, they are kids: how can an adult possibly have issues with kids?

They stay glued to the television set until I call them to come and have a late lunch with their father and me at the pool. I offer to help them get into their swimming costumes but Fifi will not have it, Pule lets me. While we are sitting by the pool and having rib rolls (specially made by mwah) and fruit juice, Reahile begins the conversation.

“Kefe, how is school baby girl?”

Kefe: “School is fine dad.”

Me: “What grade are you in Fifi?”

She looks at me, not a good look at me.

Kefe: “My name is Kefentse Thandolwethu Mohale. My family calls me

Kefe. I don’t know who Fifi is.”

Reahile: “Kefentse, who do you think you are talking to like that?”

Kefe: “Papa, she is not my mom. And my mommy said that I don’t have to be nice to strangers – especially the strangers that I find in my father’s house”.

Wow. Reahile and I are taken aback.

I respond, “Kefentse, I was not trying to make you upset okay? I am sorry if I did. I will call you whatever you want me to call you. Just know that I am not trying to be your mom. I just want us to at least be friends. You are a cool girl. I like cool kids.”

She smiles a little. I am making progress.

“Maybe we can swim together a little bit before I prepare supper. Your father tells me that you are quite the mermaid”. I continue. And no, Rea never told me this, I googled the school she attends and it is a private school that trains kids to swim from grade R. She is super excited and says,

“Yes, come. I will show you how Mrs Green taught us how to do back strokes last week.”

She notices my hand...

“Do you think you will be able to do backstrokes with your broken hand?” she asks.

“Well it is still very painful but I can step into the water with you and you can still show me. When my hand is better, I will practice and you can come and see how well I am doing. How is that?”

She smiles. Reahile smiles. I think I am doing okay.

She and I get into the pool in our bikinis. She is in a pink Barbie bikini. I am in a bikini too, a Billabong purple bikini. Reahile and baby Pule watch Kefentse and I bond in the pool.

After the pool session, Kefentse agrees to take a bath with me so that we can get warm. We get into our pyjamas. She lets me wash her hair. While I wash her hair, she tells me that her mother never washes her hair so she has never done her hair at home. I tell her that my best friend, Gugu, and I used to always do each other’s hair. She is so excited to hear all about it. I blow dry her huge afro (too beautiful) then I plait it, cornrows all in a “straight-back” style. I am a bit slow; I plait as fast as my broken wrist will allow me. She eventually asks me what happened to my wrist and I tell her that I fell and hurt myself really badly. She tells me that she did first-aid training at school, so if it gets too painful I should let her know and she will sort me out. Lol. How cute is she?

I then warm supper (as I had already cooked it) and we all have dinner at the dining table. Kefentse sits on her father's lap and baby Pule sits on my lap. I feed him. He eats without any resistance and keeps playing with my weave.

After dinner, we read storybooks together. I bought a few while I was shopping. Miss Kefentse is only too excited and she insists that she would like to read us the book. This is after she has insisted that we all sleep in one bed. Thank goodness Reahile's bed is a king-size bed. He is so happy. We all drink warm milk; it is beautiful. We read Frozen; she reads it to us. She is a fluent English reader, twang and all, and she is very smart. She explains, after each page, what the book is saying. It is funny actually. Eventually we all fall asleep, including Miss Reader herself.

I am woken up by a knock – a dramatic knock – at 2:30am. Reahile and the kids are fast asleep. I get out of bed and put pillows where I was sleeping so that baby Pule does not roll onto the floor. I dress myself in Reahile's gown, on top of the pyjamas that I am wearing, and head downstairs to attend to the vicious knock. I open the door.

“Thandeka? At this time? Are you serious?” I am actually annoyed. Where is this woman’s husband when she is so keen on being a typical baby-mama?

“I am here to fetch my children.” Thandeka, shaking her head with attitude as if I ever said those kids are not hers.

“The kids are sleeping Thandeka. Can you not fetch them tomorrow?”
Me.

“Sleeping? But they never sleep here.” She says, disappointed that Reahile did something right with these kids.

“Yes sleeping.” I say. She is puzzled. She walks in and sits on the couch. Really Thandeka? It is 2:30am for crying out loud. I close the door and sit next to her.

“I can see that you are good with my children. They are never this relieved around Reahile. You are clearly good for him when it comes to my children. I just hope that never changes when you start having children with him.” She says.

“You have good children Thandeka. Reahile is a good father. You should also encourage them to spend more time with him. No matter what happens or what has happened between you and Reahile, you are still both their parents. As far as those kids are concerned, that is what should always come first.” I tell her. I did not like what I saw between them when she came to drop off the kids, and I needed to say that to her. Just like I will also tell Reahile. I also did not like what she taught her kids about treating the women they find in this house. A mother does not deliberately teach her children to be rude.

Thandeka is quiet for a while. Then she tells me that she worries about her children. I tell her that she has nothing to worry about. Reahile loves his children. Then she blurts it all out,

“He used to hit me you know. Reahile loves too passionately; so passionately that it becomes a flaw. He gets angry when things don’t go his way. I loved him a lot but he loved me to a flaw. I admit that I cheated on him and I have no regrets because I married a man that I love. I know that Themba, my husband, does not love them like his own, but I know that he will never hit them or hit me.”

I do not know what to say. Reahile? Hit? We hear someone clear his throat and we both turn around to find Reahile standing behind us. The look on his face tells me that he definitely heard everything that we spoke about. I stand up. I do not know why but I just do.

“What are you doing in my house at such odd hours Thandeka?” Reahile says this, facing down, but also clenching his fists. Thandeka is suddenly scared. She does not say anything. I chip in and say,

“Rea, she was here to fetch the kids. I asked her to come back tomorrow because they are already sleeping.”

“So why is she still here? And why is she telling you about the contents of the relationship that I had with her when it is no longer relevant in any of our lives? Where are your greener pastures that you left me for?”

Reahile is scaring me too here. His voice is low. His eyes are half shut; it is as if he is making sure that he is really zooming into the situation.

We are all in an awkward bind right now.

“Get out of my house Thandeka. I will phone you when the kids are ready to be fetched. Do not come back here until I call you. Alternatively, I will

drop them off at your house when their visit is over. For now, get out of my house and stop talking shit to my woman. Get out, we need to go back to bed.” Yho Reahile. Like this even?

Did he just call me his lady?

Thandeka grabs her bag and leaves. Reahile walks to the door and locks it. He turns around and looks at me.

“We don’t have to talk about it; about you hitting her. I am not ready to know what happened.” I say.

He nods. He takes my hand and leads me back upstairs. He tucks me in then goes back to his side of the bed. He switches off the side lamp and we all go back to sleep. I silently pray in my heart; I ask God to please bless the road ahead of me. The road that I have chosen to turn my back on was too painful.

Chapter 11

I am frightened and tensed by the nightmare I just had. I saw him again – in a nightmare this time. He was on top of me, telling me that he will be done in a few minutes. He kept saying that all he needs to do is plant his seed inside of me and let it grow, then we will be done. He kept saying that if I keep on resisting, then it would be painful. He told me I should let him do what he needs to do so that we can both benefit from the present pleasures of the flesh and the elders. I was crying again. This time, in the dream, Mohato was there. I keep screaming for him to help me, but all he did was sit on his throne and demand that I let him, the chosen one to do this to me, do what he needs to do so that my place in the royal house is secured.

As I lie awake in the bed, both babies cuddled next to me, I try to wipe my tears and compose myself. I hear chatter that is coming from downstairs and I lift my head to see if Reahile is still in bed. He is not. I step out of the bed and notice a packed suitcase next to the door. I also notice his briefcase. I check the time. It is 4am. What case is this man working on at such odd hours? No wonder Thandeka can just barge in

here at 2am; they both attend to cases and duties at odd hours. He walks in the bedroom and finds me standing in the centre of the dark room.

“And then? The bags? What is going on?” I ask him before he can even utter the obvious fact that he thought I was asleep.

“I am going to Tholoana. I am going to start your divorce proceedings.”

He says this with no conviction at all. This man mara.

I look at him and he notices that he better give me more than that if he expects me to just stay here while he goes to laugh at his half-brother who is not supposed to even be on the throne, and tell him that his principle wife wishes to divorce him. He continues,

“You said you wanted a divorce. I am helping you get what you want.

My top two divorce lawyers have drafted the papers; one of them specialising in the divorce of customary marriage. All I need is for you to sign them and initial each page. The two lawyers, myself, and my brother will be headed to Tholoana to ensure that you are divorced by sunset today.”

Is he for real?

“I don’t understand Reahile. Why can we not just mail him the documents? Why must this be a dramatic procedure? Keng? Do you want to see the look on his face when you tell him that I am never going back there?” I ask.

“Kearabetswe, this is not just a civil matter. It is also a customary matter. Mohato will fight this divorce, I am telling you this right now. You are his principle wife. You leaving him affects his status, affects his ability to rule a country in the eyes of the royal council and the country. This means that he has to get another principle wife which is unheard of in Tholoana unless the principle wife dies. He might even send out a hit to get you killed. That is how bad this divorce might be.”

I look at him as he utters these words. Is this the reason why many principle wives have stayed in the past? This is worse than I thought. I hold my stomach as it tightens before me and my head feels light. I almost fall, he catches me, and helps me sit down on the edge of the bed.

“Let me protect you. Let me help you. I still hold power. I am the initial king remember? My brother, Morena, and I have more power in that royal council than Mohato does. We are meeting with my mother first as we get

there. As soon as we get her on our side, we can all make Mohato sign those papers by tonight. She is the queen-mother. My brother and I are the sons to the queen-mother; all older than Mohato. He was the last resort to being king after my father. He and his mother know what they did for him to get the king position over us; and so do we. And they know it.”

This family is scandalous.

“What makes you think the queen-mother will help you? Queen-mother Nthatsi was one of the people pushing for your cousin to impregnate me on behalf of Mohato.” I must ask.

He is quiet for a moment...

Or two...

Then says, “Because I am in love with you. She is my mother. She loves me more than she doesn’t care about Mohato. And she loves me more than she respects that throne.”

I am quiet. I knew that he loves me. Why would he rescue me and take me to God’s window? Why else would he buy me clothes and make my stay comfortable here because I literally left Tholoana with nothing but

my adidas tracksuit? Why else would he let me bond with his children and see my divorce through – my knight-in-shining-armor. I look at him.

He is looking at me too.

“Rabi, I am going to go to Tholoana with the intention to cut off the chapter of Mohato in your life. I am not coming back until it’s done. Then when I come back, I want you and I to focus on us and moving forward together as a couple; if you are okay with that. I want you to use this time to think about a future with me. I have made my decision. My decision is you; I want you.” He communicates this so sincerely.

I smile. He smiles back at me.

“If it makes you feel any better, you would have been married to me anyway had Mohato and Mathabo not cheated the royal system. You are the wife to the king; Mohato just happens to be sitting in that title – it doesn’t mean it is his and therefore, it does not mean you are his.” We look at each other, trying very hard not to laugh. However, I cannot help it. I just chuckle. He smiles and puts his arm around my neck.

“Your worth crowned him, Rabi. He became a man half worthy of that throne when he married you. That is why he and the royal council will

fight this. We all know the truth. You are the reason he stands as a worthy king. But it came at too much of an expense from your side.” The truth in his words is piercing through this moment and into the truth of my being.

“I had a nightmare you know. I dreamt about Thapelo and everything that he did to me that day. But this time, in my dream, Mohato was there and he was telling me to let Thapelo do what he needed to do.” I sob.

He hugs me. “They will never hurt you again. No man will ever hurt you again, not while I am still alive. Your fight is over now. The life that was chosen for you is over now. Let me rescue you from what remains of it then we can look forward to your happily ever after.” His words soothe me.

“Give me those papers and let me sign them. Do whatever it is that you need to do. I will stay here and take care of the children.” I say.

He gives me the papers. I initial each page and sign the last page. I put them back in the envelope and silently pray that the drama will be minimal. I pray that he will let me go, even if his reasoning is to be with Ntombi – the legendary liar who is about to make him father a child that is not his.

I kiss him. I do not know why, but I do. Now that he has told me he loves me and he is about to no longer be my brother-in-law, I can safely admit to checking him out and noticing his chubby-nyana self; not a hip-hop Pantsula (HHP) kinda chubby – a matured Brian Themba kind of chubby. He gets his good looks from his gorgeous mother (looks that have successfully been inherited by both his kids); mesmerising eyes that are sincere in their own right. Beautifully tall, deliciously dark but not too dark. I have never been the light-skinned man type of lady anyway, it's a lack of melanin I looked past because Mohato was chosen for me. His hugs are everything and his kiss; that first one I gave him; passionately erotic.

He finally leaves and tells me to go back to sleep. He promises to call when he has safely arrived in Tholoana Kingdom. I do just that, smiles and all on my face. I had no desire of going downstairs and begin small chats with all of those men anyway.

When I wake up at 6:07am, the babies are still fast asleep. I get out of bed, take a quick shower and begin to prepare breakfast for them. I make

sorghum porridge with Nespray powder. Then I fry eggs, bacon, and toasted cheese. I put them in the oven so that the food stays warm until the babies wake up.

There is a brief knock on the door. I walk around the kitchen counter and head to open the door. An interesting woman stands before me. Do not get me wrong – she is beautiful, but she is extra. Her eyebrows are all shaved off and are replaced with a thin-curved drawn on line. She has pink eye shadow on, very pink blush, red thick lips, and a gold tooth. She is quite big-boned; tall and built. However, it works for her. She is wearing her crown (afro) with pride. I actually really like her confidence and self-love. But, who is she? She is standing here, staring at me, and almost ready to jump up and down and hug me. Her energy is just –

“Hi”, she screams and laughs at the same time. What a ball of joy she must be.

“Hi. Can I help you?” I respond. I am not sure how to deal with this kind of situation.

“I am Salamina, but everyone calls me Mimi. I am sure you have heard a lot about me. I know my man Morena cannot stop talking about me. I mean look at me – I am amazing.”

I let out a giggle. I am about to have fun. I admire her confidence, but honestly, I have heard absolutely nothing about her.

“Hi Salamina, I am –

“I know exactly who you are.” She interrupts me.

“You do?”

“Oh yeah I do. And I just know that we are going to be besties.” She says.

She is so loud. But, she is so warm. I like her – a lot!

“Do you mind if I come in?” She says, realising that I am not going to let her in.

“Actually, the kids are about to wake up and I just need to adapt to their routine a bit before I can initiate anything different.” I sincerely say.

“I am not anything different though – they know me; I am their aunty Mimi.” She insists.

“Salamina, please ausi. We can do lunch some time. But, today, I really cannot. I just need to be here for the kids.” I sincerely say, almost desperate for her to understand and not be offended. I like her. Moreover, seeing that she has been around longer, it is probably correct to assume that what she thinks of me matters.

She nods.

“Give me your number then. I will phone you tomorrow and we can set up our lunch date.” She says.

I give her my number and we say our goodbyes. She leaves. Wow.

...

At 9am, Kefentse walks down the stairs with baby Pule on her hip. It is the most beautiful sight I have ever seen; perfect way to start my day indeed.

“Good morning babies”, I say to them with a smile. Kefentse approaches the kitchen counter with Pule on her hip and very sleepy eyes. Pule has been crying and you can just see that she was woken up by him. I walk around the kitchen counter and meet them half way. I take Pule from her

and he obliges; tucking his sleepy head and wet eyes between my chin and my shoulder.

“Where is my dad?” Oh gosh, Kefentse are we seriously here again? No good morning or anything, just plain rude and asking for your father.

Okay, I will just take it that she is not a morning person.

“Your father had to go somewhere, my angel. But he will phone us as soon as he can. He promised.” I say.

“Why do you call me names that are not mine? My name is Kefentse! Not Angel, or Fifi, or any other name that you will call me next.” She says this and rolls her eyes. This child is seriously going to test my patience and shoot it up to the limit I tell you.

“My apologies Kefentse. I made breakfast. Would you like to have something to eat?” I ask, still calm and nice.

“We haven’t brushed our teeth or washed our face. We can’t just eat. That is so disgusting.” She has a point, mara must she be so damn rude?

I just look at her. She can see that I am getting annoyed. She stands up and heads back upstairs with her iPhone in her hand. I assume she is going to wash her face and brush her teeth. But, I am not impressed at all.

An sms comes through my iPhone; mind you my phone is identical to the little brat's phone. The only difference is that my back cover is simply RoseGold and hers is pink with flowers and glitter. The sms reads:

"I hope the kids are treating you well. I hope you are all okay. If you need anything, please call me. If you cannot reach me, get my PA or secretary to contact one of the men I am with. Make sure she finds me. We are still on our way, I miss you already."

I reply:

"The kids need to speak to you. And so do I. May we please phone you?"

He calls. I answer.

"Hey you".

"Hey gorgeous, everything okay?"

"Yeah, we just miss you. And it's only right that you wish us all a good morning."

“Okay, put me on speaker”. He says this and giggles.

I shout for the diva to come downstairs and speak to her father. She has changed her clothes but you can tell shame that she is still that child that still has no idea on how to clean herself up properly yet.

“Hi daddy, howcome you left us with a stranger and didn’t even wake us up?” Lol. I am going to klap this girl.

“Kefe, that is not a stranger. How many times must I tell you that?”

She ignores that statement.

“Daddy, when are you coming back? You do realise that the point of us coming to visit you was so that we could spend time with you right?”

His response: “Kefentse, I will be back when I can. For now, behave yourself and don’t give aunty Rabi a hard time”.

Kefentse: “Aunty Rabi? Is she your sister?”

Reahile hangs up.

I look at her. She looks at me. I am shocked at the lack of manners that this child has. What the hell? You know exactly what your father meant, you just chose to be a little twit about it.

Reahile calls again.

“Is that my dad?” She says as she grabs my phone. Okay, time to lay down some rules now, and my phone will have to be the starting point.

“Ey wena, listen here little girl, and listen very carefully. I am not your friend and I am not your age. Don’t you dare treat me like someone you just met on the playground. That is my cellphone and when it rings, you don’t touch it unless I give you permission to”.

Her eye-balls stick out from her face.

“But my father is calling”, she says this as if it justifies her behaviour.

“I don’t care. He is phoning me. He has your number. I am sure if he intended on calling you, he would have dialled your number.” She throws my phone at me. I almost knock her out when I throw it back at her face; good thing she ducked. The phone stops ringing. I call him back.

“Rabi?”

“Why did you hang up?”

“I am not yet able to deal with Kefentse and her blatant attempt at being unnecessary.” Him.

“She just misses you babe. Plus she is just upset that she came to visit you and you just up and left.”

I do not know why I am defending the little twit but it must be coming from somewhere. Nandi, one of my varsity friends, grew up with a step-mother. She was on the receiving end of a step-monster who made her life very difficult just by being in it. The stories that Nandi used to tell us about that woman made me realise how much a child needs to be assured that it’s all love between the two of you; you don’t always need to give birth to a human being to love him/her.

“You just called me babe. I like it.” He says. I blush.

“Where is Pule?” he asks. I look on my shoulder and his eyes are shut. He has gone back to sleep.

“He just fell asleep on my shoulder. I will phone you when he wakes up” I say.

“Okay then. Good luck with Kefe.” Him.

“Kefe and I will be fine, don’t worry about us. How come you guys are taking so long to get to Tholoana?” I ask.

“We are in Tholoana. I had to talk to mama as I had told you. Now we are headed to the royal house. Everything will be fine baby. Don’t stress.”

I smile. He called me baby 😊.

“Call me okay.” I say.

“Okay.”

“Bye”.

“Bye”.

After I bath Pule and feed him, I make the bed. I search the rooms, looking for the little diva. I find her sitting on the porch, taking selfies and probably posting on some kind of social media platform. I walk towards her and stand in front of her, waiting for her to acknowledge my presence. She looks up at me. I look at her. She is suddenly uncomfortable. It is probably because she undid the cornrows I did on her hair yesterday and now she is ashamed.

“We need to talk young lady.” I begin.

“I agree.” She says.

This child is something else. I sit down on the chair next to her.

“Kefentse, you and I need to establish some kind of common ground and understanding. I don’t normally negotiate with kids, but I can see that you are an exception on so many levels. We need to learn to co-exist together in one space and at the very least, respect one another.” I tell her.

“And we definitely need to establish our place in this situation.” Her. Her ten year old mouth spat out such nonsense. What does she know about people having a place? This thing is not a child.

“You see, Kefentse, that attitude right there needs to be dealt with. You cannot seriously believe that it is normal for you to speak to a person like that; especially an adult.” I tell her.

She is quiet.

Then she says, “Are you my father’s girlfriend?”

Yho this child was truly born and bred in Gauteng; the only thing Tholoana about her is the birth place of her father.

“Something like that. Why? You not comfortable with your father being in a relationship?” I ask. The question must have come from somewhere.

“It’s just that... I just hoped that we would at least have one place between mom and dad’s house where we could have a home. My mom’s husband doesn’t like us and I can see that she doesn’t know how to tell him to not treat us bad. If papa gets married as well, where will Pule and I go?” She says.

I had no idea that the situation at Thandeka’s house was this bad.

“Kefentse, I don’t know what the situation is like at your mother’s house. And I hope that one day you will trust me enough to tell me. For now, I just want you to give me a chance. I want you to at least be open to having me in your life. I love you guys. I am not perfect, I may make mistakes along the way, and I am not saying that I want to be your mother. I can be your friend until you are comfortable with inviting me into your life as something more than that.”

She looks at me. She smiles. She cries a little.

“Don’t cry Kefentse. Come on girl. Let’s just start over, okay?”

She hugs me. I hug her back. I kiss her forehead.

“Now, come and help me cook dinner. Your dad might be coming home today. We can cook for him and your brother, then I will fix your hair later. After we swim maybe?”

She stands up and as she is about to run back to the house, I stop her and say: “Please stay for all your school holidays? It would really mean a lot to your dad. Pretty please?”

“Okay. I will. Can I call you Rabi?” she says.

Say what? Rabi? Hehh banna! Is she not ten years old? Where is her respect for elders?

Calm down Rabi, calm down. Just breathe, I came to speak to the twit to establish a relationship, I was not expecting a selfie-moment or anything. I guess expecting an auntie Rabi would be pushing it neh? Rabi it is then, to the ten year old.

“Sure thing... can I call you Fifi?” I say with a giggle.

She laughs aloud and finally agrees.

It is evening and Rea is not home. I have fed the kids and they have taken their evening baths. Thanks to the swimming, they were too exhausted to argue with me about any of my orders. I braided Fifi's hair, in a straight-up this time, and added fibre to the ponytail: Miss Thang wanted the extra drama to her hair. She low-key enjoys having a stylist at her split-ends this one. I promised that we would phone papa before we go to sleep so I must deliver. Fifi is chilling in between my legs and Pule is sitting on my lap. I dial Rea's number and put it on loudspeaker. He answers his phone after three rings,

"Baby"

Kefentse looks at me and chuckles a bit.

"Hello papa", Kefentse.

Rea laughs aloud. But, it is a deflated LOL. As if life is on his shoulders. I am glad he can let a laugh escape for his two beautiful babies.

"Papa!" Baby Pule shouts.

"How are you guys doing?" Rea.

"Daddy when are you coming home?" Fifi.

“I am on my way as we speak princess. I will be home in the morning when you wake up. Will I find you there?”

“Yes!” Pule.

“We are staying for the school holidays. Come back home please.”

Kefentse.

“Okay princess. I am looking forward to the holidays with you. Take care of each other until I get there okay?”

“Okay. See you in the morning.” Fifi.

“I love you guys; all of you”. Rea.

I smile. I know he threw that at me too.

“We love you too papa”, Fifi.

“I love you”. Pule.

“Okay, let me talk to your mom now please.” Rea.

I do not look at Fifi’s reaction. We had this conversation this morning and she and I reached an understanding. I take the phone from the table and put him off loudspeaker, then:

Me: "Riri"

Fifi laughs aloud. Pule laughs too, but I think he is laughing at the fact that Fifi is laughing. Fifi probably thinks I am calling her dad Rihanna.

Rea slightly giggles and says, "This call is the highlight of my entire day.

Thank you."

Me: "How did it go?"

Riri: "We will talk when I get there my love. But you don't ever have to worry about Mohato ever again."

Me: "My hero".

Riri: "I will be home in the next three hours. Wait up for me?"

Me: "Always".

Riri: "See you soon. I love you".

We hang up.

I put the kids to bed. They insisted on sleeping in Riri's king-sized bed and I did not protest. Princess Fifi read us a story again. Then I tucked the munchkins into bed. A knock on the door sends me back downstairs as I

picked up my book to read. I switch off the lights and keep the door slightly open.

Is it Riri already? It cannot be, it has not been three hours yet. Plus he has a key.

Okay, maybe it is Thandeka. She has zero sense of timing that one and knows no boundaries. What am I saying? What boundaries? These are her kids and they are sleeping upstairs in this house; she has every right to be here.

I adjust my face and smile as I open the door. I am shocked at who receives my smile.

It is queen-mother Nthatisi.

Chapter 12

Riri arrived in the wee hours of the morning. Thanks to the unexpected arrival of his mother, I have been unable to sleep. She walked in and went straight to bed in the spare bedroom. She has said absolutely nothing to me. I told Riri about the arrival of his mother and he was far more surprised than I was. Honestly, I am not even surprised – I just do not know what to do. Right now, I am drinking rooibos tea with honey, sitting on the kitchen bar stool, and listening to the very loud silence in the house as everyone is still fast asleep. I keep thinking about the events that took place in Tholoana Kingdom. What happened? What was said? Why is Queen-Mother Nthatsi here?

The hand that gently lands on my shoulder frightens me. I look behind me and see Riri smiling at me. I smile at him. He kisses my cheek, and sits on the bar stool next to mine.

“Good morning”, I say.

“Good morning to you gorgeous. The kids and I missed you in the king-sized bed. Are you still freaked out by mama’s unexpected arrival?”

I look at him.

“I met Salamina”. I say.

Riri looks at me. He bursts out laughing. I giggle.

“How come you did not tell me about her? She seems cool and she came here assuming that I knew exactly who she was and that I had heard A LOT about her”. I say, I am also laughing now.

Riri can barely breathe – the depth of his laughter is too intense.

“Mimi is Morena’s girlfriend of nine months. She is an acquired taste.” He says.

“I think she is really cool, warm, and inviting. I am excited to get to know her better. Plus, we decided that we were going to do lunch together some time.” I tell him.

“Are you serious?” Riri.

“Yes. You can join us if you wish.” I say.

“Please don’t do me any favours.” Him, still laughing.

I stop laughing. He looks at me, he stops laughing. The moment went from humorous to serious.

“Riri, what happened in Tholoana Kingdom?” I ask.

He smiles a little bit – mischievously smiles. What is he chuckling about?

Were the events of last night that humorous?

“Where does this Riri name come from exactly? Please explain.”

We both burst out laughing. He holds my hand and I get off the bar stool and find myself in between his thighs, my back against the kitchen-table in front of the bar stool. I put my hands on his face and baby-talk him saying, “Would you rather I called you Rea? Then we could be Rea and Kea?”

We keep on laughing. He tickles me and then baby-talks me saying, “But I like Rabi. I wanna call you Rabi.”

“And I wanna call you Riri”.

He says, “We can be Rabi and Riri”. We keep on laughing. We are in stitches and eyes are super teary. For the first time in a very long time, tears in my eyes are formed by happiness. I stop laughing, smile and stare

at him. He is so beautiful. He is handsome. He has a good heart. He rescued me. He is a good father. He would have made an incredible king. He catches me staring and smiling at him, admiring the fact that I am in his presence. He stops laughing too. He smiles back at me. We have a moment. He pulls me in and hugs me.

A “papa” disturbs us. I quickly jump out of his grip and we give our undivided attention to the babies. Pule is on Fifi’s hip. Pule extends his arms towards my direction and I walk up to both him and his sister, say good morning to Princess Fifi, and take Pule from her hip.

“Were you guys well-behaved for Aunty Rabi?” Riri says.

Pule nods his head. Fifi just attends to her iPhone.

“Kefe, I am talking to you.” Riri exclaims.

“Daddy, we were fine.” Kefe responds to her father, her tone at level unacceptable. She rolled her eyes even. I just held baby Pule in my arms and completely ignored the moment. I am still maintaining that Kefe is not a morning person. Riri is not impressed at all. A vicious knock on the door pleasantly interrupts this moment. Fifi runs to the door and opens

it. She is so delighted. She yells, “Mommy! Mommy! Mommy!” She is very happy. I guess Kefe is not a morning person around us. I look at Riri and he is not impressed at all. He buries his head in his hands. Fifi invites her mother in and Thandeka walks in – slow motion kind of walk-in. She still has her shades on and only removes them from her face when she is about ten seconds in the house. She is a hot woman – not beautiful, hot. She is voluptuous but not big. Her body is an hour glass, her stomach is even flatter than mine. She is also a strong liker of things; very stylish but you can also tell that she is not shy when it comes to experimenting with fashion. She is wearing a white high-waste skirt and a floral crop-top. It is a cute crop-top though; there is something either about her or her crop top that makes the floral work. Of course, she is wearing snake-skin stilettos. She looks at Riri and smiles, then her face changes when she looks at me and finds Pule on my hip.

“Good morning”. She finally says.

“What do you want Thandeka?” Riri.

I bump his arm. He looks at me. I whisper, “Not in front of the children”.

“I thought I would just come by and see how my children are doing. But I can clearly see that there was no need; I have been replaced.” Thandeka.

Riri is annoyed and I am just amazed. Where was this idiot brought up? Did her elders not teach her any lady-like etiquette?

She looks at Pule and says, “Has mommy been replaced my boy?” She takes him from my hip.

“Thandeka, nobody is trying to replace you.” I say to her. She looks at me in disbelief, as if her mind is questioning the moment, asking why I am even talking right now. She then says, “I would like to take my children out for a movie. Is that okay with you Reahile?”

Riri looks at her and just shrugs. Queen-mother Nthatisi walks down the stairs looking ever so regal. Her wig is beautiful and stylish. She is wearing a sweet-pink two-piece and white sandal heels. She is wearing red diamond earrings and a matching necklace. When she reaches the bottom of the stairs, she looks at the awkward situation in front of her. She looks at Riri, then Thandeka, then me... I blush. This woman’s beauty gets to me all the time. I cannot get used to it. I look away. She then says,

“Thandeka, you look good. You really do have a talent of finding men that know how to take care of you, don’t you?”

Thandeka is offended. Actually, I am offended for her.

“Nthatsi. You too look good. The royal trust fund is still taking care of you I see. At least the wife and mother to the current king hasn’t cut you off completely.” Thandeka.

Oh no she didn’t. She did not just throw shade at the queen-mother. She did not just call her by name. She did not just disrespect the queen-mother in her son’s house. I am beyond shocked. Everyone in the room can see it.

“Who the hell do you think you are talking to?” I cannot help myself. These words literally slipped out of my mouth. But I want an answer. My face has changed, my mood has changed – and now her attitude shall be sorted immediately.

“I am not talking to you”, Thandeka responds.

“Thandeka, were you raised by wolves? Is this what your elders taught you? To disrespect women older than you? Are these the kind of manners that you are teaching your children?”

Thandeka is getting upset. I see Riri starting to smile. The queen-mother's face is blank. I cannot read her at all. She seems un-moved. I don't care, yes I am doing this for her and to score points with her. I am also doing this so that Thandeka knows her place in this house; mother of the children or not. I will not tolerate disrespect from an insolent grown woman. I do not care if she is a city girl or a rural girl; the fact that she is black tells me that she knows the basics of respect such as respecting people older than you.

I take a step closer to her. She looks at me, questioning my audacity. I tell her, "Thandeka, you came here to fetch your children so that you can take them out to the movies. I think it is best that you leave now so that you can be on time for your movie." We both stare at each other. I think she gets it now: I have arrived. She does not move. I signal with the movement of my head and eyes that she should use the door she came in with to leave. She walks out and tells Kefe to follow her.

"But mommy, we haven't bathed yet", Kefe protests. Thandeka will hear none of it. She just says, "Kefentse just come. We will sort that out at home before we leave for the cinemas." They leave. Now it is just Riri, his

mother, and myself. Queen-mother Nthatisi looks at both Riri and I. She stares at us. Her eyes intimidate me. I try to walk away but Riri holds my hand, signalling for me to stay by his side.

“Is there something that you would like to say to us mother?” Riri asks his mother, arrogantly so.

“How’s your husband mofomahadi? Who is taking care of him while you are here in his brother’s kitchen?” She asks. This is the very first thing that she says to me. I have never been lucky when it came to mothers-in-law so I am barely phased by her attitude towards me. I am worried about her attitude towards her son though. I take it things did not go too well at Tholoana yesterday.

“Mother, you drove all the way from Tholoana Kingdom to my house to disrespect the woman that I love?” Riri.

“The woman that you love? That was fast. Have the two of you not only spent five minutes together? Now you love her? Whatever gold dances off your thighs must surely be magical.” Queen-mother Nthatisi says with the utmost undermining tone that could ever exist in the human language.

Riri viciously stands up from the chair and as he charges towards his mother, I pull him back to sit him down. The queen-mother is shocked. She grabs an apple and leaves the house. Neither Riri nor I asked her where she was going, but we are happy that she is gone. We look at each other. We literally have no idea what to say to each other. What a good morning.

After the sleepless night I had being followed by the morning I cruised into, I decided to take a bath. I put bath crystals, bath foam and eucalyptus oils in the water. I lit some scented candles and just sat there. I sat there and I thought about my life. I tried to search within me for answers that would explain what it is exactly that happened in Tholoana Kingdom. What was said? What the hell is queen-mother's problem? After my 35-minute bath, I streamed my face, scrubed it, cleansed it, toned it and moisturised it. I further lotioned my body. I walked out of the bathroom with my body wrapped in a towel and stepped into the bedroom. I see Riri sitting on the edge of the bed. His head is faced downwards and his

hands are tucked in between his thighs. I walk towards him and stand in front of him.

“You okay?” I ask him.

He nods.

“What happened in Tholoana, Reahile?” I ask, my tone firmer than it was this morning.

“He won’t give you the divorce.” His response. He is still not looking at me.

I sit down next to him.

“Why?” I ask. I do not know how I expect him to answer this but I have asked him anyway.

“Because you are the principle wife. It is also about pride. He made me pay damages or a fine for living with you while you neglected your duties as the principle wife.” He says this. I do not know what to say.

We are both silent.

“What are we going to do?” I ask him – my voice is very desperate.

“Kearabetswe, I am going to fight for you. I need to know that you are all in. I am too old to be chasing pavements. Are we in this or not?” He asks me. He is still not looking at me.

“Yes, Riri, I am all in. You know this.” I respond.

“You don’t understand, Rabi. The only way that you and I can be together moving forward is if you and I get married.”

I am shocked. Seriously? I am not even divorced yet and he is already proposing marriage to me?

“Reahile...”

He interjects and says, “Rabi, I love you. I am ready to fight for you. The thing is Rabi, Mohato is going to send men to come and fetch you and take you back to the royal house. Your parents were part of the meeting and the Mohales were demanding fines from them because you left. Your family promised to bring you back to the royal house. That means your family, or Mohato’s people will come and fetch you. I can only protect you if you agree to be my wife. That is the only way that I will have

grounds to stand on. But that is not even why I want to marry you; I want this house to be your home forever.”

I put my index finger on his lips. He keeps quiet.

“I will marry you Riri”. I say this. I feel good saying this, I will not lie. I take off Mohato’s ring and put it in Riri’s hand, I ask him to get rid of it or even return it to the throne, I don’t care. He holds me; he REALLY holds me. I am wrapped in his arms and draped in his scent.

“Rabi, I would prefer it if you do not fight him. I will fight him for you. Moving forward, I do not want you to ever engage yourself in a situation that could hurt me or even offend what we are trying to build towards.”

I do not say anything.

“I need to take a nap. I feel really tired.” I tell him. He picks me up, cradling me, pulls the blankets open and places me down. He covers my towel-wrapped body with the blankets. He then lies on top of the blankets but cups me close to him using his front side and arms.

“This is going to be a difficult journey isn’t it?” I ask.

“It is. I think you should go away for some time. I want you to just get a break from all of this. Let me deal with this so that we can breathe right again. Go out there, focus on your magazine and come back rejuvenated.”

He says.

I am not going to lie. That is exactly what I need. I am about to become a wife afresh. I am dealing with nonsense left, right, and centre. I need a break.

“I start work soon Riri; I cannot just go on holiday”.

“You have about four more days. Pick anywhere you would like to go, take Gugu with you and just go out there and relax. Please love.” He says.

“And the kids?” I ask.

“Don’t worry about anything my love, just go out there. Choose a place and I will get my PA to hook you up with plane tickets and accommodation. Just choose a place.” He requests.

“Emeralds in the Vaal. The last time I went there, I was in Varsity. I loved it there. It is close, fun, and away. Gugu and I will drive. Just ask your PA to please get us decent accommodation.”

He kisses my forehead, and then says, "When you wake up from your nap, it will be sorted. Rest for now." With this, I fall asleep.

I had the best sleep ever. I am preparing dinner when Thandeka brings the kids back. She does not even come inside the house this time around and I am okay with that. Fifi tells me about her fun afternoon with her mother. She seems happy. She stares at me for a while then says, "Rabi, you know I have been meaning to ask you. Howcome you clean and cook in this house? Isn't this part of Maditaba's job?"

"Excuse me?" I respond, shocked at the things coming out of this child's mouth.

"Daddy pays Maditaba money every week so that she can cook and clean. Why are you doing it?"

"Is Maditaba your age?" I ask, annoyed.

"No, she is actually old enough to be my grandmother". She says this and giggles.

“Then stop calling her by her first name. She is mme Maditaba to you.”

She realises that I am serious. She is also now tense.

“And you need to respect her a lot more. She is helping us out here at home. Her job is very difficult, that is why nobody wants to do it.” I tell her.

“That is not what my mommy told me. My mommy says that the reason why we pay them such small money is because their jobs are not rocket science. Anyone can clean. It is not that difficult. Besides, we pay them as a favour. Mommy says we creating job opportunities.”

Thandeka is a piece of work. She and Mohato belong together. Fifi says all of this without a single care in the world. She actually thinks she is proving a point.

“Fifi, come here.” I know I said I am tired, but I am about to teach this child what domestic work is and why she needs to be a little bit more aware of what she is actually saying. I hand her an apron. She looks at me, confused. I tell her that she is going to help me clean the house and prepare dinner.

“Why? That is Maditaba’s job”. She really irritates me when she does not acknowledge the fact that Maditaba is not her age.

“You said this is a job that anyone can do right? Come then.” I say.

“I didn’t say that, my mom did.” She says, trying to talk her way out of this.

“But you agree with her, don’t you?”

She does not say anything. She accepts the apron. I get two buckets and fill them with water and the necessary cleaning chemicals. We start in the guest bedroom. It is carpet so we use a brush and some water to clean the carpet. She looks at the way that I do it and she too helps me. As soon as we are done with the carpet, we dust the wooden bedroom furniture. When we are done with the guest bedroom, we clean her bedroom. It is tiled and has pink loose carpets. We brush the carpets with water once again, and then mop her tiles. We deep clean her bathroom too. We then use tile polish to shine the tiles when we are done. We do the same in her brother’s room and her father’s room. As we are about to start cleaning the passage and staircase, she complains about being tired. I tell her that the work is not done so we cannot take a break.

“Meditaba takes breaks all the time.” She sulks.

“Let’s please finish Fifi, we still need to cook”. We clean the passage, and the staircase. We get to the TV room. We dust and polish the furniture, wash the leather couches using Dove soap and plain water. Mme Segametsi taught me this trick. I miss her. We use the leather polish to polish the couches.

The brat is crying. She is complaining about her body being painful. She cries about being tired and hungry. I make her a sandwich. Riri comes home and finds us eating a sandwich. I fill him in on the lesson that she needs to learn: respecting domestic service. He thinks this is funny but decides not to even get involved. After the sandwiches are finished, we finish cleaning the TV room and then we move to deep cleaning the kitchen. She is beyond annoyed with me. We then clean the lounge.

When we are done, it is about 7pm. I tell her to take a shower so that we can start making dinner. She does. I also take a shower. Riri asked me what the purpose of all of this was again, giggling and practically making a joke out of the laziness of her daughter. To be honest with you, I am just as lazy. I hated cleaning when my mother made me clean. My mother was

borderline OCD. She took cleanliness way too far. I, too, hated every minute of all of that cleaning. But, you know what? I am not rude to domestic workers. I needed to ensure that Fifi respects domestic service a little bit more. Knowing Fifi's mouth, she would have run that mouth to Mme Maditaba about domestic work being a favour and not a job. She had to be dealt with.

We prepare supper. She is a walking zombie, but I am not letting her go. She will learn. We set-up the table and then dish for everyone. Queen-mother Nthatisi is back and joins us for dinner.

"The two of you made a mean dish. Thank you ladies." Riri.

"Thank you." I say.

Kefentse is not feeling this conversation at all. She just wants to finish her food and go to sleep. She carelessly says, "Rabi please pass me the salt."

Before I can even pass the salt, Riri is on his feet and is hitting Fifi. We are all taken aback; well just me. Queen-mother Nthatisi is not even phased.

"Reahile, what are you doing? Leave her alone! Stop it!" I scream. Baby Pule is crying. Reahile stops. Kefentse looks at him, and she cries.

“You had better learn some manners and fast. She is not Rabi to you. She is about to become my wife. She is about to become your mother.” Reahile yells.

Kefentse runs up the stairs crying. Queen-mother Nthatisi is staring at us, shocked at what Reahile has just said. I take baby Pule and run upstairs.

I guess our dinner is concluded.

After I calmed Fifi down and put Pule to bed, I phoned Gugu regarding our get-away, and she is so keen. She said that she will sort leave application out when we get back. I am really looking forward to this trip, but I am worried about Riri and Fifi.

Riri walks into the bedroom. We need to talk.

He walks past me as I am sitting on the bed and goes into the bathroom.

I wish to wait for him but the urge to talk about what he did to Fifi gets the better of me so I follow him into the bathroom. I close the door behind me and he realises that he is not alone in the bathroom. He stares at me, confused and honestly interested if I am really going to watch him pee.

“I am going to take a dump”. He says. We look at each other.

“Well I need to talk to you.” I say. We stare at each other and we burst into laughter. He settles on the toilet seat and I sit inside the empty bathtub. We both really cannot believe what is going on here but we decide to joke through the awkwardness of me watching him “take a dump”, then I start.

“Riri, I really don’t like the fact that you hit Fifi for calling me Rabi. It really wasn’t necessary.”

Him: “Rabi, Kefentse needs to learn some manners. This is not her mother’s house where she gets away with being disrespectful. You are not her friend. You are not her age. She needs to learn the discipline of differentiating between an adult and a child.” He has a point – with reference to Mme Maditaba though. Fifi and I have an agreement. I gave her permission to call me Rabi.”

Me: “I get that and I understand your sentiments. But my love, you also need to understand that if you force me onto her, she will hate me as a form of resistance; not because I treat her badly.”

Him: "So we must beg her to accept you? Forget it. An elder is an elder. An elder married to your father is your mother. I hate Mohato's mother with a passion, but when I address her, she is Mme."

Me: "Riri, you cannot use Tholoana methods to bring up a city girl like Kefentse. The only thing Tholoana about her is her paternity. You need to find a way to discipline or bond with her that is familiar with her. My love, Fifi and I are still trying to build a relationship. She and I reached an understanding that we are friends until she allows me into her life as anything more. I gave her permission to call me Rabi. My plan is to let her come to me naturally, not force myself upon her – especially as a mother."

Him: "My love, I appreciate what you are doing very much. However, we cannot have that, it's unheard of. You are not Rabi to Kefentse. If I must hit her again for her to understand that like my father hit me to accept another mother in my life, then so be it".

This breaks my heart. I do not know why, but there is something inside of me that sinks as he says this. I say to him: "Reahile, Fifi already feels that she is not completely loved by her mother's husband. Do you know that she was slightly resistant towards me because she thought that by me

being in your life, she would have another house that belongs to her parent that she is not completely welcome in. Baby, the truth is that you are her father. You are her first love and you are the benchmark of the men she will allow into her life as well as the kind of treatment that she will accept from men.”

I see him engage with what I am saying deep in his thoughts, so I continue, “If you will hit her to accept me, she will always see me as the woman that she was ‘hit’ into accepting. She will see me as the woman that her father will always choose first and put before her. That creates an insecurity in a little girl that she may end up filling with very unnecessary people or things. Every girl puts her father on a pedestal. If her father disappoints her, that is it babe. She will find it very difficult to see what she should in a man; you will be indirectly forcing her to teach herself about the love of a man. If you are too violent with her, you make that kind of treatment acceptable in her eyes. You need to be gentle with her, so that when she starts dating, she will know that being dealt with in a violent manner is unacceptable.”

He is quiet. The only loud scream in here is the smell of his faeces. I want to laugh but I need to let what I have said to him marinate. I ask him, "Did you really hit Thandeka?" He places his head in the palm of his hands and slightly nods. He then says, "It only happened once. I know that it was never supposed to happen, but I didn't know how else to solve that particular issue. I went for anger management. I will never hit you baby, I promise."

I am quiet. I ask, "What was your father like? If you don't mind me asking."

He looks at me. He hardens his face. He begins, "He was a good man. He was a disciplinarian at most. He was always busy. He never really had a close relationship with any of us, his kids, but then we grew up knowing and understanding that we were not like any other family. Our father was a king and he never had a normal life or could have normal relationships with his children. The only time we ever really saw him was when we were in meetings and he had to discipline one of us. He was always telling us that we are princes and we had to behave in a certain way. He made

sure that he whipped us into those ways. But, he was a good man. Our mothers said so. Our history books said so.”

I take in what he said. The things I learned about their father when studying politics (alongside my Media Studies) said otherwise. I critically analysed that man’s methods and he was quite the controversial topic. I have a 15-page essay on the ruling tactics of that man. But anyway, I am not there. I am here with his son. I say to him, “What kind of relationship do you want to have with your children?”

He looks at me and says, “My father was a good man, Rabi”.

I do not say anything. He then says, “But I want more with my kids.”

Me: “Then you need to do better. Try other methods. My marriage with Mohato is proof of the fact that the Tholoana way of doing things is not always the best way of doing things. There are contemporary ways of raising children now. They may not all be the best ways, but they are worth a try. Kefe needs a friend in one of her parents. She needs a safe home. Don’t push her away.”

He is silent. Then he says, “How do I fix it?”

I reply, "You need to go into her room and talk to her. Tell her why you hit her but acknowledge that you should have rather spoken to her about it and understood where she was coming from by calling me Rabi. Then reach a common ground with her."

"I do not negotiate with children, Kearabetswe." Him.

"I know. But with your own children, you trial and error all methods until you find one that works. The aim is to love them, have them learn from you, and raise them in love. The aim is to teach them sacrifice but try to maintain a Disneyland of some sort in their "happy place" forever. Keep your eye on the prize, my love; whatever it takes."

He is quiet. I jump out of the bathtub and kneel at his knees, place my hands on his and say, "My love, every parent should know when to stop hitting their children and start talking to them. That is very important."

He is quiet. He is touched. I can see it in his face. His faeces smells and I think I am getting a headache so I need to get out of here. He notices that the smell is getting to me. He grabs my head and places it on his lap. I tell him I need to get out of here immediately. He laughs so hard it even starts

hurting my feelings. I feel like I am being laughed at by the kids on the playground. The he says, "Can you wipe my bum at least? I am done."

"No!" I exclaim. I escape his hands and get out of the bathroom. He is still dying of laughter.

Mxm.

Chapter 13

I woke up this morning wrapped in Riri's arms. It amazes me how I am practically engaged to this man but we have not had sex yet. I do not know if it is because he is so gentle and patient, or if I am scared of intimacy since Thapelo, or we are just genuinely taking things slow. He spoke to the princess as per my request. He asked me to be there with him to explain certain things should he be lost in translation, considering that it is the first time that he is doing something like this. I told him to have a little chat with Pule. He did not have to see his daddy do his sister like that. The conclusion was that we would all go to Carnival City for movies and games as a way of him making it up to them. However, we had to make certain things very clear such as what he expects in terms of respect in the house. The babies too had a thing or two to say about how they would like to be disciplined. Mind you, Kefe prefers the naughty corner as opposed to beatings. Riri has no idea how that system works so he said he would confiscate her cellphone should she not follow rules or be disrespectful. She negotiated her way to having at least three warnings. Her reasoning being that she will not know everything first time around.

Fair enough. We were all happy when we went to bed. I am also excited about my trip today to Emerald with my girl Gugs.

VIOLENT KNOCK ON THE DOOR!

I walk out of the bedroom, in my blue knee-torn jeans, white all-stars and white camisole. I bump into Riri on the passage coming from his study. He tells me to go and put the kids in the guest bedroom with his mother. I oblige. He goes downstairs and I do as I am told. Queen-mother Nthatsi, who still has not spoken to me since our kitchen incident with Thandeka, gives me a rather disapproving look. I am not sure if I am too worried about that right now. I say what I need to say to her and keep the kids in there with her. I then go downstairs to see who that is and what the silence has come to be about. As I walk down the stairs, I see my parents, Kamo, and my two sisters sitting on the couches. They watch me as I walk down the stairs. I think I know what they have come to do here. I sit next to Riri. He too knows why they are here; I can see it in his eyes.

Me: "Good morning everyone".

My mother wastes no time. She just says, "Pack your things, we have come to fetch you and take you back to your husband. What is happening here is unheard of. How dare you embarrass us like this."

I look at Riri. He is still looking down, playing with his fingers and probably thinking hard.

"Right now, Kearabetswe!" My mother yells.

I respond, "I am not going anywhere with you." The shock on my siblings' faces is indescribable.

My mother is just downright annoyed with me. She stands up and charges towards me, grabs me by my wrist, hurting me like a demon, and I push her off me screaming, "Get your hands off me! Do you think I would go anywhere with you? You put me in this mess. You married me off to an animal that cares about nothing but his throne. You're expecting me to let you take me back there? You are sick! You are crazy! Get out and leave me alone." My mother slaps me. Riri stands up immediately and as he charges towards my mother and I, my father and Kamo stand up and charge towards him. He raises his hands in surrender, stops walking and

says: "With all due respect, you have no business coming into our home and disturbing our peace."

"Give us our child." My father demands. His voice low but very firm.

"I cannot give you anything that is not a possession. If she says she is not going anywhere, I am not going to force her to leave with you." Riri humbly replies.

My family looks at him. I walk towards him and stand next to him. I look at my family and say, "Please leave. All of you".

My mother is disgusted with me to say the least. She makes a phone call. Two seconds after she hangs up, a gang of men dressed in black come charging into the house and attempt to drag me out of the house. I scream and try fight them, but they have one job to do and one job only – to get me out of here. I scream, crying even. I hear a gun shot. The men drop me immediately and I hit my head on the ground. I look up, one of the men who were pulling me out has been shot in the shoulder – by Zethembe. The next thing I see is Gugu next to me saying, "Zala are you okay? Can you move?" I am dizzy. However, I do remember that we were to meet here and the men were going to drive us to Emerald. I guess that is over

now. Before I can answer her, Zethembe and Riri are chasing people away from me and out of the house with guns. The men resist a bit, but after Riri shoots about three men, they are all out – dragging the injured ones out too.

Then I hear my mother say, “Kearabetswe, let us go right now. I am asking you this for the last time.” I hear Gugu answer her saying, “Mma she doesn’t want to go anywhere with you.” My mom viciously responds, “I am not talking to you wena. Kearabetswe, get up from that floor and let us go right now!”

“No!” I say. She is in disbelief, I emphasise, “Get out and stay out of my life – for good. If you ever come back here to take me back to Mohato, I will shoot you myself.” She stares at me. Kamo holds her hand and walks her out of the house. The rest of my family follow them out. As the door shuts behind them, I cry like a baby in Gugu’s arms. She sits flat on her butt on the floor in our TV room, and I just cry. She just sits there and soothes my back.

Gugu helped me pack my bags. I did not have much stuff anyway, just the bit that Riri bought me to help me get settled. I do not even have a travel bag; I am using one of his. As we zip my bag and my handbag, Riri slightly knocks on the door and walks in. He looks at the bandage at the side of my neck and looks down, sad. Gugu squeezes my arm and walks towards the door. She squeezes Riri's arm as well on her way out the bedroom.

"Are you sure about this? You don't have to go my love." Riri says this to me as Gugu closes the door behind her. I walk towards him, wrap my arms around his waist and place my head on his chest. He holds me. I remove my head from his chest and look up to him. We kiss. I then say to him, "Riri, I have to do this. I love you. I respect you. I will not disrespect you in anyway. My living here is bad for you – bad for us. You know how our culture is. As soon as the divorce is through and we have done the necessary practices, I will move back in here and we will live "happily ever after".

I kiss his cheek.

He giggles. He says, “Am I allowed to come and visit often and you come visit too?”

I smile,

“Always.”

He laughs.

“Then you shouldn’t be moving out. You are wasting money on rent.” He says this and we laugh. Then he says, “Give me five minutes to pack an overnight bag. We will drop the kids off at Thandeka’s place and I will sleep over tonight, just to settle you in nicely.”

“Okay, no problem. I will go and say goodbye to your mother in the meantime.” He looks at me, shocked to say the least. I am shocked too. However, this conversation has to be had. The queen-mother and I have to find a way to communicate at some point; I am marrying her son soon.

“Are you sure?” He asks.

“It has to be done, Riri”. I say.

“Would you like me to come with you?” He asks.

“No my love, I am good.” I kiss him on his cheek and walk out to go to the queen-mother’s bedroom.

The walk to the bedroom is a very long 35 seconds. I knock twice. I hear a “Come in” and I am in the bedroom at the blink of the eye. I stand at the door.

“Mme Mofomahadi”, I say to her. She nods her head as a sign that she acknowledges me.

“Mme, we need to talk. Please.” I plead with her.

She looks at me, takes my entire presence in, and then finally says, “Sit down, my child”.

My heart performs a mini-cartwheel, at least she referred to me as her child. I hope this will go well. I sit on the open bedroom couch next to her. She looks at me, her eyes basically telling me not to just sit there but rather to proceed with what I want to talk about.

“Mme, I need you to tell me how you feel about everything that has happened. I know you are upset, but I do need you to lash out if you have to, ask me questions so that I can answer you. Anything Mme, but please,

I don't know how to respond to silence and the last thing I want, is to come across as if I am disrespectful towards you."

She looks at me, then she asks, "When exactly did you realise that you love my son?"

That is not exactly the question I was expecting, but I answer her as honestly as I possibly can by saying, "Mme, I am not really sure if I ever loved Mohato. I tried to love him. I think I did feel for him. But if what I felt was love, would it have easily turned into hate?"

She looks at me, waiting for an answer to her question, then I say, "Despite being married to Mohato and feeling unexplainable feelings for him, what I am feeling for your son is a feeling that I am experiencing for the first time. I do love him. At first, I thought that I was falling into the hero-syndrome trap. He practically rescued me from that life that I didn't even choose for myself. But the closer I get to his heart, the more my heart confirms that I want to stay with him forever."

She responds, "You know Mofomahadi, the life we live is not easy. The power of a king dictates the life of his wife. I know what they did to you. However, the way Thapelo and Mohato describe what happened is very

different to what Reahile says you said happened. I believe you my child. I have my reasons.”

There is a sad silence between us.

“Thank you Mme. I don’t think you understand how much that means to me.” I say, sobbing.

“I want out of that marriage Mme. I cannot be with Mohato anymore. I don’t want to be a royal wife.” I plead.

She holds my hand.

“My child, we went to the royal house to plead your divorce. Mohato is going to fight us. Your parents and his people being here this morning is an indication that the battle has started. We all have to go back to Tholoana for the war.”

“War?” What does she mean by this?

“Yes my child, a war. Literally. It is a war for the throne. It is a war for you – the queen of Tholoana Kingdom. You leaving the side of the throne has created political and cultural instability. Any wife can be replaced, but

not the principle wife. That is why I need to know whose side you are on. I am not taking my children to war for an unsure woman.”

I look down. This woman is incredible. I do not understand why Riri did not tell me about the war. Not only have I upgraded from a default king to the rightful king, but I have also upgraded from ratchet mother-in-law to the epitome of elegance and regal. I get up from my chair and kneel next to her. I hold her hands and begin my sort-of-prepared speech:

“Mme, I have decided to move out today. Out of respect for Reahile, out of respect for you, and out of respect for what he and I are trying to build. Mme, I never had the opportunity to make a decision with my heart when it came to Mohato. Now that I have choices, I am going to do things right. I may not have the support of my parents, but he is all I need. At some point in life Mme, I pray that we will at least have your blessing. Mme, I love your son.”

She stretches out her hands, I stand up from the ground and hug her. She squeezes me tightly, I squeeze back and inhale her beautiful scent. She gently rubs my cut on the side of my neck. We let go of each other. I tell

her my friends and Reahile are waiting for me and we have to get going, she stands up and holds my hand. We are about the same height. She says, "You are one brave woman. It is becoming clearer to me that it is neither Mohato nor Reahile that crown the throne. You have become the Helen of Troy in this family. I look forward to getting to know your worth that crowns that throne."

This cuts me really deep. Helen of Troy? Wow. Helen of Troy is a controversial topic of love. Perhaps my situation is the same in terms of merit; but it definitely is different in terms of intention. It was never my intention or wish to start a war. Reahile knocks once and opens the door, he peeks his head through and asks, "Everything okay in here?" I just look at him. His mother smiles at him. I smile too, hesitantly.

"Ready to go?" He asks.

I nod.

"Goodbye Mme. Keep well." I say.

"Goodbye my child. Take care of yourself." She says.

Reahile stretches out his hand, I hold onto it. We leave.

Chapter 14

So who exactly decided that the ideal feminine professional look is highly inclusive again? These shoes are ridiculous when you have to be walking from one office to another, or even one presentation to another. My feet are forever protesting. As a result, I am on a coffee strike. Every time I think about going to the kitchen (at work) to get some coffee, the pain exerted from my 7-inch heels to my feet inspire me to stay seated at my desk.

I have been working for three months now. My girl Gugu seriously hooked me up. I am even at a point where I am able to be a content producer for some media communication here at work. It is so much fun. It is my first real job. I enjoy waking up in the morning and complaining about needing more sleep. I like getting to work and wishing that the weekend can be the next day; or perhaps even wishing for more April (into May) -kind-of long weekends; where you forever have four working days in a week. The best days of all, are pay days. I enjoy my shopping sprees.

Things have been amazing between Riri and me. He spends a million days at my little flat. It is not as big as his house, but it is cosy and he likes it there. Plus, his mom seems to have moved into his house. Things are pretty bad in Tholoana. They are so bad that if she or any of her sons set foot in Tholoana, Mohato has called on the army to basically kill them. Morena (Riri's brother) lives with his mom as well at Riri's house. Morena is quite sad about it; he was actually one of Mohato's advisers. Mohato attempted to send an army to "finish off" the queen-mother and her sons, but Riri fought back using the law and guns. He made it very clear that Mohato's jurisdictional rule ends at the Tholoana Kingdom border. Further than that, both he and Riri are equal before the eyes of the law.

The babies have been visiting us a lot as well. As much as we love having them around, we have to be extra careful with their safety. Mohato has become a mad man. So, sleep overs happen at my little 3 bedroom flat that Riri has now bought for me. My main bedroom has a king-size bed for sleepovers with the kids. Riri and I still have not had any sex yet. No, it is not because I am trying to be difficult, but I have been going to therapy to deal with what happened to me. Riri has come to a few sessions with me,

just to try and understand my intimacy issues, and there is a lot of progress. Any day may be the day for us.

Riri also hated the fact that when Gugu was unavailable, I would take an uber to work. He believes that uber drivers are creepy and are stalkers. He is not really a controlling man, but his intentions do get the better of him sometimes. I do not protest with him, I just let him fuss over me. I love it. I am driving one of his cars. Of all the cars I could have chosen, I took a manual car. It gets on my very last nerve every time I drive. Let us just address the fact that the car is a BMW 4 series. This means that the car instalments are way above R6000 a month. My friend, if you are paying more than R2000 on a monthly basis for a manual car, you are being ripped off. We pay far too much money for us to be changing gears and have banging cars such as BMWs randomly switching off in the middle of the road because you forgot to change down a gear. Such cars should be driving themselves.

“Rabi! Earth to Rabi”, she clicks her fingers in front of my face as she says this, trying to bring my attention back to work. Little does she know that she is also bringing me back to the reality of the pain in my baby toes

thanks to these heels that I am wearing. This girl just really gets on my nerves. It is not exactly pleasant to be “managed” by my fiancé’s ex-wife.

“Yes, Thandeka. What’s going on?” I ask. We try to keep things professional, but sometimes it is necessary to pull rank when necessary; just to make it clear that we are not friends. She always feels the need to remind me that at work, she is my boss. However, when she brings up the “kids” issue or visitation matters, I always pull rank and remind her who the leading lady in Riri’s life is.

“I need you to attend a meeting on my behalf please, in Rosebank. I double-booked myself. I need to be in Sandton. The meeting in Rosebank is about the online content of the new series we want to launch online”. Is she really telling me this on the one day I am wearing hectic-inch heels? Now I must hustle my manual BMW car through traffic from Parktown to Rosebank? Via Wits students driving around JHB between lectures? Can Thandeka please not test me - not today Satan.

“Thandeka, can we not video call these people? I can still be present at the meeting and still be here at work.” I try to negotiate.

“It wasn’t a request. Please get moving, your meeting starts in one hour.”

She says this as she dumps a massive file in front of me and clicks her heels in the opposite direction. I am tempted to take this stapler and throw it against her head so her brain can be bumped back into the advancement of technology that has made video calling a possible meeting option. However, professionalism gets the better of me. I pack my laptop and handbag quietly and swiftly find my way to my manual BMW.

The meeting was not even worth a minute of my time. I sat in a boardroom full of men who could not reach a conclusion about the kind of content that they want for this online series. I do not even remember what the conclusion was. However, I have successfully taken it upon myself to work on the content. I will work on it tonight, pitch it to Thandeka tomorrow, and then take it from there.

I have so much work to do and such little time. The magazine also takes up some of my time. I am waist-deep in the research and am coming across incredible reads. I do wish I had a way to reach Mme Segametsi though. She is the soul of this magazine. I wonder how she and her

daughter are doing. Where will I find domestic workers in JHB who are as willing to talk? I tried to form a relationship-sort-of with Mme Maditaba but she seems to be off with me; almost as if she does not like me. I just do not know why. Maybe she liked it best when she was just cleaning for Riri. Maybe she hates having a woman around being specific about what she should clean and when. I have been under the impression that I wasn't too bad. I told her to not clean our main bedroom as I will do it myself. I told her to not worry about cooking because I do it. Now that we spend a lot of time at my little flat (compared to Mohato's big house), she comes to clean at our flat twice a week. She still does not cook nor does she clean our main bedroom. So where exactly am I going wrong with her? Or is it that I am just trying to find Mme Segametsi in her and she is just simply not her?

I spent about three unnecessary hours in that stupid meeting. I am exhausted, my feet hurt from these heels and pushing the accelerator and clutch. I think I want to just go home. There is no way that I am going back to the office. However, I will be decent enough to phone Thandeka and tell her about the meeting. After three rings:

“Rabi? What is it?” Her.

Me: “Hi, Thandeka. That meeting was a complete waste of time. Those people have no idea what they want in terms of content. We all walked out of there still very much clueless about a way forward.”

Thandeka: “You are giving me problems, Rabi. I don’t want to hear problems. I only want to hear solutions. Why didn’t you take over that meeting?”

Me: “Thandeka, I didn’t even set-up that meeting. I didn’t even know about this meeting until a few hours ago. At what time was I supposed to come up with an agenda?”

Thandeka: “Solutions, Rabi. I want solutions please. We are going live in nine months. What do you have up your sleeve?”

Me: “Give me two days. I will have a presentation ready for you by the end of the week. I will schedule a meeting with your PA.”

Thandeka: “Much better. I will see you tomorrow. I am not going back to work.”

Good. I was not going back to the office neither.

Me: "Okay, Thandeka bye".

She hangs up.

I drive myself back home; I am super exhausted. I still have to cook when I get home.

Sigh...

I park outside and realise that Riri is already home. This is going to be very nice. He hardly comes home early. I park the car and go inside the house. I open the door and am greeted by a set table – candle set. The vanilla in the scented candles is very welcoming. The red roses scattered around the table romantically invite me into the mood and moment. There is also some mood music and soulful RnB welcoming me in my home today: Tamia, Into you. This is so beautiful. Mr God's Window continues to impress. He walks into the TV room, walking out from one of the bedrooms. He smiles and watches me take all of this in.

"You are home early." He says.

I run to him and hug him. He kisses my forehead.

“You did all of this for me?” I ask.

“I did. But you arrived too early. Your food hasn’t been delivered yet. I am still setting up.” He says. We both giggle. This is beautiful. This is just perfect; late food or not.

“But I’ll tell you what, we can improvise. How about you take a shower, after your shower, I give you a nice full body massage... then we eat. I am pretty sure the food will have arrived by the time you are done with your shower.”

I agree and head into the bedroom. I start undressing myself, his phone rings. I ignore it. I wrap myself in a towel and wrap the second towel around my head. His phone rings again. I ignore it. I start wiping my make-up off with baby wipes, the phone rings again. Okay, maybe this is something important... or maybe it is the food people delivering the food, whoever those people are. I walk around the king-sized bed to his side of the bed. I look at the caller ID, it reads “Thandeka”. What does she want? All of a sudden, my stomach is untangling a few knots yet seems to be tying them together at the same time. The discomfort spreads to my abdomen and I feel like I want to poop. The phone stops ringing. An sms

comes in, thank you iPhone for displaying the full message on the top of the screen without me having to unlock the phone. The sender is Thandeka and it reads,

"I really had a good time with you this afternoon Rea. I was hoping that I would see you again before Rabi knocks off and locks you inside the house for the rest of the night."

My head feels light. A tear escapes my eye. How is it possible? She was in Sandton this afternoon that is why she could not make it to the meeting. Oh no, she sent me to that meeting so that she can have time with my man while I waste my time with those stupid men. Riri? How could he? I almost fall flat on the ground but the bed catches me instead. Thandeka calls again. I want to answer, but my entire being will not let me. All of a sudden I am unable to handle an iPhone.

I walk to the bathroom and step into the shower. I listen to the water hit my body as tears fall from inside my body. I stand in the shower. I just stand there. I listen to it all – the water and the reality of Riri cheating on me with his baby mama. How did I not know?

I feel a presence come in from behind me. It gently holds me, caressing my neck and nurturing my senses. But I respond to none of it. My senses are disappointing him just like he has disappointed me. I step out of the shower without even saying a word to him. He does not protest. I step into the bedroom and start smelling his clothes. I smell her on his vest. He got naked with her just before he set all of this up for me. I look at his phone and the screen no longer shows the number of missed calls or messages anymore. He read them. He probably responded to them already. He walks into the bedroom and finds his phone in my hands. He stands at the door and gives me an angry and confused and disappointed look at one go.

“Is this what we do now? Go through each other’s phones?” He says.

“You dog! You sleeping with your ex! You are sleeping with your baby mama”. I whisper; but my whisper is loud enough for him to hear and understand that the guilt trip is not on me tonight.

“What are you doing with my phone? Why do you have my phone?” He asks, not polite at all.

“How long have you been sleeping with her?” I manage to spit this sentence out over the lump that is stuck in my throat.

“Kearabetswe...”

“HOW LONG?!” I yell. He jumps. He is scared. He tries walking towards me but I throw the phone at him. He knows that means that he better stay away from me. I am one mad black woman right now. I have been bottling up so much. Between my mother, Mohato, and Reahile, I do not know how it is possible that I am not yet in a mental institution. Reahile is standing still in a towel, staring at me and very confused on how to approach this matter.

“She is my boss Reahile. She sends me away to meetings so that the two of you can screw each other? She gives me extra work so that I don’t notice when you get home super late – after screwing her. I am always exhausted – too exhausted to notice her cheap pharmacy perfume stuck on your vest like the smell of a baby prostitute stuck to its pimp. I trusted you. I love you. You said you loved me too. Then you do this? With Thandeka? Of all the vaginas you could have cheated on me with, you choose to bring

me her STDs?" I am going on like a woman possessed. I am exhausted. Reahile was never meant to be the one who did this to me.

He tries to say something to me but I am out of the bedroom before he can even put a sentence together. He runs after me denying the fact that he is cheating on me. I pull out a steak knife from one of the knife holders in the kitchen, he freezes... and he starts singing like a bird.

"It was a mistake baby, I am sorry."

"It was never meant to happen, my love, please forgive me."

"I will do anything to fix this; I will never speak to her again if that is what you want, please my love."

The rage inside of me gets the better of me. I start shouting like a mad woman now,

"WERE YOU WAITING FOR ME TO CATCH YOU BEFORE YOU SAW THE NECESSITY TO STOP TALKING TO HER? TO STOP SLEEPING WITH HER? OR DO YOU JUST PREFER PLAYING UMAMA NOBABA WITH HER?"

I am getting closer and closer to him with the knife and he keeps running away from me, mostly running around the table. Three candles are already on the floor. They switched themselves off somewhere in between all the madness.

“Baby, you need to put that knife down so we can have a conversation. Please my love.”

I stop running around in my towel, with a knife in my hand. He stops running away from me. He is right by the door.

“Get the hell out of my house!” I say, unexpectedly so.

“What?” He says, super shocked. Did he really not see this coming?

“Turn around, use that door behind you, and exit my house.” I repeat this, not taking into consideration at all that he bought this place.

“Love, where must I go? I am in a towel for crying out loud.” Him, sounding very much close to tears. He looks very ashy too. I would give him Vaseline to lotion himself at least, but no, he can walk to Thandeka’s house in that towel, no shoes, and ashy as hell. I am not even letting him in the bedroom to get his keys and phone.

“GET OUT!” I scream and charge towards him with the knife in my hand.
He is out of there in a split second.

I wake up with a killer headache. I champagne-ed myself to sleep last night. My phone has been in my car since I came back from work yesterday and I am just not strong enough to face the sun just to get a phone. I also decided that I am not going into work today. His phone has been ringing non-stop. It is Thandeka calling. I guess she misses her man and does not know yet that his phone is not in his possession. That means he did not go to her. Good.

I step out of bed and go to the kitchen. I open a bottle of wine and down it from the bottle. I sit on the tile in my towel from yesterday's shower. I drink and cry. I want to pray. But I don't know how to start. I do not know what to say. Why did you not let Skhumbuzo and I make it to the altar?

His phone rings again, the battery is dying, thank God. Within minutes, the wine is finished. I open another bottle. I gulp it. It hits me – the truth about me – I am a woman mostly cheated on and raped by men who possess the same surname. The moment my parents gave me away to a

husband, they gave me away to a throne. That throne has taken everything it could possibly take from me. I cannot even breathe properly. The throne has taken away my choice; even my options are restricted within the boundaries of the Mohales. My body... they do what they will with it and when they are done, they seek other vaginas. I cannot even go home (Gulps wine), I cannot call my mother to be there for me (Another gulp of wine and as I stand up from the floor. I slightly lose my balance but I hold on to the cupboard on top of me and manage to stand). How much more can I honestly take? I open the cupboard in front of me. I pull out a pack of Retalin. I do not even remember what I was taking them for. I pour them all in the palm of my hand. I give out one last SCREAM. I swallow them, four at a time and gulping them down with my wine. Then...

I wake up in a hospital bed with Gugu sitting next to my bed; almost like I was sitting next to Boikarabelo when she was in hospital. She is crying and is mumbling something to me – I cannot make out what she is saying

though. I do not feel too good. I groan, trying to get her attention so that I can tell her what I need.

“Zala?” She responds to my groan.

“Zala how are you feeling? What do you need?” She is panicking. I do not need her to panic right now. I am not sure what it is that I need exactly but I know that I need her to be strong.

“Gugu...” I mumble out. I take a deep breath. “Water. I need water.” I complete my sentence. She runs out my ward and yells at someone to bring me a bottle of water from the canteen. There is water right next to me, why can I not just drink that? When she runs back to my bedside, I point at the jug of water with ice next to the bed and she looks at me and says, “You are a queen being chased by the entire Tholoana Kingdom monarchy, I don’t trust anything that has been pre-prepared.” This girl though. I giggle and a sudden discomfort interferes with my will to laugh. She smiles and holds my hand.

“Reahile told me what happened, Zala.” I am reminded of what happened and how I got into this hospital bed. I feel angry all over again.

“Zala, did you really attempt to take your own life because Reahile and Thandeka were hooking up? Because I actually believe that there is more to this incident. Taking your own life Zala? You are not a coward. What is going on?” Shame, my friend, my real and true sister... she is so concerned about me. How do I sum up everything?

“Zala, I am a broken woman. I am broken from my spirit right down to my purpose. I am shattered. You are right, what happened is a result of a manifestation of too many things that have taken over my life; especially that Tholoana Kingdom monarchy.” I say this but I cannot even look at her. My face is facing in the direction away from her face. My voice is still battling through some groans and stutters, but I have managed to give her a summary of my feelings and current state. She does not push any further for answers. She just sits there with me. She is not saying anything, but I know that she is hurt. I know that she is also here for me – her actions have spoken louder than her words ever will. She holds my hand and says, “Zala, the doctor will discharge you tonight. You will come and stay with Zethembe and I okay?” I just nod my head. I have nothing but tears to let out of me.

They walk in with my water, Gugu's water, and two thick slices of cake. I turn around to look at them. I smile at Zethembe, acknowledging his presence. Then I look at Reahile, and face the direction that I was facing. Gugu taps my shoulder and when I face her, she helps me sit up so that I can drink some water and have some cake. It is so silent in this room. Zethembe has now found a chair and is sitting down. Reahile is looking at me – looking at Gugu take care of me. He has that phone in his pocket; all that hatred towards that phone and its owner flushes over me. We STARE at each other. I let out a tear.

“You cry a lot”, Reahile says.

Gugu looks at him, skemp kind of look. Zethembe sees the look on his wife's face and buries himself in his hands. I almost giggle but I will not let him win. He and I get what this line reminds us of – God's Window. I choose to roll my eyes instead – it hurts him a little. Good. He then says, sad face and falling shoulders, “I am sorry, Kearabetswe”.

Something happens to me at the annunciation of these words. It almost feels as if he was apologising for everything that has ever hurt me in life. It feels like I have been needing to hear this since the day I was kidnapped

with the intention to be married off to Mohato. I fall apart. Gugu looks at Reahile and says, “Maybe you should just sit down and make yourself invisible. If that is too difficult for you, then you can continue to wait outside.” Reahile does not fight Gugu at all. He just sits down. My face falls onto Gugu’s shoulder, she soothes my back but that does not stop the tears at all – it just makes the road for them to come out that much smoother.

After I have cried myself to a point of “running low on tears”, Gugu tells me that I should get showered up so that I don’t look crazy and suicidal when the doctor comes to discharge me. She says if I look like the mess I am right now, they will keep me here for the rest of the year. Thanks friend, for indirectly saying that I look terrible. Reahile brought me changing clothes – my pink Adidas tracksuit: the subtle messages and reminder. Hmmm... starting over maybe? Like we did that day? After I notice my pink tracksuit, I notice that he too is wearing his blue Adidas tracksuit from the God’s Window day. He notices that I notice, he smiles. I giggle. Gugu and Zethembe are confused. I leave the room to take my shower.

Gugu came inside the bathroom with me to ensure that I take a bath and not drown myself. The chats were nice and funny – obviously this is Gugu. When I am done taking a bath and changing into my pink Adidas tracksuit, Gugu packs my overnight bag. All that is left is for the doctor to come and discharge me.

We step back into my ward, deep within chats, and stumble upon Zethembe and Reahile... Okay... and freaken Thandeka. I freeze at the door. I look at her. I look at Reahile. I look at her.

“I came to see if you were okay. The kids were worried about you. I wasn’t sure if it’s appropriate as yet to bring them. What exactly happened to you?” Thandeka, she seems sincere but it is probably because her side piece has not briefed her that I know about her itching thighs and loose panty. Today is the day that this thing knows me.

I look at her. I walk right passed her. She is very worried about the way that I am treating her right now. Everyone in this room is feeling very awkward. “Thandeka, I don’t think you should be here. Please just give us some space. I am sure you can understand.” Gugu says this, trying to

be very nice because this chick is my boss. She is also scared that I might just pop off – go all Love And Hip Hop Atlanta on her. Thandeka is unfazed by what Gugu is saying; she just seems more concerned about the hostility in the room.

“Well, I am also here in the capacity of your manager. We want you to know that the company is thinking about you and we are all wishing you a speedy recovery.” Thandeka continues, desperately hoping for a response.

“Reahile, handle your whore. Does she not know her place?” I politely say to Reahile. Gugu scratches her head, Zethembe tries to leave the room but Gugu stops him, throwing him a look that reads, “You better not leave me here.” Reahile tries to walk out too, but he is stopped by Zethembe and the look Reahile gets from Zethembe reads, “You are not leaving us here with your mess.” Thandeka is just looking dumb, confused, long-inch pretty weave, beautiful, and very much unaware of the fire that is about to be released unto her.

“Am I missing something here?” Thandeka.

“Thandeka...” Reahile begins, “Kearabetswe knows about the fling we have been having.”

Thandeka seems chuffed with herself. Then she says, “Is that why I haven’t seen or spoken to you since...” She keeps quiet. She looks at me and realises that I am waiting for her to say something stupid so that I can show her what crazy is. Then she says, “It meant nothing, Kearabetswe... it was just...” she pauses... she looks at me, then she looks at Reahile, then she looks at me and giggles, then she says, “Are you in hospital because of that? Did you have an episode or something?” We all look at her. She continues to say, “Wait a minute, you didn’t try to kill yourself because of this did you?” Before she can even blink her beautiful yet fake eyelashes after vomiting that sentence as if it is a joke, I am on top of her. I am not sure if I have slapped or punched her, that particular aspect of the fight seems to exist in a blackout that I might have just had. All I see now, is her Peruvian wig next to her face, her eye covered in blood, her cornrows (that were located under her wig) are half undone, and there is a broken glass in my hand. Zethembe physically picks me up, removing me off her and places me in the bathroom, then he closes it and holds on to the door.

“Open this door, Zethembe!” I keep yelling as I bang on the door.

“Zala, I think you killed her.” Gugu says, crying sort of.

“Where is Reahile? He better not be touching that whore. If he has any aspirations of saving this engagement between him and I, he better have his hands off that whore!” I yell.

The door opens immediately, and Reahile walks in. He looks at me and says, “I am here. I didn’t touch her. I promise.” I just look at him. I attempt to go out there again but the door is shut before I can move beyond the point I am standing. Reahile sits down on the toilet seat and tucks his head in his hands.

I keep banging on the door for Zethembe to open for me, but it is not happening. All I hear is this one behind me singing an “I’m sorry song”. I ignore him. I bang on the door. Then that piece of work of a baby mama of his rises from the dead. She bangs on the toilet door too, but I can hear that Zethembe and Gugu are trying to restrain her. They restrain her body but not her tongue. She yells, directing this at me, “I am the mother of Reahile’s children. Do you think you will ever get rid of me? Reahile tell her that it will always be me first.”

I yell back, “You couldn’t keep him when you could. What makes you think anything about you has upgraded now? You are cheating on your husband with your ex just like you cheated on Reahile with your current husband.” ”

“Oh please, you think you are better than me? You are engaged to your husband’s brother. You also cheated on your husband with your ex who is a married man now. You don’t get to be special. In case you are wondering how I know this, he told me everything during our pillow talks. You are clearly not as important as you think you are.” She says.

I turn around and look at Reahile. He is staring at me, amazed at the situation. Then I say to him, “Do you see the kind of trash thinks it can talk to me because it has shared a bed with you out of disrespect for me? Are you happy?” He says nothing – just continues to look at me like I am speaking Chinese. He stands up and speaks through the door, a bit scared, saying to Thandeka, “Thandeka please just leave us alone. I want to build with Rabi. She is my future. You and I were a mistake. I am ready to build with her from our foundation.” He doesn’t even breathe after the word “foundation” and Thandeka responds, yelling, “Foundation yokunuka!”

I handle her now. I am sick and tired of this hoe now! “Thandeka, you seem to forget that even after using all your tricks on my man and hoping that your vile nature will prevail, his arms are around me right now. You don’t get the happily ever after with him. You are just worn out by being used for your services by a taken man.”

She boldly replies, “And yet you are in hospital because of the tricks I have performed for him.” Oh no she didn’t. This time, Reahile opens the door and beats the crap out of Thandeka. The next thing we know, Thandeka has a team of doctors and nurses trying to help her from the floor. She is still and covered in blood. Gugu and I know this scene too well. This is how we last saw Lerato. However, Thandeka is not dead, I just know it. Her type does not die that easily. As for Riri...

He is being taken away in handcuffs.

I wake up from a very deep sleep and find myself in Gugu’s guest bedroom. I am actually woken up by her 6year old playing with

something on my face. I cannot help but embrace him; to think his mother and I were only in university when he was born. I take my hat off to Zethembe. He stepped up and gave my friend a happily ever after. I am so happy for her.

Gugu walks in with three cups of something... wine for me, vodka for her, and fruit juice for her son. We look at our cups and giggle. When Zakhe says that we must “cheers”, we do just that and drink up.

“Zethembe will come back with him today. In fact they should be here any minute now. Zethembe phoned me when they were leaving the police station.” She tells me.

“Zala, did you tell Zethembe that they must fetch Fifi and Pule from Thandeka’s house? I don’t trust that husband to be alone with those kids.”
Me.

“I told them Zala. That is probably why they are taking so long. They probably fetched the kids. Yes Zala, they can stay here with you for as long as you need. The three of you are not crowding our space at all.”

Gugu reassures me.

There is a strange silence. She wants to ask me something, but she is not sure how to ask it. She asks anyway, "You want to know how Thandeka is doing?"

"Nope. That has absolutely nothing to do with me." I say, no remorse at all.

She is quiet. She downs her vodka and puts her cup on the floor.

"This woman thing, it is hard Zala." I say. I continue, "It is not for the feint-hearted. It is a qualification on its own. We endure way too much; far more than what we should actually. It is too difficult Zala. Being a woman – a truly grown woman, is an essential qualification for marriage. If you are not built for it, you will be broken by the beginning of the word 'marriage'."

Zala responds saying, "The problem is us; Zala we truly are what we accept and allow. I have come to learn that people will leave your life no matter what you do and no matter the effort you pump into a situation or relationship. The one who wants to stay with you through the ups and down will stay. Men got this memo at the beginning of time. That's why they seldom compromise in a relationship. When they mess up, they have

the arrogance to expect us to stay, especially after we have had sex with them and recited deep quotes like “I will stay with you no matter what”. Those men, they will mess up, and expect you to stick around and clean up the mess.”

So profound. Wow.

“Are you going to leave Rea?” She asks.

“I don’t want to. I love him. I love him more than I thought I loved Mohato, and I love him deeper than I was infatuated with Skhumbuzo. But he cannot think what he did was okay. I am scared that if I go back, it will be difficult for me to trust him. What if he cheats on me again?”

“I will never cheat on you again.” Reahile is standing at the door, looking like he has been hit by life. He was clearly eavesdropping on our conversation. Pule and Fifi walk in and find me in bed, they hug me.

“Are you okay aunty sister-girl?” Fifi. Guess who has new pet names for me everyday now?

We giggle. I hold them both super tightly and say, “I am okay now that the two of you are here.”

Gugu gets all three of the kids out of the room so that Reahile and I can talk. She closes the door behind them. Riri sits down next to me. I pull his upper body down, his back lies on my thighs. I brush his forehead as he looks at me. He blinks and a tear races down his cheek. I wipe the tear.

“How was jail?” I ask. We look at each other.

“You should have been in there with me – Bonnie and Clyde style.” He says this and we burst out laughing.

Then there is an indescribable silence.

“You want to know why I slept with her?” He asks.

I respond, “No. I just need you to know that you broke my heart. You were very insensitive to my insecurities and it got to a point where you stopped caring or being sensitive to how I could have felt knowing that you were doing what you were doing behind my back.”

“Baby...”

“I am not done. I know that you love me. But you were manipulated and defeated by the oldest temptation in the book – your baby mama. She appealed to the desires of your flesh and you succumbed to it, confusing

familiar with special. Your flesh is weak. I am scared it might betray me again. You traded in love for lust. Even though you are not fulfilled, I lie here hurt.”

He buries his face in his hands. I continue, “You know, at some point in the logic and emotion of hurt, even the most pro-traditionalist woman will begin to feel that feminists are on to something. You men are never insecure because we women go out of our way to ensure your security. But you keep on second-guessing everything that is right because conforming to social pressure such as tapping the baby mama seems like a road worth travelling. I am hurt Riri. I am in pain. Of course protests will take place, insisting on the empowerment of the woman, her body, and the alleviation of her mind because this woman that patriarchy insists on – man is evidently not designed to appreciate her. This woman traps herself in the box of hope and perseverance and it is not fair. This is how women end up finding other reasons for companionship because love is not always reason enough for a man to NOT put her through nonsense like this. Maybe my insecurities are manifested by factors I cannot explain

in-depth at the moment; but what you did..." I can't stop the tears. Neither can he.

We sit in sobs, silence, and tears.

"Do you think Gugu can stay with the kids for a while? I am not yet sure for how long. Can you please at least ask her?" He randomly says.

"Are we going somewhere?" I ask.

"Yes. Tomorrow night, we leave for Tholoana Kingdom. I am going to fight for you – kill Mohato if I must. But I am not coming here until Tholoana considers you and Mohato divorced so that I can finally marry you. I am going in with an army of my own, thanks to my contacts with the defence force. That is my first step to making all of this right."

Oh my word, we are going to war.

"Then, I am going to spend as much time required to mend your broken heart, so that we can start over." He continues.

"I don't want us to start over. If we start over, we must hurt each other again. I cannot go through that again." I protest.

"Okay, then we move on." Him.

Silence...

“For now, please just know that I am truly sorry, my love. Hashtag Rari”

😊.

Chapter 15

“Kearabetswe...”

“Kearabetswe...”

“Kearabetswe!”

With this, I feel ice-cold water and ice-cubes stinging my entire body. I feel cold water viciously splash across my face. I try to move as quickly as my heart is beating, but I cannot. My body hurts so badly. I am freezing cold. I cannot do anything. The only movement I respond to all of this with is the opening of my eyes.

I notice that I am tied up with rope and am placed in a bathtub filled with ice-cubes and cold water. There is blood everywhere. My body is covered in bruises and cuts. I am in the bathroom of the main bedroom of the royal house. I have not been here since it was re-built from being burned down. I know this is it because it has been built to look exactly like the burned-down house.

“Rise and shine my gorgeous wife”, he says as I try to figure out what is going on and what has caused my splitting headache.

I think I remember.

I remember us getting to the Tholoana Kingdom border. I remember that Reahile and I were in one car. Queen-mother Nthatisi and Morena were in the car in front of us. I remember their car exploding. I remember another car bashing into the car that Reahile and I were inside of. I remember people pulling us out of the car. Reahile was not moving at all; the car that crashed into us, came at us from his side of the car. I remember people beating him up and taking him away in a black and window-tinted vehicle. I also remember being beaten up and injected with something.

“Kea, how are you feeling my love? These bastards, I told them not to hurt you too much. I told them the only problem is Reahile. But at least that has been dealt with. Now you and I can get back to making our marriage work.”

“Mohato, what are you talking about? What exactly is going on here?” I struggle to speak but I manage to get that out of my mouth.

He does not say anything.

“Mohato, where is Reahile?”

“Do not ask me about your boyfriend.”

We are both quiet.

Where is Riri?

“Mohato, I am feeling cold.”

He cradles me out of the water and places me on the carpet in the bathroom. He dries the water dripping off my body with a bath towel and then lotions me. His hands are so cold. I am in so much pain. I am so confused. What the hell is going on? Why am I tied up?

When Mohato is done lotioning my body, he asks me what I want to wear.

I look at him and I begin to cry.

“Mohato, what are you doing?” I ask him.

He does not answer me. He walks out of the bathroom and comes back with a black Adidas tracksuit and Uggs. He does not even look at me. I carry on crying. He places the outfit that he has chosen for me on the side.

He starts undressing himself.

“I do not want to sleep with you Mohato”.

“You are my wife. I do not need your permission.”

No. Dear God, please no... This is not happening again.

Before I know it, he is on top of me. He is moaning, groaning, and biting on me. I am just lying there, tied up in rope, and crying.

“You are as good as the last time that I had sex with you”.

Mohato is finally satisfied. He dresses me up and carries me over his shoulders. He places me on the bed and tells me that he will bring me my food shortly.

When Mohato leaves the bedroom, I try to wrestle with the rope that has been used to tie me up but it ends up hurting my hands more than letting loose, so I give up. I look around the room and look for something that I can use to at least get out of this rope. I cannot find so much as a nail-cutter. I need to think now... think Rabi, think... damn it. There is absolutely nothing here that is giving me a clue at the very least.

I hear a slight knock on the door and someone enters. It is my sister, Kgosikgadi. I do not understand. I am really confused. What is she doing here?

“Hi Kea.”

I just look at her. I do not say anything to her at all. She climbs on top of the bed that I am sitting on and sits next to me. She looks down – unable to face me or even speak to me.

“Kgadi, why are you here?” I ask her.

“Kea, they want to kill Reahile.” She says.

“Where is Reahile?” I ask.

She does not say anything.

“Kgosikgadi, please help me. Please. I am so confused. I have no idea what is going on here. Why am I even tied up? Where is Reahile?”

“Kea, you need to understand that what Reahile has done is treason and he will be dealt with accordingly. From what mama tells me, he might just receive the death penalty.”

My heart...

No...

“But why?” I am in tears. My voice cannot go any higher than whispers.

“You are Mohato’s wife, Kea. What Reahile did is just wrong. He threatened and disrespected the throne. He cannot just get away with it. According to our courts, he has kidnapped you. He forced you into staying with him and his mother assisted him with that.”

“But that is not what happened.”

“Yes it is”.

“Kgadi, that is not what happened.” I firmly say.

“Yes it is what happened. This family is planning on killing our parents if that is not the story that you will stick to when you go and testify against Reahile tomorrow.”

I just sit there and cry.

“He has children, Kgadi. They cannot do that to him. Kgadi, I will leave him alone. I will never see him again, I promise. But please, do not let them hurt him.” I beg her.

“And you have a husband. He should have taken into consideration the people that are affected by the choices that he makes before he just took you from the royal house. You had a good life Kearabetswe, why would

you want to dumb it down to normal with Reahile? Even you can be a little bit more ambitious than that.”

“I am not testifying against Reahile.”

Kgadi slaps me. She looks at me with disgust and hatred.

“I am not asking you to stick to this story. I am telling you.”

The door opens again, this time, it is Mohato bringing me food.

Kgosikgadi walks out of the bedroom and Mohato sits where she was sitting. He tries to feed me but I look away. He forcefully turns my face back in his direction and I head-butt him. His nose bleeds. He gets so angry that he throws the entire plate of food on the ground, swears at me and storms into the in-suite bathroom that I was taking an ice-cold bath in.

The food is all on the ground. There is a fork directly next to the bed, and a knife not too far from where I am. I use my foot to pull the knife towards me and I use my hands to push it under the pillow that I am sitting on. He comes out of the bathroom and stares at me. His mixed-race skin tone has now turned red.

“You are my wife, Kearabetswe. You are not leaving this bedroom ever again until you understand that and until you can stomach that.”

I do not say anything.

“This house is guarded by trusted guards, workers, your family and mine.

You are not going anywhere.”

I just look at him.

He walks out of the bedroom.

I grab the knife and try to hold it just right and begin to cut the rope. It is quite a struggle but it is a struggle that I must win. I keep on cutting and eventually the rope begins to feel slightly lighter.

I hear footsteps approaching my bedroom and place the knife under the pillow again. I face downwards. The footsteps march into the bedroom without even knocking. It is Mme Mathabo.

“Look at you, the wife to my son who slept with his brother.”

“I did not sleep with Reahile”.

“Yeah right”.

She sits next to me.

“Tell me, what exactly did you think you would achieve?”

“I thought I would have you out of my life permanently.”

“I am not going anywhere, Kearabetswe Mohale.”

“That is why I left. But clearly you don’t want me to go anywhere
neither.”

She looks at me. She does not say anything.

“Where is Reahile?”

“I did not come here to talk about Reahile. I came here to ask you what
your opinion is on the colour of beige for Ntombi and Mohato’s
wedding.”

I just look at her.

“Where is Reahile?”

She looks at me. She realises that I am not going to let her carry on with
her wedding conversation unless she tells me what I need to hear.

“In the chambers. He is being prepared for his trial tomorrow. Hopefully by the time the sun sets tomorrow, he will be dead.”

The chambers? Oh no. People are tortured in there. It is punishment reserved for the ultimate act of treason. My poor Riri.

“Can we talk about the wedding now?”

I nod.

I cry as she speaks. She is not bothered about my tears and I am equally not moved by the words coming out of her mouth. I need to let loose and save Riri.

When Mme Mathabo is over my tears and silence, she leaves the room. I grab the knife again and cut the rope. The rope does not necessarily snap but it is loose enough for me to free my hands. I need to be smart now. I need to remember everything I witnessed as Mohato’s wife.

I first run to the safe. It is not locked. I open it and take the R400 000 that I find in there and the gun that is in there. He usually keeps R500 000 in the safe; he must have recently used the R100 000 for something important

and unexpected. I come out to see if there is anyone in the bedroom yet or if anyone is approaching the room. Nothing.

I go back to the closet and see a few of my things. I grab a big handbag and a backpack. I shove the money in the backpack and the gun in my handbag.

I walk into Mohato's walk-in closet and take the five pepper-sprays that I find in there. I put them in my handbag. I also find a bag of acid. This man is weird. However, I take it anyway.

I tiptoe out of the walk-in closet and stumble upon a guard waiting there for me, gun pointed at me.

I look at him.

"Put it down." He says.

I know he will not kill me. That will never be Mohato's order.

"No." I say.

"Now!" He yells.

I put the bags down and walk back to the bed. The gun is still pointed at me. He puts the gun down (big mistake) and attempts to tie me up again.

I take the gun and point it at him. I realise that if I shoot him, it will make a noise and everyone in the house will know that I am not tied up anymore. He has his hands up and is shocked.

I grab the knife under the pillow and stab his shoulder. I tell him that if he makes so much as a whim of noise, I will aim for his heart. He stares at me. He is terrified. Good.

“You need to help me.”

He nods in panic.

“Where are Mohato and the queen mother?”

“In the chambers with Reahile.”

“Distract all the guards. Get them out so that I can go to the chambers.”

“Mofomahadi...”

“NOW!” I say.

He says something in his walkie-talkie thingy.

Then he tells me that all is clear. I do not remove the knife from his shoulder. I just grab the bags and leave the room.

I head down the stairs and all the way into the basement. I then open the trap-door that leads me to the stairs that lead to the chambers. The smoke is heavy. The door is slightly open. The key is hanging on the door. I take the keys and place them in my handbag. I walk in and follow the voices. I see Mohato's phone on the table. I take it. I send a text to two people, one of them being a major risk – but he is the only one in my family that I trust. I send Kamo and Gugu a text that reads:

"I need your help. Trapped in the chambers at the royal house. Go downstairs to the basement. Go down the trap door. The chambers are there, below the basement."

Message Sent.

I send one more message to Skhumbuzo.

"Mohato is going to kill me. Talk to Gugu, she knows how to get to the chambers that I am trapped in, please help me."

Message sent.

I place the phone back on the table and walk towards the arguing again.

I eavesdrop on the conversation inspired by nothing but pure instinct and curiosity to do so.

Mohato: “Yes, I killed ntate. He needed to die. That man was an animal. He wanted to kill my mother. He wanted to kill my mother because of your mother; he had to die.”

Reahile (weak and barely speaking as loud as Mohato): “You didn’t have to kill him. We all knew that he wasn’t your father and we still kept your dirty secret. There was absolutely no reason for you to kill him. He loved and accepted you as his own. He loved you more than he even loved us, his sons.”

Mohato: “You are not his son neither. You and Morena are not that bastard’s sons. He was unable to have children Reahile. He was a sick bastard that was unable to have children. Your mother fulfilled her duty and slept with your biological father without ntate knowing. That is why ntate did not know that you and Morena are not his sons. But when my mother slept with another man and claimed that I was his child, your mother went out of her way to expose my mother as a whore – isn’t it?”

Reahile: “Mohato, I do not understand what you are saying.”

Mme Mathabo: “What he is saying is that your mother thought that if she kept kgosi’s infertility a secret, she would get away with being the perfect wife. She thought that she was better than me.”

Mohato: “And when ntate found out who my actual father was, he killed him. He found out because your mother told him. Your father is still alive. Mine is dead. I deserve that thrown. And Kearabetswe is MY WIFE. How dare you think that you can just take her from me.”

There is silence.

I think Reahile is very broken. I would be broken too if I had to find out so late in my life that my paternity has been a lie all this time.

Reahile (sobbing): “Who is my father?”

Mme Mathabo: “Your father is Richard – kgosi’s brother. The same brother who believes that he was robbed off his title as the king of this place. Is it not amazing how the two of you have so much in common?”

I hear Reahile crying. My heart sinks so deep. I almost charge in there to protect him and fight these two demons, but I have to play this smart. I need to make sure that he gets out of here.

I go around to the other side of the chambers. I will enter through the other door. I know all the weird corners of this place. It is very interesting how this is the only part of the house that never really burned down to the ground.

I open the door slowly and enter the chambers. They are still arguing but I cannot hear the conversation from here. I hear a million men run into the chambers though and I hear them yelling at the top of their voices, "Mofomahadi is gone. We have no idea where she is."

Mohato and Mme Mathabo immediately rush out with the armed men and do not even notice that the key is missing from the door of the chambers. They just shut it behind them. I quickly run in and lock the door from inside. I run around locking all the doors in the chambers and then I finally run to Reahile and kneel down before him, resting my hands on his thighs.

He is in tears. He cannot stop crying. He is beaten to a pulp. He is tied up in rope; his feet and his hands. His face is covered with blood but I can still trace his tears. His upper body is draped in blood and his legs are not moving at all.

I untie his legs. I struggle gravely. My goodness, such days I wish I was a girl scout. I find a broken glass next to him. I pick it up and use it to cut the rope instead, praying that this glass was not broken against his head or body at all. He keeps on crying. The ropes are finally off and I hug him briefly. He hangs on to me for dear life and then he says, "I cannot feel my legs".

Dear God, I pray that this man is not paralysed.

"My love, I need you to do something for me. We do not have much time. We have to get out of here. We need to get you medical care outside of Tholoana Kingdom as soon as possible."

"How are we going to do that?" Reahile, speaking as pain stabs him deeper.

"I will help you. I have contacted Gugu and my brother. I know that they will try to help us."

He reaches for his pocket. He pulls out a cellphone.

"Mohato has never been the brightest smartie in the box".

I take the phone from him. I should have stolen water as well. He looks so dehydrated. I dial Gugu's number. She answers after two rings...

"Reahile..."

"Gugs, it's me. Zala..."

"Zala, I am in Tholoana. I am outside of your house. We knew something was wrong when the news reported that you had been in an accident and no one knows where you, the queen-mother and her sons are."

"Zala, make sure that nobody sees you. Mohato knows you and he will know that you know something. Bring a car to the back. I am going to try get Reahile out of here. I want you to get him to a hospital in South Africa immediately. I will follow him. Please Zala, he is in really bad shape."

"Okay Zala. Bring him out, we are coming."

I take the phone and place it in my pocket.

Reahile's eyes are closing and his breathing is becoming slower.

"Baby, I need you to hold on a little while longer for me okay. Please my baby."

He mumbles something but I cannot make out what it is. Nor do I have the patience to try. I need to get him out of here immediately. I feel him hurt and hear him groan as I get him up from his chair. I ask him to hang onto me, beg him to trust me. We slowly walk to the staircase. He trips and falls. He moans. I help him up, throw his hand over my shoulder and slowly help him up the stairs. We finally reach the top of the stairs and he falls, rolling all the way down to the bottom. I am a little frustrated but I go down and help him up again.

When we get to the door (the back door of the chambers), I open it and we step into the outer part of the chambers. We see the late king's picture and he stands and stares at it.

"Help me, ntate", he speaks to the picture. I let him have his moment.

We start walking again. We exit through the door that leads to the outside.

I find Skhumbuzo and Zethembe waiting. They do not hesitate to take Reahile from me and place him in a car. I hear Gugu yell, "Go! Go! Go!"

They have disappeared before I know it. Gugu leaves with them. I run back into the chambers and see Mohato pointing a gun at Kamo just as I walk in.

“Mohato, what are you....”

BANG!

He shoots Kamo in the his leg.

“You are one stupid woman do you know that?”

I remember the acid I stole but I let those bags leave with Reahile and Gugu and company.

“So you are killing my family now?”

“Where is Reahile?”

“I don’t know. I came in here with the intention to look for him. He was not here when I got in.”

I look at Kamo crying in pain on the floor.

“Your brother is the one who told us you were in here. Except, he was coming down to help you. How many times are you going to cross me Kearabetswe? After everything that I have done for you?”

“Mohato, please... let Kamo go. Please.”

He shoots him again – in his arm this time. I cry. I scream.

I hear gunshots coming in from behind me and they hit Mohato in the shoulder. I turn around. It is Skhumbuzo. He holds my hand and pulls me out of the room and away from the situation. His gun pointing at Mohato on the floor. I do not know where his guards are but I am happy that they are not here. He probably told them he wants to finish me off and no one should witness that.

“We cannot leave my brother, Skhu.” I plead.

I run towards Kamo and drag him out. Skhu picks him up and carries him over his shoulder. His gun is in my hands now and I am pointing it at Mohato. I am feeling all kinds of scared and brave at the same time; the power of the gun.

We get out of the chambers and finally out of the house. We run into a car and it drives off; Skhumbuzo is in the driving seat and I am in the backseat with Kamo bleeding on my lap.

Where are Morena and the queen-mother?

We arrive at Brenthurst Hospital in Johannesburg. This is one incredible hospital that has incredible staff members and 100% ideal care. They treated me first for the bruises that I had. Then I went looking for Reahile. He was connected to machines and covered in bandages when I got here. I have been sitting by his side, waiting for him to wake up.

Kamo is still in the operating theatre. Gugu and Zethembe are waiting in the waiting room.

I look up at the television playing and I see a report that Morena's body was found in the royal swimming pool. He had been dead for three days when he was found. An involuntary tear races down my cheek. How will we even bury him because we are on the run? Poor Mimi; how is she going to deal with this? I feel horrible. I cannot begin to imagine how I would cope if it were Reahile that were dead.

The doctor comes in, "Mrs Mohale" ...

I look at him.

"We are doing all that we can to save your brother. The injuries that he sustained are bad."

I do not hear the rest of his sentence. I hear screams in the waiting room, I walk out and see Aus’Kantse crying, on the floor, screaming as loud as mme Segametsi screamed for Boikarabelo in hospital. She is with my parents. They look at me, disgusted and disappointed. I look at them and I feel nothing but hatred for them. Kamo’s mother is also here. She is crying too.

I walk away from them. I find the doctor checking on Reahile.

“Please tell me he is not going to die.” I plead.

“He is responding well to the treatment ma’am. I think he will be okay. He should be awake by tomorrow.” The kind doctor says.

“Thank you.”

I sob. I hear the commotion happening outside but I do not go out there. I tuck myself in the single hospital bed that Reahile lies in and I cuddle him. I cannot stop crying. I say to him, praying from my soul that he hears me...

“God bless the broken road that lead me to you. I may not have prayed for you, Reahile, but by wishing and hoping for a man who will love me

no matter what and a man that I will have no problem moving mountains for – God sent you my way alongside all the obstacles we clearly have to go through.”

My soul drowns in tears. I cannot help but cry from my gut. My monologue does not stop, I continue,

“I love you Reahile. You need to wake up. The babies need you. I love you not just for who you are to me but also for what you mean to me. I love you not just for today. You see, yesterday I prayed to love you more passionately today and today, I pray for the opportunity to be loved by you tomorrow. I miss you. My pride left a long time ago when it came to my love for you. My voice is cracked, my head is throbbing, my eyes are heavy, and I am emotionally bipolar. I cannot be strong anymore baby. I need you. I do not even know what to say to God in my prayers anymore; I have asked him for you in all ways prayerfully possible. I am lying here next to you and the powers of the world are no longer phasing me; the power of my world is in this bed and I need him too open his eyes. Wake up baby, so that you can finally make love to me – please.”

“You promise?” He says in pain but in a voice that brings so much joy to my existence.

I giggle. My baby is awake.

Kamo is awake and recovering. Aus’Kantse and my mother are helping Kamo recover. I know that he will be okay. Now, I focus on taking care of my husband.