

He told me that he wanted the lyrics of J Cole's "*Love Yours*" tattooed on him because this song got him through a very difficult time in his life. When we met, he introduced me to J Cole's "*January 28<sup>th</sup>*" because my birthday is on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January.

I never really paid much mind or attention to J Cole's music. Firstly, I was not a fan. Secondly, my ex-boyfriend's ex-fiance and mother to his son bought him tickets to a J Cole concert when they were still together. This still goes down in history as his best birthday gift **EVER**.

Woman insecurity 101 kicked in.

Now that my house is empty and my spirit feels incomplete, I am confronted with the fact that perhaps I did not give myself the opportunity to truly know him... to fundamentally understand him... to ask questions in spirit about his dreams, his hopes, and all the other things that keep him sensitive. I was so used to having my hopes, my dreams, and my insecurities not being understood or taken into regard that I set my entire goal of an ideal man to be a man who cares and nurtures my hopes, my dreams, and my love. When I found a man who did just that, I forgot to understand that he too, needs all of these things understood about him.

The manner in which I grew up is something I pray every day I could forget and never revisit – not even in memory. That is why I enjoy taking full control of my present. It breaks my heart that my insecurities from the past still influence my relationships today.

As I am packing up his clothes and other belongings for him to collect in the afternoon, I take a breather and scroll through my Instagram. I come across one of my favourite vocalists' posting about J Cole's "*Love Yours*", so I decide to download J Cole's "*Love Yours*" and J Cole's "*January 28<sup>th</sup>*". I play them through my sound bar... nice and loud, so that I do not miss a single beat or a single lyric.

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## Chapter 1

Tshidi slept over yet again. I am convinced that Tshidi is not happy in her marriage. Her husband is never home – so she is forever complaining – but she is never home neither. I would know because she is always at my house. She insists that she is worried about me because of my break-up with Mabutho. I do not believe her. However right now, I do not have time to worry about Tshidi. I am dressed and ready for work, enjoying some Jungle Oats Cranberry & Yoghurt Clusters Muesli with Inkomazi; please do not judge me, this is my favourite.

I am playing some J Cole from my sound bar. I woke up missing Mabutho today and listening to J Cole somehow makes me feel like I am still close to him... J Cole, and the baby that has been growing inside of me for the past four months. Thankfully, everyone suspects that I am merely gaining weight. This “gaining weight” storyline has bought me some more time to keep this pregnancy a secret until I know what I will say to Mabutho when I let him know that he is going to be a father again. I am one more baby-mama that he will have to co-parent with: Baby-mama number three to be exact.

“Good morning sunshine”, Tshidi startles me out of my thoughts.

“Hello gorgeous. Did you sleep well?” I ask her.

She grabs a banana out of my fruit basket and says, “I always sleep well in your house, friend”.

“Which makes me wonder how your hubby is sleeping in your bed without you every day”, I say.

“That one is probably not even aware that I am not home. Besides, you need me more.”

“Because of Mabutho?” She is really being ridiculous – honestly.

“Amongst other things. J Cole is on full blast today so I take it that you miss him”, she says, catching me off guard.

I finish my breakfast and put the bowl in the sink. She just eats her banana and stares at me. I can feel her sitting behind me and waiting for me to respond. I open my freezer instead and pull out a packet of mixed fruit and fresh yogurt that I plan to blend and enjoy as a smoothie to finish off my breakfast. I open the packet and throw its contents into my blender. Pineapple, blueberries, bananas, avocado, and spinach blend into a smoothie. I add some plain yogurt and blend a bit more. I disconnect the blender and put it in the sink with the other dirty dishes patiently waiting for Sis’Nora to come in and wash them.

I look at her. She is still staring at me, eating her third banana. This girl and bananas. One packet of bananas usually lasts me two weeks. When Tshidi is around, it lasts two days.

“Kenosi, are you ever going to tell me what happened between you and Mabutho? Evidently, it has affected you more than you are willing to share. Nosi, you are putting on weight every single day. You are two seconds away from obesity”, Tshidi informs me.

“You are so extra. I am going to work”, I tell her. This is my cue to leave. I am suddenly feeling teary. I know it is the hormones, but must she be such a bitch about me putting on weight?

I get into my car looking forward to some “me” time that I have been robbed off in my own house. My car is the perfect spot for me to enjoy my “me” time. I love my car. I worked hard to buy this car for myself for my 28<sup>th</sup> birthday. It is my little gift to myself for when I turned 28 on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January. My beautiful Mercedes Benz C63 AMG 2-door stunner in classy black with white leather interior.

I place my laptop bag and handbag in my boot, pull out my *Tom Ford* sunglasses, Samsung cellphone, and *SMJ Designs* purse to put into the car with me. I hop in, put my cellphone on the side of my door, my shades on my face, and my purse under my driver’s seat.

I start my engine and drive out of my complex. I drive slowly as I pray with the rosary hanging from my rear-view mirror, asking God to bless my journey to work and be with me all the times and moments that I will be on this road today. Then, I let my beast move like it was created to, listening to some feel good music by Zonke playing on my radio.

Traffic is not too bad – thank God. When I stop at three stop signs before my workplace, I see an advertisement about a sale at Baby Boom. I rub my tummy and smile. I work my way out of the road and to the shop. I arrive as they open their doors.

“Hi”, the kind gentleman who is opening the doors acknowledges my cheesing self.

“Hey”, I reply with my cheesing smile personifying my baby’s mood and mine.

“You are glowing. How far are you?” He asks me.

He is a complete stranger. I suppose I can share with him what I have not shared with anyone.

“I am almost five months”, I tell him. I giggle to myself. I am actually happy. I am doing this by myself but I am genuinely happy.

“Congratulations. I am Keano by the way”, this fine mixed-race brother announces to me.

“Lovely meeting you Keano, I am Kenosi. You are welcome to call me Nosi”, I say.

“Pleasure meeting you, Nosi. Do you have anything in mind that you would like to get?” He asks.

“Do you mind if I just look around before I decide? It’s my first time shopping for a baby that is actually mine, so I am really just going to enjoy this”, me.

“Knock yourself out. Let me know if you need someone to push the trolley around for you. I will be at your service”, he tells me.

“Thank you. Let me get to it”, me.

I cannot begin to describe to you the joy that is in my heart right now. Everything just seems perfect for my perfect bundle of joy.

An hour later, I am hungry and my feet are exhausted. However, I have three trolleys full of baby goodies. Keano offers to take me out to lunch and I do not protest at all. If only customer service was always this amazing.

I am craving McDonald's junior cheeseburgers so we settle for McDonald's. I order two junior cheeseburgers and orange juice. He orders a McFeast Deluxe burger and coke. How does he stay so fine if he eats junk like this? Keano is the type that looks like it lives on green food.

"So, are your parents both coloured?" I know that this is a politically incorrect question but I am asking anyway, and if I have offended him, I will blame it on my pregnancy brain.

He takes no offense at all.

"Nope. My dad is black. He is Zulu – original and untainted. He and his family originate from eMtubatuba in KZN. He has some family in Tholoana here and there but the majority of them are born, bred, and will probably die eMtubatuba. My mother on the other hand, she is a product of a white man and an Indian woman." Him.

That explains why he looks so exotic.

"Don't take this the wrong way please, but I must ask: Keano sounds like a '*kallid*' name. How did you end up with it?" I ask, genuinely curious.

“It is a combination of my parents’ names: My dad’s name is Anokuhle and my mother’s name is Kearra. So the ‘Ke’ is taken from my mother’s name and the ‘Ano’ is taken from my father’s name, therefore making up Keano.” He explains. Then he fondly smiles to himself and tells me, “Apparently my mother gave me that name”.

“I love that. So what is your Zulu name? Ain’t no Zulu man naming a son Keano without some hard-core Zulu name appearing first on his birth certificate”, I try to be funny and he laughs. I know this because my Zulu baby-daddy is called Mabutho. Mabutho appears first on his ID right before his middle name, Ethan.

“Well, my first name is Shaka”, he says.

“Amen”, I say and we both indulge in laughter.

After a good laugh, he looks at me like no man has ever looked at me before. I blush. I cannot help myself. I look fat and I feel fat. There is not a single attractive feature on me right now.

“So where is he?” He asks me. Oh, it is pity- that look that he was giving me was pity. I know he is asking me about Mabutho. This is actually a socially incorrect question from a man I have just met, but I guess that balances out the politically incorrect questions that I asked him.

“He left me”, I reply, suddenly ready to cry.

“Because you are pregnant?” He asks.



“No. He doesn’t even know that I am pregnant. He left before I even found out. I guess his ex-fiancé will always have his heart. He went back to her”, I tell him. I cry.

He holds my hand.

In no time, I am in this man’s welcoming arms and my burgers are all finished.

“Nosi, I will have these things delivered to your home. You will not fit them all in your car.” He says.

“*Ngiyabonga Shaka*”, I say as I smile.

He smiles back at me. I let myself out of his arms. I give him my address then head to work. To do what? Only God knows. I am already late.

The traffic is literally at a standstill. I am stuck in the heat of Tholoana Kingdom amongst a million cars. I can move neither forward nor backwards. I check Waze to calculate how long I will be waiting in this traffic and it is two hours. I also notice that there is an accident on this road about a walking distance from where I am.

I get out of my car and decide to become one of those nosy people who are probably holding up this damn traffic. I take my purse and phone, keep my sunglasses on, get my handbag from my boot, throw my phone and purse in it, lock my car and walk to the accident scene.

Red car – no!

Red VW – it cannot be!

Red Golf 7 – never!

I walk closer to the scene. I have people telling me to stay back. I hear them but I do not hear them. I see them but I do not see them. I push my way through as the image becomes clearer.

Red Golf 7, R-Line: MABUTHO TK.

I am crying now.

I kneel down next to his body covered in blood. It is the only body that has not been covered with a black bag. Five bodies next to him have been declared dead. However, he is not moving neither.

“Butho”, I murmur as I kneel down next to him. I place my ear on his body. I feel the blood come on me but I do not care.

“Butho, you cannot die. You are not allowed to die. Please don’t die”, I keep saying, crying.

I take his hand and place it on my tummy.

“The daughter that you have always wanted, Butho she is on her way. She cannot grow up without you. Please Butho, wake up”, me.

He opens his eyes. I am hopeful a bit.

“Askies Nono”, he says to me. Then he closes his eyes again.

## Chapter 2

I am following the paramedics as they pull Mabutho into ER. I am running next to the bed that he is laid upon. A nurse then runs up to me and stops me. I look at her like she must have lost her mind. She then says, "Ma'am, please have a seat. We will let you know the status of his health as soon as there is something to tell". I stand frozen in one place as all the medical professionals before me disappear into a theatre.

I make my way to the waiting room. I take out my cellphone and dial Mam'Thola, Mabutho's mother.

"Hello sisi", she greets me.

"Mah..." I pause. I am literally shaking.

"What's wrong, Nosi?" She asks me.

"Mah... uMabutho. He has been in an accident. We are at the Royal King Tau Hospital", I finally say. She hangs up immediately.

After twenty minutes, Mam'Thola arrives with Luthuli (Mabutho's brother), Nandi (Mabutho's sister), Nonhle (Mabutho's ex whom he went back to when he left me), and Lethu (Mabutho's son with Nonhle). They find me sitting by myself, crying and covered in his blood. His mother comes to me and hugs me. We cry together. Nonhle does not even acknowledge me.

Luthuli walks up to us and just gently puts his hand on my shoulder.

“What happened?” Nandi asks as she kneels in front of me and wipes my tears off my face.

“I don’t know. I was driving to work and there was traffic. I got out of my car, walked to the accident scene and I found him there”, I say. I cry. Mam’Thola and Nandi comfort me.

Luthuli then brushes my back and says, “So where is your car now?”

Shit.

I look at him. Our eyes communicate that my car is still on that road.

“Give me your keys”, I do just that. I tell him where the car is. He phones someone, takes Lethu with him and leaves to fetch my car.

Mam’Thola, Nonhle, Nandi, and I patiently wait for doctors to come and tell us something about Mabutho’s progress. I am now agitated so I decide to go and take a walk. As I stand up, I spot Mam’Thola’s hand on my tummy. Shit.

“You look beautiful”, she says to me and she smiles.

“Thank you, mah.” I try to smile but I am slightly uncomfortable because Nonhle looks like she is ready to kill me.

“Wow! Mabutho is really determined to leave children with each woman he sleeps with”, I hear Nandi telling Nonhle. I do not look at Nonhle to see what her reaction is.

I walk away. I realise that my feet are killing me now. I take off my heels and my feet are swollen. I sit outside on some bench that I find. My phone rings. It is Kea.

“Hey babe”, I answer her call.

“Hey mama! I just heard about Mabutho’s accident. Are you okay?” She says.

She is honestly the sweetest human being I know.

“Mam’Thola is here with Nonhle and it is just awkward. I don’t even know which direction to sneeze in”, I tell her.

“I am coming over. You are at the Royal King Tau hospital right?” Kea.

“Who will look after the twins?” I ask her. She is a mother and the queen of Tholoana Kingdom you know.

“Mohato is here and he offered to stay with them so that I can come and be with you. Mme Nthatisi is also here. Relax, I am on my way”, Kea tells me.

“Okay friend. Please bring me flat shoes. My feet are dead”, I ask her.

“I got you”, her.

We hang up and I sit back and ponder on this day.

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Kea arrives and finds me sitting outside. My gorgeous friend. She runs to me and hugs me. Then she looks at my full face and says, "You are pregnant!"

I giggle. It is weird how everyone else can see me except the one who has made herself comfortable in my house.

She hugs me again. She gives me those fluffy "push-in" flats to wear. They feel like heaven. She sits with me on the bench and pulls up my feet. She massages my feet. Heaven!

"Have the doctors said anything?" She asks.

"To me, nothing as yet. But Nonhle and Mam'Thola are in there so I suppose my part is done here", I tell her.

She sighs.

"Is the baby his?" She asks me. I nod.

"Does he know?" She asks me.

I shake my head.

She takes a deep breath.

"How are you friend? How are the twins? How are things with Mohato?"

I ask her.

"We have all adapted and accepted the situation for what it is. He is my husband and we now have two boys that we are raising together. Mohato loves the boys. I am grateful, but sometimes I feel as if he has no right to

be close to them – they are Reahile’s children, not his. I try to love him, but there is a level of resentment that is pounding in my heart that I cannot get rid of”, she tells me.

“You miss Reahile. You are allowed to miss him. You genuinely loved that man”, I sympathise with her.

She shakes her head and says, “It is not just that though. Friend, I have been having these nightmares that I cannot explain. They are crippling nightmares. Sometimes, I fear going to sleep because the nightmares will not go away. They are all nightmares that make me relive the day that Reahile died”.

Now I am concerned. I look at her.

“Have you spoken to anyone about them?” I ask her, concerned.

“Anyone like who, friend? No one in that house is about my life. Mme Nthatsi lost two sons because of me. Her only link to me are the twins. Mohato on the other hand... I just have no words. I have seen him kill people. He killed Reahile right in front of me. I know he loves me, but now that I know what he is capable of, I am slightly scared of him”, she tells me.

“He would never hurt you though, friend, you know that. In fact, every person he ever did hurt, was either for you or because of you”, I tell her.

“No Nosi, it’s not right. What kind of teachings will he pass on to my kids about love, sacrifice, and fighting for what you believe in? That violence

is the answer? I don't want my children to be masters of the gun", she says.

"The gun is a powerful weapon, Kea, especially for you and your kids because of your royal status. You are a queen. They are princes", I remind her. She must stop thinking that she is like one of us commoners.

"It is a powerful weapon that has enslaved people to power. Countries have been colonised by the power of the gun. The greatest division found in wars are a result of the gun. The greatest division in families are a result of the gun. My boys will be educated and will know of other ways to rule and gain power outside of the gun. They do not have to take lives to have everything. That is not how it should work", she says.

"Kea, you are too naïve. Tholoana is a Kingdom, yes. However, it affiliates with other countries economically, politically, and socially. Unfortunately, to make things happen for the people of Tholoana, your boys will need to understand the power of the gun – maybe possess it at times." I say.

She shakes her head.

We look around us to see if anyone is listening to our conversation. I am the only person that Kea told about Reahile's death. The actual truth behind his death, not the nonsense that was announced to Tholoana Kingdom via the media. We hug for a while.

Luthuli creeps up on us.



“Your car is in the parking lot”, he tells me.

“Dumela mofomahadi”, he greets Kea.

“Hi there. Please, call me Kea”, Kea responds.

“Kea, this is Luthuli. He is Mabutho’s brother”, I introduce him to her formally.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Luthuli.” Kea makes Luthuli blush. I just giggle and get my keys from him.

“Nosi, they are looking for you inside”, Luthuli finally says.

I put my shoes back on (the fluffy push-in flat shoes that Kea brought for me). Kea, Luthuli, and I walk back.

We see the doctors talking to Mam’Thola and Nonhle. Lethu recognises me and sprints to me. I guess that now I am less of an emotional mess compared to how I was when he arrived, he can show me love and not feel awkward about it. Kids are smarter than what we give them credit for. I hug him and put his three-year-old self on my hip. Nonhle is just bitter.

“He is asking to see someone called Nono”, the doctor says.

Everyone looks at me.

“That would be me”, I say.

Kea takes Lethu from me and says, “Go friend.”

I follow the doctor and not even look back. I can feel Nonhle's eyes stabbing me in the back.

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I sit next to him. All the machines that he is connected to intimidate me. I hold his hand. He opens his eyes. I smile. He tries to smile. His smile is still as beautiful as it was when we first met.

"Why must you scare me like that?" I ask him.

"I'm so sorry, Nono", he replies.

"Please come back to us. I know that you don't love me anymore and you don't want to be with me anymore. But, Lethu still needs you. Lwazi still needs you. Nonhle still needs you –

"And my baby that you are carrying still needs me", he says and smiles.

I smile.

"You look so beautiful, mamakhe", he says.

I cry and giggle.

"She is going to be perfect. She will be just like you", he says to me.

"That is why I need you to pull through. She has to meet you." I tell him.

He holds my hand.

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I leave his ward after he has passed out. His mother and Nonhle are still waiting to hear from me. As soon as I come out, they run in – no questions asked.

“I told Tshidi you will be staying at the royal house tonight. She called”, Kea says.

“Friend –

“We are leaving. Come on, let’s go. I have spoken to Luthuli. He will take your car to my place. You are not going to be with Tshidi and her obnoxious self after a day like this. What the hell is she doing at your house anyway?” Kea.

We giggle and leave the hospital.

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We get to the royal house and find Mohato waiting up for Kea. He greets me and kisses Kea. They look so good together. I know Kea genuinely resents him for killing Reahile, but he loves her so much it is almost scary.

I just smile at them.

One of the helpers walks into the living room where the three of us are seated to tell us that she is preparing tea for us and that my room is ready for me.

A call comes in.

It is Mam’Thola.

“Mah...” I answer.

“Sisi, he got worse after you left. He is now in ICU”, she tells me, crying.

I hang up.

I tell Mohato and Kea about the call. Then I break down and cry. Why am I crying for a man who left me for his ex? I blame the pregnancy hormones. This is definitely not me.

After I have had my moment, and my tea has finally arrived, I look at Mohato and Kea then say:

“Please forgive me if I am asking for too much. But I really need your help”.

They look at me – engaged.

“Mabutho has a son who lives in another province but right here in Tholoana Kingdom. He lives with his mother at Motaung waMoletsane. She moved there with Lwazi – that’s his name – and kept Lwazi from seeing Mabutho for the past two years. She is incredibly difficult. However, I know with your power and influence, you can get her to bring Lwazi. Mabutho could die. This is my last hope to bring him back to us – to his kids...” I say my speech super teary.

“He will be here by tomorrow afternoon. Don’t worry about anything”, Mohato lets me know.

With that, I say my thank you and my goodnight then head up to my designated room.

After a good shower, I slip into the pyjamas laid on the bed for me. I pray, then I fall asleep.

### Chapter 3

I woke up today with a heavy heart. I must have hoped too hard that Mabutho's accident was a mere dream; but it is as real as can be. I turn around and find Kea in my bed. She must have had one of those crippling nightmares of hers again. She wakes up as I try to get out of bed.

"Did you sleep okay?" She asks me.

"Yeah. I think it is because my feet were so over life. The minute that I got into bed, the relaxation of my feet had a chamomile effect on the rest of my body", I say.

We both laugh.

"The high-heel shoes struggle is so real, my friend. I definitely don't judge those women who allow their knees to embarrass them when the knees surrender to the struggle half way through the day", Kea says and we burst out laughing.

We sigh after our laughter and my heart feels heavy again. Kea notices. She rubs my back and says, "Mohato left last night to go and get Lwazi. He will be here before sunset today".

If there is one thing that Mohato is good for in life, it is getting things done – especially the impossible. Khanyi is one hell of a baby-mama. A mother who keeps her child away from the child's father when the father is begging, with tears in his eyes and snots in his nose, to be part of his

child's life deserves a reality show. She is an interesting breed of special. However, Mohato will shake her and we will have Lwazi here.

"Thank you, friend. Seriously, no matter what happens... whether Khanyi agrees for Lwazi to come over or not – thank you for at least trying", I tell her. I am genuinely thankful.

"Khanyi is small fish in a very big pond. Lwazi will be here today! With or without Khanyi", she says. I am reassured.

"I need to go home babe, change my clothes, take a shower, then head to the hospital", I tell her. With that, I prepare to leave the royal house, leaving her royal highness to whatever it is that she gets up to being a rich and royal housewife. Luthuli brought my car to the royal house sometime last night.

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I get to my house and find Tshidi eating a banana and Sis'Nora cleaning the kitchen. These two do not like each other at all, and to be honest with you, I am ready for Tshidi to leave my house now.

"Matshidiso, you still here?" I ask, annoyed.

Before she even answers me, her four children come sliding down the tiles of my passage. Before I can even scream out "WHAT THE FUCK?!" Sis'Nora is on to them, yelling the crap out of them and reminding them that this is not their mother's house. Tshidi's heart sinks at these words.

She looks at me hoping that I will say something to Sis'Nora, but honestly, I have so much more to say to her.

"Tshidi, seriously, you have moved into my house and now your kids are here too?! *Aowa* Matshidiso, no. I actually love my space and I enjoy having a very clean house", I tell her.

"I told you friend, I am here for you. And now that Mabutho is also in hospital –

"Matshidiso, I am fine! In fact, I would feel a whole lot better if you and your kids were not here. I need some space. Tshidi, I need you to please leave", I blurt out.

"Friend –

"Please Matshidiso. I am asking you to leave my house. I need you to go home and fix your situation with your husband. Please," I am actually fed up.

"Fine!" she sulks.

She disappears into one of the bedrooms in my house.

"Shuuuu! You finally said something! Thank you! That friend of yours is very annoying" Sis'Nora.

I do not have the energy for any of this. I just look at her and make my way to my room, lock the door and enjoy my space. I shower up, lotion myself with my face and body products. I fix my face and settle for black jeans, a yellow t-shirt, a yellow-beaded neck-piece, and my white



Converse All Stars. I wear my wristwatch, and comb my beautifully long relaxed hair into a bun.

I grab my *SMJ Designs* handbag and I make my way out of my bedroom. Tshidi's perfume that is stuck in my passage (now that she and her basketball team have left my house) and the smell brings me to vomit!

I run into the toilet and throw up. When I am done, I clean up after myself. When I get to the kitchen, Sis'Nora gives me sorghum porridge. She tells me that it will help settle my tummy and it is safe for the baby. I look at her – shocked that she knows.

"Come on, Kenosi. I am an old woman. I can see these things." I just smile at her.

"Don't worry, Kenosi. Matshidiso's perfume smells terrible – even to those of us who are not pregnant." She says. I laugh.

"Why are you so stressed? Is it because of Mabutho and his accident?" She asks, genuinely concerned.

"He cannot die, sis'Nora." I tell her.

"It's not for you to decide, my love. A person belongs to God and no one else. If God has decided that it is time for Mabutho to die, you need to accept it." She says.

"But how will I raise this child on my own?" I ask her, tears knocking on my eyelids.

“Kenosi, stop crying! You are a woman – raising a child with or without a partner is an inherent ability that you never have to worry about. You will be more than able to raise this child without Mabutho. Stop using this child as a crutch for your inability to let this man go. Even if he survives this, what are you hoping will happen? He has already chosen another woman over you. What makes you think a kiss away from death will make all the difference and bring him back to you?” Sis’Nora expresses a truth I am not ready to hear.

“I have to go back to the hospital. I will see you later, Sis’Nora”, I tell her. She just looks at me.

“Sis’Nora, I might come back with Lwazi later.” I inform her.

“For what?!” She protests. She must think I was asking her.

“Lwazi is Mabutho’s son. His father is not well. He needs to be here”, I explain myself.

“You have got to be kidding me. Mabutho’s wife has to be the one who accommodates Lwazi. Mabutho and his children have nothing to do with you.” Sis’Nora is revealing truths that I am not ready to hear again.

“Sis’Nora, Khanyi will never allow Nonhle to stay with her child. Lwazi has to be here.” I explain.

“U-NGE-NA-PHI?!” She emphasises. This means, “*How is this your problem?*”

I just look at her.

“Please fix the guest bedroom for him. I want his stay to be comfortable”,  
I conclude.

I leave before she can even say anything more.

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I get to the hospital and I see Mam’Thola sitting outside of the ICU room where Mabutho is.

“Mah”, I acknowledge her. She is crying. I sit next to her. I hug her. Today is her turn to cry on my shoulder.

“Nandi and Luthuli are inside with him.” She tells me.

“Okay mah. Where is Nonhle?” I ask. She is his wife after all – culturally speaking anyway.

“She told me that she had a nail appointment she could not get out of so she will only be here tomorrow again”, she tells me.

Nonhle does not deserve uMabutho. She does not deserve his love nor does she deserve his family’s love and support as Mabutho’s wife. She behaves like some stray dog with zero basic home training. I am actually annoyed. Nonhle has no sense.

“Kenosi, this is Mabutho’s wife.” She reminds me, noticing my utter annoyance with her absence.

“The same wife that cheated on him! The same wife that he went back to and she still disrespects you, and your family. This is the same wife that

chose a nail appointment over being here with her husband – YOUR SON!” I think I am losing my mind.

I look away from her.

“I know you mean well, but this is not the time for all of that”, she concludes.

I see Nandi and Luthuli walk out of the ICU room. They greet me. I smile back at them.

I decide to stand up and go into Mabutho’s room.

I brush his head as I get to the side of the bed. I kiss his forehead and sit down.

“Mabutho Ngwenya, wake up. I am begging you Mtimande. Lwazi will be here to see you. You have a lot to live for still. Your purpose has not yet been concluded. I am begging you Butho, wake up”, I say. There is no response from him. I just hear the beeping machines.

I pull out some earphones and my phone. I put on J-Cole’s *“Love Yours”*, and put the earphones in his ears. I put the song on repeat. I hold his hand. While he listens to the music, I pray. I talk to God about this entire situation. I pray for Mabutho’s life. I pray for his healing. I pass out mid-prayer.

Mabutho’s coughing viciously wakes me up! The next thing I know, a swarm of nurses come running in and I am thrown out of the ward. My

phone got thrown at me too. What is happening? I wait at the door. My arms are folded against my chest in distress.

“What happened?” Mam’Thola asks me like I know what just happened. Good Lord.

I just shrug my shoulders and utter, “I don’t know”. Then I break down and cry. Luthuli puts his arms around me. Nandi gives me a bottle of water to drink and calm down.

Mohato appears down the hospital passage. Walking in next to him is Lwazi and Kea. Lwazi sees me and when our eyes lock, he runs to me and I kneel down to hug him. There is silence. Lwazi and I embrace each other.

“How are you my boy?” I ask him.

“I am fine”, he says.

“Thank you for coming to see your dad”, I say.

“Don’t cry, Nono... I am here now”, he says.

I just melt into his five-year-old arms. I look up and see that Khanyi is here too. I stand up. She is not impressed at all.

She and I look at each other.

“Fana, come to granny”, exclaims shocked Mam’Thola.

Lwazi goes to greet Mam’Thola.

“I don’t appreciate being dragged out of my home with my son to come and answer to you”, Khanyi expresses.

“Please forgive me, Khanyi. I was desperate, and I knew that you wouldn’t hear me out”, I tell her.

“So you send scary men to drag me out of my house instead?” Khanyi.

I look at Kea and Mohato. What scary men now? Kea seems unfazed and just shrugs her shoulders.

“Well, thank you that you are here anyway. Khanyi, Lwazi needs to be here. Mabutho needs him”, I say.

“Mabutho has been fine without Lwazi all these years. Why does he suddenly need him now?” Khanyi says, attitude on 100.

“Without involving myself in whatever happened between you and Mabutho, we both know that is not true. I am not going to involve myself more than I should in your issues with Mabutho, but I am going to ask you to please put that all aside and let his son be here for his healing; his first born son, Khanyi. Please.” Me.

“Okay, let him go in quickly so that we can head back home. The road is long and far”, Khanyi.

“I was thinking that he could please be here for the remainder of his recess.” I plead with her.

“Mabutho has not completed all the necessary cultural requirements regarding Lwazi. He knows that and uMam’Thola knows that too, that is why she is so silent right now, isn’t that right, Mam’Thola?” Khanyi.

“Khanyi please... this is not the time nor the place for all of that. When Mabutho wakes up, we can have these conversations. But for now, please sisi, please let Lwazi stay”, I say.

“And where exactly will he be staying?” Khanyi.

“At my place”, I say.

“I can live with that. I don’t want Nonhle anywhere near my son. I need you to promise me that Nonhle will stay the hell away from my son”, Khanyi.

I nod.

“I like you, Kenosi. I can see that your intentions are pure. I trust you with my son. Don’t make me regret it”, Khanyi states.

I nod and smile.

She says goodbye to Lwazi and tells him to be good for ‘Aunty Nono’. Lwazi is excited to stay. As she leaves, she says, “If you ever go to war with Nonhle for Mabutho, know that I am in your corner”. She winks her eye at me, giggles, and walks away.

Where does Mabutho find these awkwardly breaded women?

## Chapter 4

Lwazi's first night was a bit rocky. He woke up in the middle of the night feeling lonely in his room and jumped into my bed. I have no worries with that. The morning is a whole lot better. He and Sis'Nora hit it off really well. He finds her very funny. I genuinely appreciate Sis'Nora for accommodating him even though she does not agree with my decision to have brought him here.

Lwazi and I enjoy our breakfast: sorghum porridge with Nespray – just like my beautiful grandmother used to make it for me –then a full English breakfast after that.

“Nono, what happened to Mabutho?” Lwazi asks me. To hear Lwazi call his father by name makes my body cringe a bit. I know it would hurt him but this also tells you just how disconnected Lwazi is from his father because they have been absent in each other's lives.

“Lwa, you do know that Mabutho is your dad right?” I say, just randomly putting it out there.

“My mom told me. But I have never had to call him dad before”, he says.

My heart sinks.



“Lwa, your father loves you very much, my boy. I hope that you will find it in your big and beautiful heart to let him be your dad”, I tell him.

He just eats his breakfast and does not respond.

“Are you going to tell me what happened to him?” He says after the brief silence that occurred after my little request.

“He was involved in a car accident”, I tell him.

“I will pray for him”, he says.

“That would be very beautiful”, I say.

We eat our breakfast in silence for a brief moment. I catch Sis’Nora’s eye throwing shade at the conversation that I am having with this child. I am going to have to try hard with this one.

“You are going to meet your brother today. Are you excited?” I try to revive the conversation.

He just shrugs his shoulders.

I see Sis’Nora pulling a face, almost ready to tell me that this child should just get a beating for being so cold.

“Lwazi, you are a big brother now. You cannot afford to be rude or cold – these are the things that will rub off onto your brother and I am quite sure that you do not want that”, I tell him.

“Nono, it will only be for a few days. After that, I am going to go home and I will be an only child again,” he tells me.

“It doesn’t have to be that way, Lwa. When your father gets better, we can try to fix that. We can try for you to come and visit us often”, I say.

“My mom says that adults’ issues are always difficult to fix because they are not easy to deal with. It could take years”, him.

This child better not say these things in front of Mabutho and make him slip into an even deeper coma.

“Lwa, your father is not well. We need him to get better”, I say.

“Why? So that he can be a good dad to my brother and forget about me as soon as he is okay again?” him.

I look at Sis’Nora in shock.

“Don’t look at me. I told you that this is not your battle to fight”, Sis’Nora.

There is silence.

Then Sis'Nora walks towards us, looks at Lwazi who is just eating his breakfast without a care in the world, grabs the plate from him, and while Lwazi is still shocked that anyone dares to treat him like that while I am too scared to be harsh on him, Sis'Nora begins: "Lwazi, you are going to listen to me now. You cannot come here and have such a nice lady accommodate you when your father's wife did not even think of bringing you up here, then you behave this way."

"I didn't ask to come here", Lwazi.

"I will slap the attitude out of you, my boy. Don't talk to me like that!"

Sis'Nora viciously states. This scares Lwazi straight to my lap. He cuddles up to me in fear.

"Lwazi, watch your mouth when you are speaking to adults! I will smack you. I do not tolerate disrespectful children. You will not disrespect me! Never!" Sis'Nora.

"Thank you, Sis'Nora", I say. Then I look at Lwazi who is now sulking in my arms and I say, "I need you to be kind to your dad today. Please".

He nods.

“Come now, let’s go bath and get ready to go to the hospital”, I tell him.

He runs to the bathroom and runs his water.

My intercom goes off. Sis’Nora answers it then says, “There is a Keano at the gate to deliver stuff”.

Good God, how can I forget?

“Please let him in. I am going to bath Lwazi, please put the stuff that he is delivering in the other spare bedroom”, I request. She nods.

...

Lwazi let me bath him without any hesitation. He even told me about the pain he endured when he went in for circumcision. We spoke about school, and his friends in Motaung waMoletsane. I can safely conclude that he is a bit shy. However, he is very clever. In his silence amongst his peers, he is highly observant.

After he bathed, I showered. I got dressed and ready for the day ahead. I grab my bag and as I enter my TV room, I find Keano and Lwazi playing together. I stand there confused.

“He said he would wait for you”, Sis’Nora.

“Good morning, pretty lady”, Keano.

“Shaka, hi. I didn’t expect you to wait”, I say.

“It’s okay, I am not complaining at all. I am waiting on a pretty woman”,  
Keano.

I blush a bit but then I also find his behaviour and language highly  
inappropriate.

“Shaka, I have to go. I am on my way out. I am really sorry. Maybe we  
can chat some other time”, I politely state.

“Perhaps I can leave you with my card and when you are more settled  
and have more time on your hands, you can give me a call and I will come  
and set up for you”, he says as he leaves his card on the coffee table.

I smile.

He finally leaves.

Sis’Nora: “He is so hot, girl!”

I laugh.

“That is the kind of man you should be investing in Nosi, not that thing you keep running after only for him to end up in bed with another woman.” Sis’Nora.

“Sis’Nora!” I reprimand her. Then I use my eyes to signal that she should mind her speech around the child in the room. He just giggles.

...

Lwazi and I get to the hospital. He is clinging onto my hand. We walk to the ICU section. We do not find Mabutho or evidence of his presence there. I panic. I look at Lwazi and he looks at me.

“Where is he?” he asks me.

Tears form at my eyes. He cannot be dead.

I find the nurse that was assigned to his bed and I ask her, “Sisi, where is Mabutho Ngwenya?”

She looks at me and says, “And you are?”

I look at her ready to punch the life out of her. She notices that my face has changed, then she quickly says, “Sorry. His wife asked us to keep his information private”.

Thank God that Kea and Mohato walk in and the nurse bows down to respect and acknowledge them.

“Where is Mabutho Ngwenya?” I ask again.

One look from Mohato and we are told that he has been moved to the surgical ward.

Mohato, Kea, Lwazi, and I walk to the surgical ward in silence. Our first encounter is Mam’Thola and Nonhle having coffee together. We say hi very briefly and walk past them. Nonhle is shocked to see Lwazi holding onto me. She follows us into the ward. Mabutho is awake. He is sitting with Luthuli and Nandi. They all turn around and see Lwazi. Mabutho almost faints. He cries instead. I did well with this one – bringing Lwazi up here. I just know it.

\*\*\* *Love Yours* \*\*

## Chapter 5

Kea, Gugu, and I are going out for breakfast this Saturday morning. The past two months have been very rough for me and honestly, I could do with some girl time and just getting out of the house not just to go to work. So, Mabutho got discharged from hospital and yes, Sis'Nora was right – he left with Nonhle and told me that it would be best if we never spoke again – but he would send me money every month for the baby. I should have let that bastard die. My rock has definitely been Kea, Hlobi, and Sis'Nora.

My pregnancy is going well. I am about 6 months pregnant now so it is no longer a secret. My belly is popping for sure, and yes, I am expecting a baby girl. I have already named her. Her name is Kemorerile. My daughter may have been conceived at the breaking point of my relationship with her father, but I will plan a good life for her and she will know love and acceptance; a good life and a quality kind of care and adoration. I plan all these things for my baby girl – Kemorerile.

Hlobi and I are quite close. Our story is quite funny actually. I used to have the greatest crush on Zethembe. Hlobi, his sister, tried to hook us up. When Zethembe gracefully “family-zoned” me by referring me to me



as his 'baby sister', my dreams of being Mrs Zethembe Zungu died a slow and painful death. When I met his wife, Gugu, through Kea, I understood why. Gugu is quite the stunner. Gugu and Zethembe started having problems before he passed and Zethembe and I became unbelievably close in his last days. Gugu was convinced that he and I were having an affair but she could not have been further from the truth. That man adored her. If only she respected herself enough.

With everything that has been going on between this pregnancy, Mabutho and myself, Hlobi has really been checking up on me. She spent a weekend at my place and all we did was eat junk and watch movies. I have not heard from Tshidi since the day she and her children moved out of my house. I think about her from time to time, but honestly, I need to be happy again for the sake of my baby girl, Reri. I hope Tshidi is okay though and I hope things are better in her marriage.

I get ready for breakfast by wearing a cute maternity wear maxi-dress. It is pink with rose gold stitching. I wear rose gold sandals and accessorise myself in rose gold jewellery. Thanks to some superstition out there, I can no longer plait my hair. I simply comb my beautifully long and relaxed

hair and let it hit my back like it always does. I wear my *Tom Ford* sunglasses, grab my *Michael Kors* handbag, and head to my breakfast.

...

“SURPRISE!”

I cry when I see all these incredible women surprise me with a baby shower when all I was expecting was breakfast for three. I am not exactly excited to see my sister and mother here, but I will live in my current blessing. I am so moved. Good for me for wearing a pink maxi-dress to indicate that I am having a baby girl. The theme here is white and gold and everyone is dressed accordingly. This has Kearabetswe written all over it.

“Thank you friend”, I tell her as she comes to hug me. Hlobi is also here. My mom and sister are sitting together. They simply waved at me and carried on with what they were doing.

The MC, Kearabetswe Mohale, announces that we should open gifts first. The rule is, when I reveal the gift, I must guess what the person who bought the gift was thinking when they were buying the gift for Reri.

My first gift: a Mercedes Benz car seat from Hlobi.

“Hlobi, you must have been thinking that my daughter will be a Mercedes Benz lady like her mama!” I say. Everyone laughs. Hlobi responds, “Nope. I was thinking that if I bought that child any other brand, her mama would kill me”. The laughter fills the room.

The second gift is from my mother. This ought to be interesting. It is a set of baby bottles and pacifiers. “Whoever bought this gift must have not received the memo that no child of mine will be using pacifiers”, I say as I put it to the side.

“It is a gift. The words that you are looking for are thank you”, my sister Nyakallo says.

“This is not the time. Please.” Kea calls her to order.

The third gift is from Nyakallo. Sweet Jesus. I am tempted to put it aside, but I decide to be civil. I open it. It is a baby cuddle pillow.

“You don’t even have to guess. Let me tell you what I was thinking when I bought that. I was thinking that you will definitely need that seeing that

you are doing this parenting thing all by yourself. That's what you get when you go around making babies with married men", Nyakallo says.

"Who invited these two animals?" I ask, upset really. What a way to ruin my baby shower.

"I invited them. I would think you would want your family to celebrate your new baby with you", Gugu.

Of course she invited them. She always wants to be a bag of extra shit. Plus, she believes that she is getting back at me for something that never even happened.

I stand up and just walk out of the eating area of the restaurant. I go sit by myself by the pool area. Hlobi, Kea, and Gugu follow me. They sit on the resting chair in front of me.

"What is your problem, Gugu?" I see her face and I cannot help myself. She had no right.

"Friend –

"No Kearabetswe. Gugu must answer for what she has done. Who do you think you are wena, Gugu?" I angrily enquire.

“Kenosi, who the hell do you think you are talking to?” Gugu lashes back.

“Gugu, you think you are the only one who can play bitch? Especially against a hormonal pregnant woman?” I threaten.

“And what exactly is it that you think you can do to me, Kenosi?” Gugu challenges me.

“Well for starters, I can start asking the media questions about why you lied and said that you and Zethembe were fixing things before he died? You know damn well that Zethembe wanted nothing more to do with you. That’s just the beginning. Part two of my conversation with the media would be why you hid the fact that it was Skhumbuzo’s vehicle that crashed into Zethembe’s vehicle and killed your husband and son”, I threaten, leaving everyone around us gob-smacked – even Gugu.

“You don’t have proof”, she says.

“I don’t need proof, Gugu. You work in the media space, you know this. All I need is to tell them how Zethembe came to me in his last few days expressing how inconsiderate his wife is. You became a nightmare of a wife because he asked you to be for him what he had always been for you!

God is going to punish you for what you did.” With this, I stand up, thank Hlobi and Kea for organising what could have been a great baby shower and start walking away from them. Kea follows me. She insists that she is bringing the gifts to my house with me. Hlobi says she will come with. We are all sad but we all leave Gugu alone with her thoughts and deeds. I need to check in on Hlobi though. It could not have been easy for her to hear all of these things about her brother. Zethembe’s death really took its toll on the Zungu family.

...

Kea, Hlobi and I drove back in my car. The baby gifts filled my boot and the rest chilled with Hlobi in the backseat. We get to my place and find Mabutho waiting outside my gate with Luthuli and Nandi. They are pushing him in his wheelchair. I step out of the car and attend to them. Mabutho is in tears.

“And now?” Kea asks, confused as I am. I had no idea she was right behind me.

“I know this looks bad. I know that my brother does not deserve your kindness and forgiveness, but please Nosi –he has nowhere else to go. Nonhle kicked him out of the house”, Luthuli informs us.

“Well why are you not wheeling him to your mother’s house? Mabutho has made it very clear that he wants nothing to do with Nosi or her baby. Why are you bringing him here?” That would be Hlobi.

“Please help him, Nosi”, Nandi pleads to me, completely ignoring what Hlobi has asked.

What else can I do? I love this man.

“Hey”, I say to him as I kneel down to talk to him.

“You are home now. Don’t cry”, I reassure him.

With this, I get my pregnant self off the floor and wheel him into the complex and into the house.

Daddy’s home.

## Chapter 6

I get into the kitchen, ready for breakfast with the intention to eat up then dash to work. I find Butho already indulging in breakfast and Sis'Nora doing something outside – I am not sure what but I think it is laundry.

“Good morning”, I greet him.

“Hey! I made us both some breakfast. I am not sure what your cravings are but I did as much as this wheelchair allowed me to do”, he tells me.

We both giggle.

He made me Rice Krispies.

“Thank you. You know what, your wheelchair is in luck. I am craving Rice Krispies”, I chuckle as I tell him.

“That’s my girl”, he says then he high-fives my belly.

I smile.

“I think we should name her Owethu”, he says.

“Uh no! I have already named her Kemorerile”, I inform him.

“What on earth does that even mean?” him.

“It means that I have planned her and have further plans for her”, I tell him.



“This child is a Ngwenya. Her name is Owethu Ntandokazikayise Siyamthanda Ngwenya. This little angel is my only baby girl and I have you to thank for her”, he says as he brushes my belly.

Two days ago, he was not even part of our lives. All he was prepared to do was give me money on a monthly basis. Today, he is naming my child. A bitterness rises in my heart as I think about how Mabutho has treated me – especially after the accident. Nevertheless, I smile through it.

“Please lie down on the couch. I need to play some music for my daughter before we both leave for work”, he asks me.

“Butho, how are you getting to work?” I ask him.

“I will uber”, he tells me.

“Hhayi bo, Mabutho. I will drive you to work and fetch you later so that we can fetch Lethu together”, I insist.

“Thank you... seriously, thank you”, him.

I smile at him.

Lethu is coming to visit for the weekend so we will be picking him up from school.

“I need to talk to my daughter please”, he reminds me.

I lie down on the couch.

He plays Kanye West's *Violent Crimes*. I am not going to lie: this song goes in. I close my eyes and take in the lyrics as he rubs my belly. When the song ends, he has a little chat with she who is growing inside of me.

"Owethu Ntandokazikayise Siyamthanda Ngwenya, I love you my baby girl. I cannot wait to meet you".

I get up from the couch and grab my bags in the bedroom. I hear the buzzer go off, but I assume that between Sis'Nora and Butho, someone will open up for whoever is at the gate. I fix my make-up then leave my room. I walk in on Keano and Butho awkwardly chilling in the TV room, not saying a word to one another. Sis'Nora is serving Keano juice and telling him how much she missed seeing him around the house. She is also telling him that he looks handsome. And he does. Trust.

I clear my throat to be noticed when she says "Don't mind this one (referring to Butho). He is merely the father of Kenosi's child. He does not deserve Kenosi in the slightest bit. He is just here because his wife has kicked him out."

"Sis'Nora, why are you saying all of these things?" I enquire.

"Because it is the truth! I don't want Mabutho to mess things up for you with Mr Keano. He is only the father of your child. He is not the man of this house. These things must be made very clear, Nosi. Especially because we both know that the minute Nonhle walks through that door asking him to come home, you will be found alone and second best once

again.” Sis’Nora must think this is funny. She then looks at Keano and says, “And they do not sleep in the same bedroom, Keano”.

Keano looks at me. Butho looks at Sis’Nora ready to strangle her.

“May we speak outside please?” Keano asks me.

He and I walk out of the TV room and stand outside. Before we even speak, Keano hugs me.

“Is everything okay?” him.

“Yeah. It is just a complicated situation. He needed my help.” Me. Why am I explaining myself to this Ben10 again? I am a good three years older than he is.

“I understand. Look, I just popped in to check up on you. I didn’t think that he would be here. I am not trying to cause any problems”, Keano.

“Well now that you see that you no longer have to come in and check up on her, I hope to never see your face here ever again.” Mabutho says – wheeling himself onto the porch that Keano and I are standing on.

“*HHayi! Hhayi!* Stop it, Mabutho. Who tells Nonhle that nonsense every time you choose her over Kenosi? Stop being selfish and silly. Kenosi deserves to be happy and Keano is better suited for Kenosi than you are”, Sis’Nora is right behind him.

“Why are you always interfering in our business? Have you forgotten that you just an employee in this house? A cleaner to be exact.” Mabutho says to Sis’Nora.

“EXCUSE ME?!” Sis’Nora, shocked.

Sis’Nora and Mabutho argue. I start experiencing pains that I am unable to explain. Keano is holding onto my tummy and my back. He is the only one paying attention to me, asking me if I am okay and if I can breathe. Sis’Nora and Mabutho do not even notice that I am no longer okay. Keano cradles me and puts me in his car. By the time we get to the car, only then do Sis’Nora and Mabutho notice that I am not well. Mabutho tries to fight Keano to let go of me, insisting that he can take care of me instead. I hear Sis’Nora saying “How are you going to help her when you are being helped by a wheelchair yourself, Mabutho? Stop being stupid. The man whose legs function better can help Nosi better than you can.”

Mabutho, out of anger, attempts to stand up from the wheelchair to help me and he falls badly onto the ground. Sis’Nora leaves him there and walks back into the house. I beg Keano to help Mabutho back onto his chair. Keano is kind enough to follow my instructions as I cry through my pain in his car – his cute Polo. When he is done, he comes back to the car and takes me to hospital.

...

I wake up in hospital to Kea and Keano sitting on either side of my bed. Keano is the first to jump up when he sees me open my eyes. I spot Kea giggling, amused at the intensity of this man’s crush on me.

“Are you okay?” Keano.

I smile. I nod. He is so sweet.

“Shouldn’t you be at work?” Kea asks Keano.

“Please forgive me, Mofomahadi. I had to make sure that she is okay”, Keano responds.

“She is going to be okay. Please feel free to call me Kea”, Kea tells him.

He nods at Kea. Then he looks at me and says, “I will text you a bit later, okay? Be kind to yourself, please”.

I nod.

He kisses my forehead. Kea giggles. Keano leaves.

“And then?” Kea looks at me, still chuckling.

“His name is Keano. He is a shop assistant at Baby Boom”, I tell her.

“Keano Maphumulo? Thee Keano Maphumulo?” Kea.

“Yeah, I think that is his surname”, I try to remember. I have never really asked him what his surname is.

“Girl stop it. Baby Boom is one of the many things that Shaka Keano Maphumulo owns. You are talking about one of the youngest billionaires in Tholoana Kingdom. He is one of the boys that Mohato mentors”, Kea says nonchalantly.

*Heh banna!*

Before I can further enquire, my doctor comes in.

“Miss Ramphora”, the doctor calls for my attention.

“How are you feeling?” She asks me.

“The pains have subsided. I just feel tired”, I tell her.

“That’s understandable. Your body is under a lot of stress. If you do not treat yourself with a bit more kindness, you will harm the baby. I am going to keep you here for tonight, just for some observations. If I am happy with yours and the baby’s health, I will let you go home tomorrow.” Dr Paton tells me.

I nod.

“You are almost at the end of your journey. It is nesting time now. Your pregnancy has been without complication thus far. Enjoy what’s left of it and don’t let anything take away the experience of a pregnancy without complications from you. Not a lot of women can say that they have had such a blessed pregnancy”, Dr Paton.

“I can definitely testify to that”, Kea.

The doctor smiles at Kea and says to me, “But I must add that you have one strong daughter baking in there”.

Kea and I both giggle.

The doctor leaves.

“You ready to tell me what happened?” Kea.

“Keano came over to my place. Butho lost his mind. Sis’Nora added fuel to the fire. I just felt so out of control”, I tell her. Vele what nonsense was going on in my house this morning?

“Nosi, I have some questions: number one, when is Sis’Nora going to stop acting like her name is on your title deed?” Kea says and we both burst into laughter.

“She means well friend, I cannot even be mad at her. She loves and protects me in a way that Motlalepula doesn’t”, me. Motlalepula is my mother by the way. Apparently back in the day, she was proper friends with Kea’s mother, Maphodile.

“Motlalepula and Maphodile have always had their own ways of living life. That consumed the kind of mothers that they became. However, it doesn’t mean that she doesn’t love you or care about you”, Kea.

“All I am saying is that Sis’Nora is more of a mother to me than what Motlalepula ever was. Motlalepula bought my child pacifiers for crying out loud. Sis’Nora herself put them in a bin without me even saying a word”, I tell Kea to prove a point.

“That’s because Sis’Nora is very forward”, Kea says. We laugh aloud this time.

“*Hhayi! Hhayi!* The two of you better stop gossiping about me”, Sis’Nora walks in and says. Kea and I look at each other and crack up once again.

“How are you feeling, Nosi *wami?* *Yhu!* I was so stressed. I couldn’t even work properly at home. I had to come and see you”, Sis’Nora dramatically tells us.

“Ncaaaaww Sis’Nora, you are so sweet”, I humour her.

“So, how did you get here, Sis’Nora?” Kea asks her.

“That nice and handsome man, Keano... he brought me here”, Sis’Nora genuinely enjoys talking about Keano.

Kea and I high-five each other and we giggle.

“My second question to you, lady: Who is Keano to you?” Kea asks me.

“Yes, I want this answer”, Sis’Nora.

“Honestly, he is just a sales rep from Baby Boom that helped me out when I was there shopping for my daughter. We had McDonald’s for lunch. He came over to help me set up the nursery. There really is very little to tell. He is just a nice guy”, me.

“Sales man? He takes you to McDonald’s for lunch on your first date? Dump him, my darling. He cannot afford you!” Sis’Nora.

“*Hhayi bo*, Sis’Nora! Shaka Keano Maphumulo is a very rich man. I am sure he was trying to get Nosi to get to know him for who he really is, and not for all of his money”, Kea.

“Rich? Kenosi, Mabutho needs to go! Immediately! We cannot miss out on Keano because of him. He is rich, my darling. Plus, he is very handsome”, Sis’Nora makes a complete 360 turn.

Kea and I look at each other.

“Nosi, listen to me. Mabutho is one of those people in your life who come into your heart to keep you back. He is not here because he loves you or wants what is best for you. He and Nonhle are going through some



marital problems right now – which is normal for any married couple. I go through marital problems with my husband. I can bet my entire salary for the next three years that if Nonhle comes back, he will leave you again.” Sis’Nora.

I am suddenly hurt.

“Friend, you can raise this baby without Mabutho. You have us. I know that you love this man, Nosi, but you need to love yourself more than you love him. You need to choose yourself before you choose him. Otherwise, you will end up like Maphodile and Motlalepula: making your daughter pay for the choices that you made because of her father. At some point in our lives, we need to understand that we should not attend events that our worth is not invited to,” Kea.

...

Kea took me home after I got discharged. Both Lwazi and Lethu are spending the weekend with us. Today, we had a great movie afternoon together. In the morning, I attended physio with Butho. He is really doing well. His physiotherapist gave us some exercises to try together at home and we have decided to do them together before we sleep.

The boys passed out in the middle of the movie. Now that they are tucked into bed, Butho and I begin his exercises.

“Butho”, I start.

“Hmmm”, him.

“If Nonhle were to come back and want you back –

“Don’t finish that sentence.” He interjects my question.

“Butho, I need to know if I am building with you or if we are just co-parenting and sharing a digs”, I tell him.

“Why? So that you know what you need to do with and about Keano Maphumulo?” Butho.

“Don’t be an ass. You moved on with your life. Surely I deserve to do the same if you no longer see me in your future”, I tell him. He notices that I am pissed.

“Nono, I am sorry I hurt you. I am really sorry that I keep disappointing you. I don’t deserve you. I could never earn the love that you show me. I know I am selfish, but loving you is something that will never die inside of me”, Butho.

I let go of his legs that I am stretching and I sit on the floor, my belly exhausting me like it always does.

“Mabutho... people very close to me; people that I love and trust are telling me that I am making a mistake with you. They are telling me that you will always choose Nonhle over me – ALWAYS. A part of me knows that it’s true. However, I am going to trust you. I am going to choose you and our family. And if you break my heart again –

“I won’t. I will never break your heart again. Trust me. Nonhle and I are done”. Mabutho says.

He puts his hand on my thighs. I smile. He runs his hands up and down my thighs, warming up the things that I have been feeling because my hormones are dancing to their own tune.

I get up and find myself on top of him.

I kiss him. He kisses me back, undressing me in the process.

It seems that both our bodies and hormones have been deprived of some sexual healing. In no time, I am bouncing on top of him and he is gripping my thighs like they are the only things that can save him from paralysis.

*As the saying goes: "Sometimes, God will bring an ex back into your life to show you that you are still stupid".*

## Chapter 7

### *THREE MONTHS LATER...*

I am two weeks away from giving birth to my daughter. Butho is walking again with the aid of one crutch. Everyone is always at my house and they all honestly just make me nervous. Everyone is always fussing over me. Butho is with me all the time – even when I have to go to the toilet. I am one hell of a whale now and the only two things that I look forward to is going to the toilet and sitting down.

Today is super rainy. I am sitting on my patio and watching the rain fall. Butho comes to sit with me outside on the patio, putting a jersey over my shoulders. He keeps brushing my belly, annoying me actually. For some reason, I really do not even want to be touched at all.

Sis’Nora walks in with Kea behind her. She chills with us on the patio and we talk about nonsense as the rain falls harder. After a good thirty minutes, Sis’Nora comes to the patio to tell us that Nonhle is in the TV room. I look at Butho – pissed as hell. He shrugs his shoulders. Kea stands up and helps my fat self get up from the chair. We walk into the house and this bitch is standing at the centre of my TV room. I fold my arms across my chest and stare at her.

“Can we help you?” Kea wastes no time.

“I just came to speak to Mabutho”, Nonhle.

“You are not welcome in this house”, Kea.

“With all due respect mofomahadi, your best friend is living with my husband and the father of my child. I need to talk to him about our child and our marriage?” Nonhle says.

“Not in my house, you don’t”, me.

Why hasn’t Mabutho divorced this cow, *vele*? He has never even suggested it. It is almost as if he was always planning on going back to her. Why did I never address this?

Nonhle looks away. Mabutho walks in.

“Butho... you look good, baby”, Nonhle.

Mabutho smiles at her.

My heart sinks.

“Mabutho, I have come to fetch you and take you home. Love, I know that there is a lot that we have been going through for the past few months, but it doesn’t change the fact that I am the love of your life”, Nonhle.

“Nonhle, you cheat on him, you kick him when he is at his lowest, you never put him first; and he is supposed to take you back just because you believe that you are the love of his life?” I enquire. The arrogance of this cow. To be honest, I am trying my best to keep myself together and fight for Butho though he has shown me that he and I are done.

“With all due respect Kenosi, he will never love you like he loves me. And you know this too. I did not come here to fight with you. I came to fetch my husband – something that he will never be to you. We have had our

issues, yes. I thank you for always being there for him. I thank you for loving him through the pain and everything that we go through. However, I am here now. Your services are no longer needed”, Nonhle says to me.

Have you ever felt like your heart has been ripped out of your chest only to be played around with? Have you ever felt like your breath has been taken out of your body and your very ability to breathe has been challenged by everything you truly believed was going right in your life? My whole world... my entire existence came crumbling down when I saw Mabutho kiss my forehead goodbye and take Nonhle’s hand to walk out of my door. Love betrayed me. The world warned me, yet I still chose love. And it betrayed me. I collapse into my couch and let my tears flow generously. Sis’Nora and Kea have been trying to calm me down with no luck. I can barely breathe.

The next thing I know, Nonhle walks back into my TV room and points a gun at my head. I am too emotional to even respond to the situation before me.

“Mabutho and I are going to grow old together. You need to stop standing in my way because you have no idea what I am capable of doing”, Nonhle says to me.

“Nonhle, please just leave me alone. Congratulations okay! You are officially the most manipulative bitch I know. You have him. You can keep him. Just stay out of my life”, I tell her, sobbing.

“There is only way that I can stay out of your life and you stay out of mine”, she says. Before I can even ask what that way is, she shoots my stomach.

...

I wake up in hospital with a smaller stomach than that which I last had when I shut my eyes in my TV room. I see Kea next to me, crying. I see Sis’Nora next to Kea, crying. I spot Keano on the other side of my bed, his face in between his hands.

“Where’s my child?” I utter.

Everyone in the room cries. I cry.

“Is she dead?” I ask, deep in my sobs now.

Kea nods her head.

“I am so sorry. She didn’t make it friend. The bullet was literally stuck in her head. To remove the bullet, they had to remove her from you. She wasn’t breathing before they could even remove the bullet from her head. When they removed the bullet from her head –

“I think she gets it”, Keano interjects Kea’s speech.

I am so broken.

“Where is Nonhle?” I ask, suddenly overcome with anger.

“She is in prison, friend”, Kea.

“And Mabutho?” I ask. I am not even sure what kind of answer I am hoping to hear.

There is silence.

“Where is Mabutho?” I firmly and angrily ask.

“UMabutho sisi – we have banned him from coming near you”, Sis’Nora.

“So he was here? Why did you ban him?” I ask, relieved that at least he still cares.

“Kenosi... Mabutho is trying to get you to drop the charges against Nonhle”, Keano.

The pain comes back. It stabs my heart. I get that he did not love me. However, apparently he didn’t love his daughter neither.

*“God will bring an ex back into your life to show you that you are still stupid”.*

The doctor comes into my ward to discharge me. Keano insists that he will take me to his place and rather I heal there. Kea insists that I will be better off at the royal house. Does it occur to anyone that maybe I want to be alone and mourn my child? Keano, Kea, and Sis’Nora agree that I will go to the royal house on my behalf.

“Friend, no offense but I really don’t want to be around children right now. You have four of them running around your house right now”, I say.

Everyone is taken aback. Yep, they did not consider that little fact.



“It’s settled then, she is coming to my house”, Keano says. He wheels me out of the ward. I hear Sis’Nora yell, “I will take good care of your house, Nono”.

...

Keano and I arrive at his mansion located at one of the most incredible suburbs in Tholoana City: Tau. It is a city named after Kearabetswe’s maternal grandfather, Kgosi (King) Tau. The gate is opened with his fingerprint. He drives in. He opens a garage and parks his Polo behind his Jaguar E-Pace.

“You have a beautiful home and beautiful cars. Baby Boom must be paying you really well”, I sarcastically say. He chuckles nervously. He gets out of the car and opens the door for me. I step out of the Polo and as I walk into his mansion, one of the helpers is already waiting for me at the door, ready to lead me to my allocated bedroom.

We silently walk up two flights of stairs then I get to the room ready to accommodate me.

“If you need anything, just let me know”, she says.

“I am not really tired. Can I maybe get some remotes for the TV?” I say.

She comes around and pulls out remote controllers out of a drawer next to me. She hands them to me.

“Will that be all, ma’am?” she says.

“Do you mind if I ask you what your name is?” I humbly request.

“Boikarabelo”, she says.

“Thank you. It is lovely to meet you, Boikarabelo”, I say.

“Likewise. Please get some rest. Dinner will be ready when you come downstairs. The chef is cooking up a storm”, she says as she leaves and closes the door behind her.

Chef?

What kind of a rich bastard is this man?

I turn on the television and treat myself to a catch-up omnibus of *The River*.

## Chapter 8

I wake up in Keano's house at 6am. I missed that storm of supper that the chef was said to be cooking. I cannot seem to go back to sleep. I suddenly miss Sis'Nora and her smart mouth. I miss my house and freedom of movement in a familiar and comfortable place. I decide to be a good digsmate and make my bed. I have no clothes in this place, yet I find a denim shirt and denim pants ironed and hung on the door of the cupboard of this room. I find white Converse All-Stars, brand new, on the ground and under the outfit.

I shower in the in-suite bathroom of my bedroom. I find a new gown, towels, washing cloths and soap neatly put there for me to use. My face products are also lined up there. Kea must have assisted with sizes and soap-choices here because my eczema does not compromise at all. I just smile and enjoy my shower. I lotion myself, walk into the bedroom and get dressed.

I touch my belly and remember that what it was carrying has died. I get lost in emotion for a minute then I remember to pull myself together, praying that I must forget. I have been through worse and I have managed to forget. I need to forget this too.

Now that I am dressed, I make my way out of the bedroom. I see this house for the first time. I follow the passage to a picture wall of some sort. There are quite a lot of pictures here of Keano's happy moments. There is this one picture that stands out the most. He is so happy, and so in love. I

zoom into the picture with my eyes, and I almost feel like retelling the story of this picture.

“Slept okay?” Keano’s voice startles me.

“I slept great, thank you. Your picture wall is very captivating”, I tell him.

“You normally go into people’s houses and look at their pictures?” Keano.

“No. I was invited to this house and I got sucked in by the happy moments displayed on this wall”, I tell him. He must not try to be clever here.

I notice that his knuckles have fresh blood. He notices me notice his knuckles.

“I had an early training session with my boxing instructor. Today’s session got a bit intense”, he explains himself. I buy his story and let it go. Besides, if he is in some sort of trouble, I am not interested. We are not at that stage in our friendship. I immediately change the subject.

“She is very beautiful”, I tell him with the intention to emphasise that *vele* I was looking deep into these pictures on this wall. I point at the “drunk in love” picture of him and the gorgeous mystery woman.

“She was. She passed”, he says. Okay, now I feel like a prick. I should have asked about the boxing session instead.

“I am sorry”, I shamefully say.

“It is okay”, him, trying to console me.

“What did you love about her the most?” I ask gleefully.

He giggles to himself and says, “She had the most hopeful laughter I have ever experienced in my life. She would just laugh, and I would be reminded that the world is still moving on. She was weird because she laughed the hardest when she was uncomfortable”. We both laugh.

“She had an incredible spirit. It was so difficult to stay mad at her. Sometimes she went out of her way to make sure that she makes me angry. For example, she could not sing at all. So when she wanted my attention, she would sing aloud just to annoy me”, he continues. We are now in stitches, laughing so hard. The pain I experience reminds me of the stitches that I have from birthing my dead baby. I try my best not to kill the vibe.

“She was so bad at singing, you would not be able to ignore her even if you tried”, he says.

We laugh.

“What happened to her?” I ask.

The mood takes a sudden change. His face changes and almost resembles the minor pain that I am now experiencing from my stitched up tummy.

“She was murdered”, he says.

I look away.

“What was her name?” I ask.

“Salamina. We all called her Mimi”, with this he weeps. He weeps like I did when I felt my tummy this morning.

I wrap my arms around his neck and hug-hold him – genuinely hold him. He holds me, hanging on to me like I am his beacon of hope.

After he has had himself a good cry, he lets go of me and says, “I think breakfast is ready”.

“She will always be with you in spirit. I am quite sure that she is proud of the man that you are becoming. I have only known you for a short space of time, but I can comfortably say that you are one in a million”, I say.

He smiles at me. His eyes are still teary. He tries to hide his face from me but I use my hand to pull his face towards my direction. I use my thumb to wipe away the tear running down his cheek.

“She loved you for the rest of her life from the moment that she met you. Don’t be sad now that she is gone. As difficult as it is, be thankful that her final experience of love was shared with you and you had the opportunity to make that love and experience beautiful”, I say.

He hugs me. He holds me too tight. I flinch. He lets me go and notices that I am in pain.

“Are you okay?” he asks me.

“The stitches”, I remind him.

He hugs me again, holding me less tightly this time.

“I thought I had brought you here to help you heal and be your strength. But truth be told, you are turning out to be my superwoman”, he says.

I am not yet sure how this makes me feel.

...

We had breakfast in silence. I could not eat at all so I just settled for the fruit that was served. After breakfast, I told Keano that I need to go back home. I need to get some clothes and other essentials that I need... like sanitary towels. I am bleeding like a slaughtered animal since I gave birth to my dead child and the two packs of sanitary towels in my new bedroom will not suffice. Keano insisted that he would drive me around today and I did not protest. I am not ready to be doing things on my own anyway.

We get to my place and find my mother, my two sisters, and my aunt comfortably sitting in my TV room and Sis'Nora cleaning my bedroom. What do they want? Keano points out a car that is hovering around the corner and appears to be watching us. He tells me that he will stay outside and watch what that car is and who is driving it. I tell him to not be paranoid and come inside.

We walk into my house. My mom is the first to stand up when she sees me, opens her arms ready to hug me and I just step away. What is she even doing here?

"Kenosi, my baby girl, how are you?" She says to me as I reject her hug.

I look away.

Keano could not have been more confused. He breaks the awkward silence and says, "Good morning, mme".

My mom nods her head in acknowledgement of Keano. Rude as always I see. Will her tongue fall off if she just says hi to the one person who is willing to greet her?

“Kenosi, I heard about what happened. I am so sorry, my baby”, my aunt.

“What do you want? Why are you here?” I say.

“We have come to support you”, my two sisters say at the same time.

I roll my eyes to five years ago.

Nyakallo is just here because she has come to celebrate the death of my child. I have not seen Mapabatso in years so I am not sure why she is here.

My aunt then says, “Are you going to introduce your friend, Kenosi?”

“This is Shaka. Shaka, this is my seasonal family. Motlalepula gave birth to her two daughters – Nyakallo and Mapabatso – and me. The lady next to them is Motlalepula’s sister, Mmannete”, I say.

There are daggers in every eye looking at me. Keano is so nervous I can literally feel him sweat. He nervously smiles and does not know how to respond to that introduction.

“I will be a minute. Let me just get what I need”, I say.

I walk past everyone and make my way to my room. I find Sis’Nora lying on my bed and watching TV. She jumps when she sees me walk in.

“Relax Sis’Nora, I just came to get a few things”, I say. I am not bothered about her misconduct right now.



“Hello to you too, Kenosi”, she says. So I give her a pass on sleeping on my bed when she should be working, and she is being her usual obnoxious self?

“Why are Motlalepula and her crew in my house?” I respond.

“*Hhe hhayi ke*, Kenosi. How am I supposed to know? You know how rude your mother is. They arrived yesterday”, Sis’Nora.

“They must leave. They are not welcome here”, I say.

“Why don’t you tell us that to our face?” Nyakallo says. I did not even notice that she is standing at my door.

“Fine!” I say. This one must think that I am either fake like her or that I am scared of them. Challenge accepted. When it comes to these ones, I have nothing to lose. I lost them years ago. I walk out my bedroom, stand in the centre of the TV room and say, “Please leave, all of you. You are not welcome here! This is my house. Get out”.

The entire room remains silent, staring at the door. I turn around and face the door too... Mabutho is standing at my door. He is a mess. He is in tears. Keano is standing next to him, ready to throw him out. I am overcome with unspeakable anger.

“Nono, please drop the charges”, Mabutho.

The nerve! The audacity! The arrogance!

“Mabutho, if I have anything to do with it, that murderer will die in jail. You have some nerve coming into my house and telling me to drop the

charges laid against a woman who came into my house, shot my belly intentionally and murdered my child. I am still mourning this child that you evidently did not care about." I tell him.

"I did care about her. That was my daughter – the only daughter that I have. However, right now, I have to deal with the living children that I have – one of which is asking me where his mother is. Do you really want Lethu to grow up without his mother?" Mabutho says this and my blood boils over time. I grab a knife closest to me and as I dash towards him, Mmannete holds me back, Mapabatso grabs the knife from me and Keano throws Mabutho out of the house. Sis'Nora runs into the TV room screaming "Yhooooo! What's going on?!"

"LET ME GO!" I yell.

"Kenosi, calm down!" Motlalepula yells at me.

"I SAID LET ME GO, MMANNETE. AND I TOLD YOU TO ALL LEAVE MY HOUSE. WHY ARE YOU STILL HERE?!" I say with intense aggression.

I feel some blood under my t-shirt. I think I may have undone a stitch or two. Keano notices it too. He tries to talk to me as I sink into a couch and manage the pain, but he is interrupted by the movement in the house.

All my uninvited guests dash to my three spare bedrooms and grab their belongings. Then they leave my house. I go into my bedroom and pack clothes, my first aid kit, and toiletries in a travelling bag then leave with Keano.

Keano took me to hospital to be re-stitched where necessary. It is not bad, but it is painful. The physical pain, however, does not come close to what I am feeling emotionally.

We then went back to his house. The drive to his house is awkwardly silent.

I need to forget.

“Nosi, I didn’t like what I saw today. We don’t talk to our mothers, aunts, and siblings like that. Everyone in that room was older than you. You had no business behaving in that manner”, Keano.

“You know what I don’t like? People who view the trailer then make an entire judgement of the whole movie. You don’t know the first thing about my family. You don’t get to tell me how I should or shouldn’t communicate with them”, I respond.

He throws a side eye at me. I look out of the window.

He puts the volume of the radio up higher and we listen to JustMphatso’s *Spend Some Time*. I love this song so much. I sing along to it and my body sittingly moves along to the instruments of the song. Keano keeps looking at me and smiles. I catch him smiling at me singing.

“It’s a beautiful song”, I say.

“You have an even more beautiful voice”, he says.

“I know. I have been told. I was always asked to lead songs in school”, I tell him.

We both laugh.

“You not going to sing the silence out of my house, are you?” he says.

“Mxim. I will sing day and night!” I accept the challenge.

He laughs.

We finally arrive at his place.

...

I really think that Boikarabelo does not like me. The looks that she gives me are honestly unforgettable. She was great when I first arrived in this house. Now that my situation does not seem to be temporary anymore, she is playing the “you can’t sit with us” card at me. The problem is that I cannot put a finger on what I did wrong for her to suddenly have these feelings of dislike towards me. I thought that I was the only one who noticed. But when I was making popcorn for mine and Keano’s movie afternoon, she gave me that legendary look and Keano walked in mid-look. She left the kitchen when Keano stepped in.

“What on earth did you do to her?” Keano asked me.

“I really don’t know. She is just so cold and rude towards me”, I told him.

“You want me to talk to her?” He offered.

“No it’s okay. You will only make things worse. I will speak to her when the moment presents itself “, I told him.

“No that’s crazy. She just works here. This is your house. We not going to tiptoe around her”, he said. I am still stuck on the part where he said that this is my house.

Shaka has a tendency of giving a person a loaded sentence. When he is done making a point, you not sure which part of the sentence to question first.

“My house?” I reflected that part of the sentence back to him.

He turned around and left the kitchen.

Now that we are cuddled on the couch and enjoying popcorn and coke – unhealthy habits 101 – Kea calls. Keano hands me my phone and pauses the movie.

“Hey love”, I answer her call.

“Hey boo. How are you feeling?” Kea.

“I am okay babe. Keano is doing a good job at this babysitting thing”, I tell her.

I see Keano smile. Kea giggles.

“I have no words. Do you mind if we do dinner tonight? You and Keano can come by to the royal house?” Kea.

“How about you and Morena Mohato come over to Keano’s house? I will cook”, I say. I look at Keano and I see him smiling. I guess he is approving. Well it is my house after all.

“Sure hun. 7pm okay?” Kea.

“Perfect”, I concur.

“See you later hun”, Kea.

We hang up.

“We can get the chef to cook”, Keano.

“Thanks, but I will manage”, I tell him.

“You sure?” Keano.

“I can cook, Shaka, if that is what you are asking me”, I tell him.

He giggles.

“Let’s finish this movie so that I can get the cooking started”, I tell him.

...

Preparing for this dinner is one of the most refreshing things that I have done in a very long time. Keano insisted on helping me around in the kitchen. I told him to get the braai stove started and I will marinate the meat and corn that I would like for him to cook on the braai stove for me. Honestly, I just need him out of my way.

I prepare a Shrimp Taco Salad as a starter. Yes honey, I am taking it all the way to highest levels of levelling up. Keano’s chef is even impressed with

my choice of a starter. His name is Marvin and in our conversation, I found out that he owns a culinary school. He is Keano's cousin. He then suggested that I also make Zucchini Rolls for effect and décor. He says the Zucchini roll should be at the entrance so that my guests indulge before the starter is even served. I ask him to show me how to make one because I can see that he is dying to cook something. He is more than excited, and he seriously educates me. Apparently cooking can be an art.

Marvin lets me in on the fact that Keano's favourite meal is Curry Tomato Chicken; Zulu man with a bit of Indian personified indeed. So I decide to prepare a mean Curry Tomato Chicken dish with baked bread. If there is one thing that I have learned in life is that anything spicy is best served with bread. I bake a gluten-free garlic loaf to be served with Curry Tomato Chicken. I finish off with some very appealing greens that Marvin has taught me to prepare for this specific dish.

It is looking good and it is smelling great.

Marvin tells me that he will dash out to the mall to get the perfect wine and the ideal dessert for my meal. I do not protest.

I start setting the table; royal blue and gold are the theme colours tonight. I text Marvin to please bring candles. I decant the food in glass warmers. Keano is done too so he brings the corn and braaied ribs in to be decanted.

"Nosi, this looks amazing. You did great", Keano says.

"Thank you," I say and I curtsy.

He smiles.

“We should take a shower and get ready. Our guests will arrive in the next hour”, I tell him.

“Okay cool, no problem”, Keano.

“I will go and let the domestic helpers know that they will not be needed tonight”, I say.

“Are you sure? They will need to wash the dishes you know”, Keano.

Very true. I would rather mop the grass twice than wash the dishes.

“And besides, Marvin will let them know. The kitchen staff are his concern. What you can do is have a word with Boikarabelo”, Keano.

“I will, after dinner though”, I tell him.

We go off to shower.

...

I dress up in an off-the-shoulder deep blue dress that is up to the top of my knees. I wear a transparent sandal with a gold block heel. Thank God my toe nails are done. I accessorise with gold jewellery: simple gold studs, a chunky gold neckpiece with diamonds, and a gold wrist-cuff. My hair is in a straight-up cornrow hairstyle so that sorts itself out. I do a facebeat of note with my make-up.



I walk down the stairs and find Marvin setting up our dessert on a cool cake holder. He got us Woolies Caramel Cake. This one – he knows the food of my heart. He has even lit the candles on the table.

He got us three bottles of the Bayede Wines: the *Bayede! 7 Icon Carbernet*, the *Bayede! 7 Icon Chardonnay*, and the *Bayede! 7 Icon Merlot*.

It is going to be a good night.

Marvin sets the table as Keano walks down the stairs in his black suit pants, and a rather well-fashion designed white shirt. He finishes the look with white sneakers. This man is all kinds of fine. He smiles at me. I think he came out of the same womb as Karan Patel. He catches me admiring his fine self and by the time he is standing in front of me, my breath is officially taken away.

“You look amazing”, he says to me. My head is against his chest and the beat of his heart is in accord with my nerves. I cannot even look at him. He smells like heaven. I almost feel like crying.

“You look incredible”, I say to him.

He lifts my head up to look at him. He stares into my eyes. I stare back at him. My heart is racing out of control.

“This is your house now. This is your home. I am in love with you. I want to make you my wife”, Keano says unexpectedly.

Ladies and gentleman, let me tell you what the sexiest thing about a man who knows what he wants: He wastes no time. When he has found his

wife, he has no interest in making her a girlfriend for a million years before he marries her. And Keano –

He kisses me. I am not even done pacing through my thoughts and he just kisses me. The kiss is best described as sensual – drinking out of a cup of genuine connection and unexplainable feelings.

Someone clears her throat. We slowly stop kissing; we have nothing to be ashamed of. He looks up, and I turn around to see who is in our presence. It is Boikarabelo. She has her arms folded against her chest.

“Please respect us. We are in the room now”, Boikarabelo commands.

Keano and I look at each other- gobsmacked. What is this girl’s problem?

## Chapter 9

Dinner is going extremely well with the Mohales. I am receiving compliments left, right, and centre. Our dinner date was so great that I completely zoned out of Boikarabelo and her antics. I think coming here was a good idea. I am thinking about everything else but the baby that I have lost. Now that I have become a personified version of “love on the brain”, I keep staring at my sensual kisser and catch him smiling in my direction. Kea and Mohato have noticed the stares and the smiles.

“Nosi, how about you show me around the house and we leave these men to talk about whatever it is that men talk about when we are not around”, Kea says.

I agree and stand up from my chair. Mohato stands up to help Kea up from her chair. How chivalric of him. The Zulu man in Keano will see him do no such for me, so I let it be. Double dates are cute and all, but they can mess with your brain if you allow them to allow you to compare the relationships before you.

Kea and I walk to the patio and we settle on the swinging couch.

“How are you doing, babe?” Kea starts. Okay, so she brought me out here to make me cry.

“I am getting through it Kea. When I am sad, I cry. When it is not on my mind, I don’t search for it to be”, I tell her. I actually mean it.

“I understand, babe. I worry about you. But now that I see that you and Mr Man are building some strong chemistry between the two of you...”

Kea says as she giggles. We both burst into laughter.

“He says he loves me. He says he wants to marry me. Twice today, he told me that this is my house”, I tell her but in an informative yet nostalgic tone.

“And wena? Do you love him? And most importantly, do you believe him?” She asks.

“I do, *watsiba*. I do believe him. In a weird way, I trust him”, I say.

“Why is it weird that you trust him? Nosi, trust has everything to do with you and nothing to do with the next person. You choose to trust someone.” Kea.

“That makes sense. I guess it’s weird because I trust him in a way that I never even trusted Mabutho”, I say.

“Why are we even talking about that loser? You did trust Mabutho. Mabutho just went out of his way to make sure that you never choose to trust him again”, Kea.

She is right.

“You don’t think it is too soon for me to date again?” I ask Kea.

“Why do you care what anyone thinks? Care about what makes you sleep at night. If Keano is that, then girl, jump on that D”, Kea says. We both burst into laughter.

After a good sigh and an even better laugh, I look at her and say, “May I ask you something, friend?”

She nods as she sips wine from her glass.

“How did you know that you were ready to move on with Reahile after Thapelo and Mohato and every other thing that you had to deal with?” I ask.

She gulps the wine down and refills her glass.

“Kenosi, I regret every minute I ever thought twice about being with Reahile. If I knew then what I know now, I would have dated Reahile the minute he opened his heart to me. I loved that man with all that ever existed inside of me. The minute I opened my will to love him, a liberation of a kind took over my life. No one could have ever prepared me to be without that man. No one and absolutely nothing could have prepared me to be Reahile Mohale’s widow. I was ready from the moment that God brought that man in my life; I was ready for us to live our happily ever after. But things like overthinking realities and searching for puzzle pieces that don’t even fit in this current puzzle stood in the way and wasted hours of my time that I could have been Reahile’s partner – and I can never get those hours back or convert them to one more moment with him. Life is moving on with or without me”, Kea says. She starts sobbing. I am sobbing too.

“I have crippling nightmares everyday about what Thapelo did to me. I have crippling nightmares about how Mohato has compromised me as

his wife and as the woman he supposedly loves. I have crippling nightmares about the day that Reahile died. His last facial expression is engraved in my memory and in each nightmare I have. I remember the last touch I ever experienced on my skin from him. I remember the last emotion he ever felt. I miss him every single moment that I breathe. I always wonder if he is okay with me raising his kids with Mohato", she says.

We are sobbing, our faces are baptised in tears.

"Nosi, if you love Keano and Keano loves you, why are you making Mabutho a puzzle piece in this puzzle? He doesn't fit in and he never will. Stop overthinking everything. Keano has nothing to do with what went wrong in the past for you. Keano is bringing you a completely new reality of love – a reality of love that surpasses everything that love was not supposed to be in your past. Girl, this is a real man. He is not giving you excuses about taking shit slow or being too scared to love because "x = y" or "8 > 6". He loves you. He is not giving you lame ass excuses about women not being able to be trusted and all that other bullshit that men smoke up when all they want is sex and someone to keep them entertained. This man opened the doors of his house to you. This man is ready to marry you despite everything that he has been through. The cherry on top is that you obviously love him too. Do you have any idea how many women are out there chasing pavements? Trying to convince grown-ass men that a relationship is not so bad?" She says.

We both have tears in our eyes but we giggle. The relationship struggle is real. I needed to hear all of this. I hold Kea's hand and we have a moment.

Boikarabelo walks out into the patio where we are sitting and says, "Kenosi, I am going to bed. You will wash the dishes, *akere?*"

"Excuse me?!" I loudly exclaim, unable to hold my tongue. Kea is also stunned.

"You guys are taking your time and I am tired. So what must happen?"

Boikarabelo continues.

This girl has some nerve. I have just about had it with Boikarabelo and whatever problem she may or may not have with me. I stand up from our swinging couch and Kea follows suit. I walk towards Boikarabelo and Kea follows me.

I begin, "Boikarabelo, do you have a problem with me?"

Boikarabelo responds, "Because I suggested that you do the dishes?"

Kea chips in unable to control herself, "What makes you think you are in a position to make suggestions in this house?"

Boikarabelo looks at Kea and says, "Mofomahadi, hello. It is nice to see you again".

"Wash the dishes Boikarabelo. That is an order", I sternly say.

Boikarabelo looks at me and walks past Kea and I to take our wine glasses.

“We are not done drinking our wine. Go and wash what is in the kitchen”, Kea says.

Boikarabelo purposely drops the bottle of wine and all that is inside the bottle spills. This bitch.

“Oops! Now you are done”, Boikarabelo looks at us and says.

“You think you are funny?” Me.

I grab a mop that is on the patio and throw it at her.

“Clean that mess up, right now!” Me.

Boikarabelo now suddenly cannot speak. She takes the mop from me and cleans the wine. She keeps rinsing the mop and cleaning up. When the outside tile is spotless, she takes the now empty bottle of wine and our glasses and heads back into the house.

“What the fuck?” I say, shocked.

“Girl, this one is a pill. She was also a headache at the royal house and that’s because she was sleeping with Mohato”, Kea says.

“What?” I am shocked.

“You think she is sleeping with Keano?” I ask, worried now.

“I wouldn’t put it past her. Babe, Keano’s sex life became your business when he told you he loves you. You have every right to ask him what the deal is with this girl. What happened tonight cannot happen again; especially if this is now your house”, Kea.



I am irritated now.

“Let’s go and get more wine”, I suggest.

I walk to the kitchen to get more wine and I see a door I have never seen before. I walk towards it. The kitchen is silent. It looks like a cupboard. What does he keep in here?

I open it.

There is a passage leading to another door. I walk to that door. It is cold and grey in here. What does this man keep in here? I open the next door.

There is a group of naked young girls cutting and packaging what looks like cocaine. I have seen this image before – on television and I think TV was trying to educate us on what a sight such as this one means. Boikarabelo is one of these girls.

Is Keano a drug dealer?

“Kenosi”, I hear a voice calling me.

I turn around and see Shaka standing behind me.

“Please come back into the house”, he says.

He is not explaining what this is; he is asking me to leave the room instead? Who is this man?

...

Kea and Mohato left at 2am this morning. Keano and I went to sleep in our respective bedrooms immediately after they left. I did not pass out

immediately. I googled the name “Shaka Keano Maphumulo”. I needed to understand what it is that I am dealing with here. All I found was google pages of the incredible businessman that he is. At 5am this morning, this man came to my room to wake me up so that I can go for a run with him. I have never been more annoyed in my life.

I woke up, got dressed and went for that run.

Now we are walking back to the house. My chest feels incredibly heavy and I am five minutes away from throwing up. He offers me water, and I am close to accepting the offer with a hot slap. I just drink up and he giggles. I am not impressed. I bring up Boikarabelo as a topic.

“Keano, are you sleeping with Boikarabelo?” I ask him.

“Since when do you call me Keano? I like it better when you call me Shaka. And I cannot believe the question you just asked me. How stupid must I be to keep the woman that I love and the domestic worker that I am fucking under one roof? What the hell are you asking me?” Keano responds, offended.

“Well what the hell is her problem?” My follow-up question.

“Kenosi, I offered to speak to her and you said no. Now you assume that I am sleeping with her. What do you take me for?” Keano.

“So that is the reason why she told me to wash dishes last night? That is the reason why she deliberately dropped a bottle of wine that Kea and I were drinking out of?” I am annoyed now.

“She did what?” Keano asks, shocked.

“What is this girl’s problem, Keano?” I ask again, pissed off this time.

“She is my cousin. Her mother, Mme Segametsi, and my father are related. Kari has been through a lot and when Rakgadi Segametsi passed away, she didn’t exactly make good choices. I gave her this job so that she could stay out of trouble. Maybe she is being protective.” Keano shocks me. Apparently, we call her Kari as well.

“You have got to be kidding me. Now I must like her because she is your family? My plan was to ask you to fire her. She’s an utter bitch towards me and she slept with my friend’s husband, Mohato”, I tell him.

Keano looks at me. It is not the kind of look he gives me when he feels in love with me.

“Maybe I should move back to my place”, I suggest. This arrangement is not going to work for me.

“No, you are not going anywhere. I will talk to Kari when we get home. We will both talk to Kari okay?” Keano says.

I shake my head. This is a disaster waiting to happen.

Then, I bring up the cocaine topic. I cannot keep it to myself.

“Are you a drug dealer?” I ask him.

He is quiet.

“Well?” I persist.

“Kenosi, I am a businessman. Not all of my businesses are within the boundaries of the law”, he says.

“Shaka, are you a drug dealer or not?” I ask.

“Nosi, I participate in a market and economy that is not recognised by the tax man and is regarded illegal by law enforcement. However, it pays my bills. I am not a perfect man, but I am trying my best to never lack anything in life”, he says.

I do not know what to say or what to think.

Then he suggests racing me back home. I suppose he is hoping that I will forget, but I am also ready to not think about it right now. I give myself a head start in the middle of his challenge but he still beats me anyway.

...

We get to the house and as we walk in, we stumble upon Mabutho and Kari drinking my *Bayede!* Merlot. I shake my head. Keano is just oozing anger.

“I hope you don’t mind, I invited my good friend Mabutho over. His wife is in jail so he is really stressed out. Her trial starts soon.” Kari.

“Get the fuck out of my house, Mabutho”, Keano says.

“Keano, don’t be rude! He is my guest. Or what? Sleeping with Kenosi has made you lose all your manners?” Kari.

“What did you just say?” I interrupt. This bitch does not know me.

“I said GET THE FUCK OUT OF MY HOUSE!” The anger in Keano’s voice fills the house. Mabutho lifts his hands in surrender. He stands up and walks out. He pauses at the door and says, “Drop those charges, Kenosi.” Then he leaves.

“WHAT IS YOUR PROBLEM?!” Keano’s rage is not over, and Kari is about to feel it.

“What is my problem? What is YOUR problem?! Since when do you disrespect Mimi’s memory and bring women in this house? Sleeping with them and making her feel entitled to anything that lies within these walls? You built this house for Mimi”, Kari yells back.

“Salamina has been dead for three years. Am I not allowed to move on?” Keano.

“Not in this house. If you want to move on, move to another house. And if you want to move on, choose a woman who is not using you as a crutch to move passed the death of a baby and a man who chose his wife over her”, Kari.

That hits me hard. Keano looks at me and he can see how hard that hit me. Kari looks at me, challenging me to say something to her. You know what, I accept the challenge. Kea told me all the dirt that I need to know about this bitch and now, she will know me. I begin, “Boikarabelo, let’s get one thing very clear – I am not your friend. You don’t get to have an opinion on anything that goes on in my life. I don’t care what you think you know about me or what you think you are protecting Keano from

when it comes to me. You will tread with care when it comes to me. I have taken your disrespect for far too long now and, quite frankly, I am no longer interested in entertaining your bullshit anymore. Regardless of what I may feel about you, I have never judged you because of your past. You too, have hurt my friend when you deliberately slept with a married man. Where do you get off thinking that you have a moral ground to stand on and judge me for moving on with my life?"

There is utter silence in the house. The other domestic workers are now standing and watching this ridiculous show before them. Marvin is also standing there, amused. Keano is standing next to me, holding me.

I continue, "Boikarabelo, you better stay in your lane. We are not equals. Now, I have to like you because you are family to a man I care about very deeply. But, make no mistake, I fuck him every night. If you keep pushing me, I will push you out of this house. You of all people know that one should never underestimate the power of the vagina."

Keano is shocked. It must be the statement that I made about fucking him every night. I have not even let him smash yet. However, he supports me and says, "All of you need to know that Kenosi will be living with us from now on. I intend on marrying her so she is not going anywhere. She is now the lady in this home and anyone who has a problem with that is more than welcome to leave right now".

Silence...

Keano continues, “Very well then. We are happy to see that we have your support”.

He then looks at Boikarabelo and says, “I think it is best you go home for a while and get some air”.

I have not even given him the vagina power and he is already kicking this bitch out. I am not going to protest. This house is not big enough to accommodate the both of us.

...

I go into Keano’s room to see if he is okay. I hear the water falling in the shower. He must be in the shower already. I walk in and open the shower door. He drops my gown and leaves my body naked. We look at each other. He stretches out his hand. I accept the hand and step into the shower with him. I hold the scar that the stitches have left on my tummy and sigh. He brushes the scar on my tummy as if to tell me not to worry and that it does not make my body look ugly, tainted, and harmed. I worked so hard to ensure that there are no traces of harm and dirt on my body. Now I have a scar to remind me that my body has lost a human being it once carried. There is also the bullet mark that has made a minor hollow dent in my stomach. I try to cover it with my hand. He removes my hand. He tells me I am beautiful. He tells me that my body is perfect. I hug him. He hugs me back. We kiss. He lifts me up and puts me against the wall. We both feel the heat of this shower and before I know it, we are remaking the music video of Silk’s *Meeting In My Bedroom*. After we both

reach our happy place, I take soap and I help him clean up under the showerhead. He smiles at me. I cannot stop giggling. When I am done helping him get clean, he does the same for me.

Our shower hour is finally complete. We step out of the shower and make our way into his bedroom in our towels. He picks me up and throws me onto the bed. He comes on top of me. I let him in. We moan and grab onto each other as the nature of our bodies takes control. At some point, I am on top of him, bouncing on him, and he is grabbing my thighs like I am doing something explicitly right. I feel him ready to cum and he gets up, keeps me on his waist, he puts me against a wall, thrusts inside of me and cums simultaneously with me. We both collapse to the ground. That was... WOW.

He kisses me. I kiss him back.

“Me too, Shaka. I love you too”, I tell him.

He kisses me as we lie on the floor.

“Let’s get dressed. We need to get going”, he says.

“Going? Where are we going?” I ask, curious.

“Just pack my love. Our journey has begun”.



## Chapter 10

Shaka Keano Maphumulo's idea of a spontaneous getaway is a trip to Zanzibar. I wish he told me that it was a semi-business trip though and that I would have to chill in a hotel alone for most of our first day here. We drove from Tholoana to South Africa for brunch at the Four Seasons Hotel in the south of Johannesburg. Who is complaining about waiting there while her man attends business meetings? Honey, I got a massage squeezed in during that waiting period. After the deal was concluded (I am assuming because he came back in a very good mood), we made our way to OR Tambo. I only figured out where the journey was taking us when we checked in at the OR Tambo International Airport. My feelings are rather bittersweet: I am happy because this is the most thoughtful thing that anyone has ever done for me. However, I am upset because I did not pack any island-like clothing items. What is he expecting me to do with denim pants on an island? Anyway, I am going to enjoy my surprise holiday. When did he even plan all of this?

We arrived at the Abeid Amani Karume International Airport. We have a chauffeur already waiting for us to take us to our hotel. I just keep smiling at him. I have never been to Zanzibar before and he is here acting like he knows his way around this place. He is pushing both his luggage and mine while I am behaving like a child who is visiting Disneyland for the first time. This is why I partly do not like rich people. All my adult life, I believed I had made it. I have my Benz and my cute house in an estate. However, I could never afford to go to Zanzibar just because it is

Wednesday. I plan for months for a trip like this and even with this planning, I take months to recover from the dent it has made in my bank account. I am excited but I am also reminded that I have not yet “arrived”.

As we get to “our car”, he packs our luggage into the black SUV we will be driven in then we both settle at the back of the car. He holds my hand. I cannot help myself; I legit just aim for his cheek and kiss it. I have not yet found the words to compile together and just simply say thank you. He holds my hand, tucks my head between his neck and shoulder, kissing my forehead and says, “This is only the beginning”. My stomach shivers.

...

When we get to our hotel, the first thing I wish to do is take a shower. He lets me shower while he plays around on his laptop doing only Lord knows what. He lets me know that he has a quick meeting with some business associates.

“You have business in Zanzibar?” I asked him.

“I have business everywhere”, he responds.

“This is not really a holiday, is it? This is not something you spontaneously planned for the sake of being romantic. You are here for business and you just made it a holiday opportunity for me”, I say to him as I realise that we keep having pause moments in our holiday for him to have all of these business meetings.

“I will be back by the time you get out of the shower. I promise”, he says. He kisses my forehead and leaves.

As I shower, I feel my tender breasts remind me of the baby that I have lost. I almost fall apart but I remember that this next chapter of my life that is currently being written is designed to help me heal and find happiness again. I have been broken before – far worse than this. And I made it. I am Kenosi Ramphora and I am the kind of dynamite that never runs out. The story of my life is currently writing chapter ‘Zanzibar’ as only the beginning of what lies ahead. I take my time in the shower because he who brought me here is busy with business. What business does he have anyway outside of Baby Boom and pushing drugs? Kea told me that Baby Boom is one of many. I wonder what the others are – especially the one up here in Zanzibar. I am very gentle to the injured areas around my stomach. I start having flashbacks of the time that my body was violated for the first time. I start to cry. I know I have forgotten. I know that my past is as good as dead and gone. However, when you go through the most painful parts of your life, memory curses the pain of the experience to haunt you until you can remember and not cry.

I pull myself together as I prepare myself to get out of the shower. I clean myself up and make my way to the bedroom where my very handsome and young boo-thang is chilling – as he promised. I chuckle at the thought that I am *is’gogwane* (*dating a younger man*) even if he is only three years younger than I am.

“You took a million years in that shower, but I must admit that you look incredible”, he says as he smiles at me.

“Lies!” I respond. I mean, I have zero make-up on, I am still in a towel, and my weave is still a mess because I just washed it. I am yet to dry it up and straighten it. I ignore him and sit in front of a mirror. I tone my face then apply my face cream. I dry my hair and he comes closer to sit next to me. I just look at him.

“Let me help you”, he says.

I giggle.

“I am serious”, he says with a mischievous smile on his face. This guy is trying to sabotage my look today, and possibly burn my good and expensive weave while he is at it.

“I am good, thank you. I will be done soon”, I tell him.

“You don’t trust me?” he asks as if he is challenging me. I kinda don’t know what to say because I really don’t trust him. This is my hair that we are talking about here.

“Love, I am good”, I insist.

Somehow, he heard “okay please help me” because he dives for my hair cosmetic bag and pulls out my serum and hair-clippers. He clips the top of my hair together like a real professional and applies the serum on a strand of hair, then uses my straightener to straighten the first bit of my 26-inch Malaysian 10A hair. I am actually very impressed.

“Where did you learn to handle weaves like that?” I cannot help myself so I ask.

He smiles at me.

“I own a few hair salons, babe”, he says. If this were 1999 in Tholoana Kingdom, I would conclude that this man is gay. It is almost as if he can read my mind because he immediately states, “I am not gay”.

I chuckle and he just smiles.

“I grew up a bit rough you know. My mother was killed when I was about eight. My elder sister was eighteen at the time, and my eldest sister was twenty-one; both their mothers had also passed. They stayed with my mother and I, so when she passed, we all struggled together. My eldest sister worked in a hair-salon. I watched her teach my other sister how to manage and maintain hair. She later taught her how to braid hair and within a year, the younger sister was working at the same salon. I went to the salon one after school when I was fourteen and asked for a haircut. I think that is when they realised that there was a market for men that they were not tapping into. I offered to cut hair for them if they gave me a week to learn. A week was all that I needed. The women agreed. I was already cleaning at a barbershop and they were already teaching me how to cut hair. Therefore, I used that week to ask them to cut people’s hair for the ‘experience’. They let me and after a week, I went back and started cutting hair at the salon. After some time, I really became good at it and I started learning how to cut weaves and style female hair and weaves. I saved up

my income because my sisters covered the household expenses and I got away with a lot because I was the baby in the family. I already knew that I would never see the door of a university lecture room so I started being very entrepreneurial. I sold sweets at school and skopas, on top of working at this salon. When I turned twenty-one, I opened my first barbershop in my backroom at home and moved back into the house. It was incredibly successful and it funded the building I rented out and later bought to do hair. When my eldest sister got married, her husband bought three buildings for me to expand. My barber shops expanded as a brand on their own, then I started opening up beauty hair salons that I co-owned with my sisters.” He tells me this and I reach a new level of respect for him and his hustle.

I would turn around and look at him, engaging in this talk but he is still straightening my hair and he is doing a much better job at it than I ever would have.

“When my salons and barber shops kicked off well, I wanted to add to the brand. My sisters wanted to expand into the nail, beauty, and massage avenue. I paid for them to go to school and learn the skills needed; my eldest sister’s husband assisted me with the fees. When they graduated, we opened our first co-owned beauty and health spa. It was only three floors, but we knew we would have a bigger one soon. The first floor was the hair salon and nails bar. The second floor was a massage parlour. The third floor was for facials and other women stuff I didn’t really understand. But that made me realise just how much money women

spend on nonsense just to feel healthy, beautiful, and relaxed; so I was okay with capitalising on that," he says this with so much pride. I am actually proud of him. I smile and he catches me smiling. I am willing to pretend as if I did not hear him say that women spend money on nonsense. It is fine because now that we are together and I am five minutes away from probably being unemployed with all these spontaneous trips we take, I will be spending his money on nonsense.

"And how big is the beauty empire now?" I ask.

"It got complicated before it got easy. My sisters started attending training for physiotherapy, managing diabetes, and other diet-related illnesses for physical improvement in the body. Within three years, we had a seven-story building that catered for medical, health, and beauty. Little did we know that my eldest sister's husband was using our businesses to cover up his illegal businesses. When I found out, I asked to be bought out because I knew he would mess things up for us and I was not prepared to struggle again after we had worked so hard. They bought me out of everything, including the buildings of the barbershops he sponsored so I was back to owning only one barbershop. However, I left with my brand. They were not going to make money out of my brand. I was not having it. I found work in retail to make up for some money here and there to see if I couldn't buy my franchise of barbershops back. After three years, I bought my first BabyBoom shop. Then I bought three more. From there, I went into restaurants and fast food outlets. As I was getting into the business of owning stuff, I realised the salons were not making me money

like retail shops and restaurants were. By then, my sisters were struggling. My eldest sister's husband was arrested and my other sister's fiancé had stolen all the money they had. They needed me to intervene financially. Therefore, I bought the barbershops and salons as well as the medical, health, and beauty facilities they had and owned them by myself, just letting them work in them and manage them. The king later mentored me and expanding all that I have, I co-own some of these places with him. I have clubs in Miami too. And here I am today", he concludes.

So when did the cocaine business start? I have not forgot about that, but I am not going to kill the mood and ask that question.

"Did you not find love at any point in your life? I mean, you were making all of this money. Surely, you wanted to spend it with or on someone. Or perhaps have one woman in your life spending it on nonsense to make her feel beautiful, relaxed, and healthy." I ask this question not interested in who was with him for his money, but just to gage how generous he is with his money. He laughs. I giggle. The laugh fades into a chuckle and he starts reminiscing on a great love I suppose he once had. This was not the plan.

"There was a girl. Her name was Bassetsana." He says this with an incredible smile on his face. Perhaps I should not have asked this question. I feel like telling him to nevermind.

"Jan neh, Bassie..." he says to himself, but I hear him. I roll my eyes. He notices.



“We don’t have to talk about her, love”, he says.

“Good. I think it is best she remains in the past. I apologise for even bringing her up”, I say.

He is finally done with my hair.

I apply my make-up in silence and irritation then dress up in a maxi-dress and sandals.

“Baby, you asked about Bassie. Why are you upset?” He asks me before we head out to dinner.

“I didn’t realise that you were still in love with her”, I spitefully say.

“But I am not. She was truly someone special to me, that’s all”, he says.

“Well she can stop being special now. I am here now”, I say.

He walks towards me. When he is breaths away from me he says, “What exactly is your problem?”

“Nothing” I say, suddenly coming across a stutter on my tongue.

“Kenosi, I choose you. I will show you that I love you, and remind you of this every day. However, I cannot fix your insecurity. If you feel that an ex like Bassie can shake things up between us, then you should not even want to be with me. You are more than welcome to leave now”, he says. Leave and go where? This man is crazy. He brings me to Zanzibar and tells me to leave. That sentence would have made sense if we were in Tholoana. His voice is low and seductive, yet firm and commanding.

I am so turned on.

I unbutton his shirt. He tries to say something but I kiss his lips and pull down his shorts. I go down on my knees and begin to blow on him. He holds onto to my perfectly straightened weave. The grip gets tighter as he gets harder; the moans get louder as my lips work well on him. I am almost afraid that he will yank my weave bundles off their tracks. He shoots inside my mouth then collapses to the floor.

“Kenosi”, him.

“Hmmmmm?” me.

“Marry me”, him.

## Chapter 11

Zanzibar was great. However, instead of us heading back to Tholoana Kingdom, Keano landed both of us in the homelands of KZN: eMtubatuba.

We arrive at Mtubatuba at the wee hours of the morning: 4:30am to be exact. I am directed to a backroom. I assume the backroom belongs to Keano because he has a key to it and requires no one to wake up to come and open for him. He hands me a t-shirt to sleep in and I wear it – no questions asked. This is not because I am submissive like that; I am just excessively sleepy to enquire. My questions will be fresh and relevant in the morning. We pass out just before 5am.

...

“Bhuti!” a female voice shouts as she knocks on the door.

I am officially awake and it is only 6:30am. Lord have mercy. I am exhausted. I slept for less than two hours.

Keano slowly opens his eyes, responding to the shouting at the door as well.

“Bhuti! Bhuti, please open up! Dad is calling you!” The voice persists.

Keano finally wakes up, wears a t-shirt and walks out of his room. He ensures that he shuts the door behind him and leaves me in his room, unsure what to do. I am coming to the reality that this man has probably brought me to his father’s house without a warning.

I wake up and make the bed. I see an in-suite bathroom in this little round room and opt to take a shower. All my cosmetics are in the car so I resort to the sunlight green bar soap and shower using my hands to apply the soap on my body and face.

I finish showering and use the aqueous cream that I find in his bathroom to lotion my body and moisturise my face. I step into the bedroom with a towel around my body and head. I bump into Keano sitting on the edge of the bed, scratching his head.

“You look beautiful, baby”, he says.

“Keano, what are we doing here?” I ask.

“When are you going to call me Shaka again? I like it when you call me Shaka.” He says.

“Are you going to answer my question?” I enquire.

“You have a ring on your finger – my ring to be exact. I asked you to marry me. You said yes. We are here to introduce you to my family so that we can start the lobola negotiations”, he says.

“You don’t think that it would have been nice for you to perhaps discuss it with me?” This guy though.

“There was no time. You and I leave for Miami tomorrow”, he says.

“What the hell are we doing in Miami?” I ask. *Bathung!* This man.

“I have two clubs there that I need to check up on”, he explains.

“Shaka, I have a job. I actually have to apply for annual leave before I just take off”, I say. He is not fazed – not even in the least bit.

“I have brought in our bags. Get dressed while I shower so that we can make it for breakfast. The family is expecting us”. With that, he makes his way into the bathroom to take his shower and leaves me dumbfounded in the centre of his room.

I throw myself onto the only couch in this room. I switch on the TV and find myself tuned into *Love&HipHop Atlanta*. I open my bag and apply my scented lotion over the aqueous cream that I have already applied. I then apply some bronzer over my legs to add some shimmer to my legs. This is emakhaya, so a dress shall be worn as I enter my first day as makoti in this home. I wear a black midi-dress just below my knee, letting my calves come out to shimmer and play. The dress is elbow length too. I wear white Converse All-Stars. I wear my pearl earrings, and a pearl neckpiece.

Keano walks out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel from beneath his waist. He takes one look at me, kisses me and goes about getting dressed. I apply my make-up – minimal yet cute. Simple foundation, some powder for a matt look, brown eye shadow, and bronzer for my cheeks – adding some ‘skin of the goddess’ effect. I then apply Revlon colourstay lipgloss. Glossy and cute in colour.

I find a white light scarf that I turn into a headscarf and tie it up over my hair. When I am done, I put on some perfume and turn around to catch

Keano dressed up in shorts and a golf t-shirt, staring at me. I smile at him. “MaRamphora, you are stunning”. He says.

...

“Sanibonani ekhaya”, Keano announces as we enter the main house – he is holding my hand as we walk in. I am beyond nervous. The main house is surrounded by four rondels, which I believe are the outside rooms. One belongs to Keano, another belongs to his brother, one belongs to his uncle, and the fourth one belongs to *abaphantsi* (the ancestors).

Keano’s father is the first to stand up then the rest of the family follows suite.

“Mashimane, this is Kenosi. She is the beautiful flower I found in the Ramphora gardens that I would like to make my wife. She has agreed to be my wife and my ask is that we welcome her into our family”, Keano says and I am both humbled and surprised. I am very aware that he addressed his father with their clan name, “Mashimane”, so I know the level of respect that is essential in this home. I need to act right.

“Good morning, *ntokazi*. Welcome to the Maphumulo home. When we conclude all the wedding celebrations, you will feel right at home”, baba Maphumulo says with a warm smile. I see Keano smile.

“Thank you, baba”, I say. Baba smiles.

“Love, this is our mother –MaNgobese. She is my father’s second wife”, I noticed that he said second wife so I am very aware that there are others.

I will enquire later. For now, I am still an “almost makoti” in a Zulu family that named its child Shaka and addresses the head of the home by his clan name. I shall shut up and speak when spoken to. However, I acknowledge MaNgobese – regal, modern, and nothing close to being second wife from the homelands material. Thank God I dressed up and styled up accordingly.

“It’s lovely meeting you, mama. You have a beautiful home”, I say to her. She smiles and says, “You did very well with this one, Shaka. She is gorgeous”.

Everyone laughs.

“These are my sisters”, he says as he points at three beautiful women, one of them I know too well and wish I did not know.

“This is my eldest sister, Zandile. Next to her is my second eldest sister, Thembisile. And this is my third eldest sister whom I come after, Sinegugu – but we call her Gugu”, him. Gugu and I have a staring match – she is smiling and I am pissed.

“Did I miss something?” Shaka.

“Yes you did, little brother. Please allow me to conclude these introductions. This is our youngest brother, Senzangakhona”, he points at a younger and darker version of Shaka. “And this is Nompumelelo Maphumulo – Shaka’s daughter”, she points at a girl who cannot be anything older than six. I swallow something in my throat and I swallow

it very hard. I smile at Nompumelelo Maphumulo, kneel down until our heights are level.

“Hi Nompumelelo”, I initiate our relationship.

“Hello”, her, not trying at all.

“My name is Kenosi. I am hoping that you will allow me to get to know you better”, I give it another try.

She shrugs her shoulders.

I look behind me, hoping to seek help from Shaka but instead all eyes in the kitchen are facing our direction, forcing me to make a breakthrough as if this will be the deciding factor of whether or not I will make a good makoti. I hope Shaka “their son” told them that he did not make any mention of a child.

I look back at my first mission impossible.

“If you wish, you and I can go out for some milkshakes and get to know each other better”, I say.

“She is lactose intolerant”, I hear Gugu mention.

“A burger then? And some soft drinks? It can be a date with your father too”, I say.

I win her over and my prize is her big smile, a resounding yes, and a good hug.

Everyone in the room is smiling except for Gugu.



Breakfast can now be served.

...

Breakfast was interesting. However, I need my fresh air right now. I am now sitting outside under some huge tree for shade, and just taking in the last six months of my life. I lost a child, gained a man, went to Zanzibar, got engaged, and now I have just gained a step-daughter. Is this what they meant when they said a lot could happen in a year?

Shaka settles next to me under this tree. He looks ahead too, in the direction that I am facing.

"Mpumi seems to like you." He breaks the silence.

"She is a lovely girl. Where is her mother?" I ask him.

"She moved on", he says.

"Was her mother Mimi?" I ask.

"No. Mimi never even met her. Her mother's name was Basetsana". This Basetsana woman again? Really?

"I guess I am just trying to understand why you didn't tell me about her", I finally say.

"I didn't know how to discuss the topic of children with you after losing Kemorerile", Shaka.

I cry.

"See what I mean?" Shaka says as he cradles me in his arms.

“Shaka, do you think we are moving too fast?” I ask him.

“I know what I want. I know what I feel. I don’t need anyone else to confirm what I feel and what I want. I want you, Kenosi Ramphora. I love you, Kenosi Ramphora. If you will still have me, I am more than happy to keep sprinting down this love journey with you”, he says to me.

I smile.

I am not sure what my smile means at this point, but I smile anyway.

“Baba, I am ready”, Nompumelelo says.

“Ready for what, Mpumi?” Shaka responds. I guess we all call her Mpumi.

“For my date with Mama Kenosi”, Mpumi responds.

My heart has been won. I look at her and smile. I catch Shaka smiling too.

“May we please borrow your keys for the car for our date?” Me.

“Am I invited to this date?” Shaka plays along with us.

“Should we invite him?” I ask Mpumi, giggling.

She giggles and says, “He may come with us, but only if he will not rush us to come back quickly”.

“Do you, Baba, accept the terms and conditions expressed by Baby Nompumelelo Maphumulo and Mama Kenosi?” I ask in a giddy voice.

“I, Baba, accept the terms and conditions set by Baby Nompumelelo Maphumulo and Mama Kenosi”, Shaka replies.

Mpumi screams in laughter and the three of us race to the car for our first and official date as a family.

...

I do not know the first thing about Mtubatuba so I am thankful that Shaka has been driving us around. He took us to the False Bay Park Game Reserve and let the game drive do the rest. Mpumi fell asleep before the game drive was even over; she fell asleep in my arms. I think she just wanted to spend some time with her father. I found myself rocking her to sleep and when we walked back to the car, Shaka carried her because she is so heavy. He took so many pictures of us, especially of Mpumi and myself. Mpumi got into the car and passed out. We started our drive back with Mpumi sleeping in the backseat, Shaka driving, and me in the passenger seat. We are using the Wrangler this time.

“Sweets”, I call him.

“Hmmm?” Him.

“Why don’t you live with Mpumi?” I ask.

“I am too busy. Who will look after her when I travel for work?” Him. He raises a good point I suppose.

“I am here now, baby”, I say. He can do as he wishes with that statement.

He stops the car on the side of the road. He looks at me and pulls my face in towards his. He kisses me.

“You mean that?” He asks me.

“Yes baby. You shouldn’t want to marry me if you feel that I wouldn’t accept your child or love her as if she were my own. You should never choose another woman over your daughter. Never! If you plan on making me your wife, then Mpumi is our child and she is coming to live with us in Tholoana”, I tell him.

He gets out of the car and comes around to my side. He opens my door and pulls me out of the car. He hugs me in a way that he has never hugged me before. He holds me so tight and so close to his heart. He cries. Wow. I had no idea this meant that much to him.

“I love you, Kenosi. And you will be my wife”, he says somewhere between his snobs.

“I love you, Shaka. And you will be my husband”, I reply.

We get back into the car and as we drive off, my least favourite topic comes up.

“How do you know Gugu?” He asks me.

I roll my eyes.

“Baby?!” Him. I think he caught my rolling eyes.

“Gugu and I used to be friends. Our mutual friend is Kea. Gugu thought and probably still thinks that I had an affair with Zethembe but that didn’t

happen. Zethembe and I were just friends, and I am very close with his sister, Hlobisile – which again makes me Gugu’s least favourite friend. Also, Gugu knows that I know that it was her boyfriend whom she was cheating with that was driving the car that killed Zethembe and her son, Zakhe. And she protected him”, I say.

Shaka is quiet.

“How are the two of you related?” I ask.

“Her mother and my father are siblings. When her parents passed, my father legally adopted her”, he says.

“Okay”, I reply. What I really want to say is *how unfortunate*.

“You need to make things right with Gugu. She is family”, Shaka says.

“I didn’t do anything wrong to her. She is the one who has been terrorising me.” I plead my case.

“You are going to be my wife now. We are not going to avoid family gatherings because you cannot get along with my sister. I don’t care who started what, you must fix it”, Shaka.

“Are you actually being serious right now?” Me, getting upset.

“Very serious”, he says without even trying to be on my side.

I am pissed.

We get to the house and find Gugu sitting outside with Zandile and Senzangakhona. I believe Thembi loves her sleep so we assume that

Thembi is fast asleep. I get Mpumi with the intention to run away from having to speak to Gugu. However, Shaka takes Mpumi from me, goes to put her down in his room where we will also be sleeping, then comes back and we walk towards Gugu, Zandi, and Senzi.

“Bhuti, did you have a successful date?” Gugu enquires.

“It was a great day, sisi. However, I don’t want to talk about our day right now. Let’s address the elephant in the room standing between you and my fiancé” Shaka gets straight to the point. I look away.

“You mean your *s’gogwane*?” Gugu says with the deliberate intention to be nasty.

“Sinegugu, behave yourself and stay within your limits. If you do not intend to fix things, tell us now. We will just go to sleep. After I marry my *s’gogwane*, I will go to baba and tell him that because my wife is no longer welcome here, myself and Mpumi will not be coming here neither”, Shaka says to everyone’s shock, including mine.

“*Hhayi bo!* What are the two of you fighting about?” Zandile.

A silence occurs between us. The silence is forcing Gugu to swallow her pride and face me, yet humbling me to apologise to her.

“I am sorry, Kenosi, for what I did at your baby shower”, Gugu says.

“What did you do at her baby shower, Gugu?” Shaka asks. Oh yeah, I forgot to mention to him that she was an utter cow at my shower.

“It doesn’t matter anymore what she did. It’s okay. I forgive you”, I say.

“You have a baby?” Zandile.

Senzi is trying very hard to run away from this meeting but I keep spotting Shaka insisting on him to stay. I have never seen eye-communication this intense.

“Gugu, I know you went through hell when Zethembe and Zakhe passed away. I am sorry if I made it worse in any kind of way. Your mistakes in your marriage were and still are none of my business. Regardless of what happened, what I know, and what you did, I know that it was never your intention for them to die. I am sorry for ever making you feel like their death was your fault”, I say. Gugu cries.

“Can someone please add meat to this conversation? I am hearing “I’m sorry I’m sorry”. Say something we will all understand please. What exactly happened to Zethembe and Zakhe? And wena Kenosi, where is your child?” Zandile is irritating me now, but I am still five-to-makoti, I cannot say that. Her questioning me about Kemorerile’s whereabouts is about to tare me apart.

“Could you please calm down, Zandile?” Shaka comes to our rescue. I think he picked up my sensitivity.

“*Hai bo!* Why are you discussing these things in front of us if we are not supposed to know what’s going on?” Zandile. *Vele* why did Shaka bring this up in front of her?

There is finally silence.

“And Gugu, I never had an affair with Zethembe. You may not believe me but that is the truth. He was my friend and I cared about him deeply. I did not have an affair with him”, I conclude.

“*Kahle Wena!* You had an affair with Zethembe?” Can someone please shut Zandile up? I just said I did not have an affair with the man. How did she conclude that I did?

“I know. Trust me, I know.” Gugu says as she wipes her pouring tears. Then she says, “And I loved him you know. I still do. We had our problems, and yes, Skhumbuzo was one of them, but I really did love that man. I still think about him even today”, she says. I have my own theory of how Gugu felt about Zethembe but for the sake of peace, I will keep that theory to myself. I hug her instead.

Zandile claps once.

After the hug, Shaka says, “Is the beef between the two of you officially cooked?”

We giggle.

“Yeah, we good now. Welcome to our family, beautiful”, Gugu says.

I smile.

Shaka and I walk back to our room. We pass out with Mpumi sleeping between the two of us.



Around 2am, I feel a hand run up my thighs. I open my eyes and see Shaka next to me. Before I can even respond, Shaka is dining on something cuisine. Thank God I shaved. I moan and I am suddenly conscious of Mpumi sleeping next to me. I get up from the bed and pull my fiancé to the couch in his room. I take care of my man's morning erection and after a fantastic happy ending, we see Mpumi standing next to us crying. We are both semi-dressed but also very embarrassed. We cannot even ask her what is wrong.

"Baba, what are you doing to Mama Kenosi?" Mpumi says.

Shaka gets up from me and pulls his pants up.

"Baba, why are you naked?" Mpumi asks again, crying still.

I sit up and pull the t-shirt I am wearing down.

"Sthandwa sami, come sit here on top of me", I say.

Mpumi sits on my lap.

"Listen to me okay. Your dad and I love each other very much. The game that we just played, you were not supposed to see because it is played by two people who are getting married", I try to explain.

"Will I get to play it one day?" Mpumi asks, a lot calmer now.

"Hell no!" Shaka exclaims.

"Only when you are much older, and you understand why the game is played. Look my baby, it is an adult game so when you are a little older, we can talk about it again. I promise you, I will tell you everything that

you need to know. Until then, please do not play it with anyone. Your dad and I will make sure to never play this game around you again, okay?" I say.

She nods her head.

I am so embarrassed. Shaka is mortified.

"She must never sleep with us again", Shaka says.

"Why?" Mpumi asks.

Shaka is now pissed.

I cradle Mpumi and put her back to sleep. She and I get back on the bed. Shaka sleeps next to me, placing me in the middle of the two of them. He cuddles me and I can feel that he is still wearing a hard one, but unfortunately, I cannot help him this time. I am cuddling lady Mpumi. I give him a kiss and we fall asleep.

## Chapter 12

Wine-red strap dress with a chunky-blood-red-bling design just around the breast area. White Louboutin shoes – bottom red part of the shoe is a slightly lighter red of my dress. Michael Kors wrist watch blinging to the head of my Princess-cut diamond engagement ring. My weave is flowing 32-inches long. I no longer budget for six months for a good weave and I love these inches.

My handsome man: Beautifully styled in his Armani suit. One-of-a-kind Jordans. Wine-red shirt open at his chest. After a powerful kiss as we step out of the car we are being driven in, Shaka and I walk hand-in-hand into his new club that he is opening tonight. The red carpet is insane. This is the opening of his third club in Miami. He has decided to name the club *Nosi*. Down the road from *Nosi*, he owns a hotel and it is called *Bassie*. I know it has everything to do with his Basetsana. I need to find this Basetsana girl and understand why she makes me feel so insecure. I am not exactly a party girl, but I love seeing my man so proud.

We snap a few pictures then walk down the red carpet. We get into the club and make our way to the VVIP section where the other two owners of *Nosi* are sitting with their wives. From what I understand, Shaka is a 75% shareholder of the club. The other two are 25% shareholders collectively.

“You must be Kenosi, soon-to-be Mrs Maphumulo. I am Penelope Saint-Patrick. I am the wife to Marcus Saint-Patrick”, a beautiful Latina looking

woman says to me. She is so beautiful. She is so nice. She oozes “nice girl married to a rich man”. She looks like the housewife type.

“Yes, I am Kenosi; Nosi for short. And it is an utter pleasure to meet you, Penelope. You are so beautiful”, I say to her. Her accent has made me more than aware of my accent. Suddenly, I appreciate my private school English accent for the first time in my life.

“Your accent is very British”, Penelope says.

“I get that a lot from Americans. But when I am anywhere else in the world, I am told that my accent is American”, I tell her.

“So what is it exactly?” Penelope asks.

“My accent? It is South African”, I say.

Moments into our conversation, I notice that the men have disappeared. It is their opening night, I guess I should have expected the disappearing act. However, a quick peck on my cheek would have been nice. Another wife comes up to me and introduces herself as Kim Richardson. Her husband is Nathaniel Richardson. She is African-American and married herself a fine white boy with a fat trust fund and a business mind.

Kim, Penelope, and I enjoy our drinks in our exclusive VVIP lounge, looking over the banging club that our husbands have just opened. It hits me hard when Kim and Penny have to check-in on their kids and I am suddenly thinking about Kemorerile.

“You ok?” Shaka sneaks up on me.

“Yeah, I am good. The ladies are just checking on their children. I am thinking we should check on Mpumi?” me.

“Mpumi is fine, my love. She is in another country with a different time zone. She is well-taken care of”, he says.

“I don’t think it would hurt if we make sure that she is okay”, I insist.

“Tell you what, when we land in South Africa on Monday, the first thing we are going to do is fetch her. Will that make you feel better?” Him.

I nod. He kisses my forehead, and my lips.

“Come see your man’s office in your club”, he says. He pulls me upstairs and into the office.

It is incredible. He closes the door and locks it.

“I was hoping that my fiancé and I could baptise it before we start making money in here”, he kinkingly says.

I play along, undressing myself until I am in my underwear. He has no time to be a gentleman. He literally fucks my brains out... on the couch, on his table, on his chair, on the floor, against the wall... and when we are done, we quickly shower in the in-suite bathroom of his office. We fuck in the shower too.

We get dressed and I put my panty in his blazer pocket. He giggles. He spanks my ass and then I DMC him.

“Why is there a shower in your office? What are you planning on doing in here? With who? And who are you planning on taking showers with

to clear evidence of infidelities?" Me, sounding crazy I know but I will feel better when I have this out of the way.

"It's for moments like today", him.

"I hear you, but with who?" Me.

"Only you, my love. Only you. I do not need the drama of more than one woman. All of this is for you, for us, and for our family", he says buttoning up his shirt and me putting on my shoes.

"Okay. Listen babe, there is something that I have been meaning to talk to you about", I begin.

"Right here at the club?" Him.

"Babe", I say, indicating that this is serious.

He grabs my waist and puts me between his legs as he sits on his desk.

"Talk to me", him.

"The house in Tau... I know it was for Mimi. So may we please buy a new one together for me? I feel like I am invading her memory in your life", I plead my story. I would never have this conversation about Basetsana. Mimi is dead, I have nothing to worry about. Basetsana ... "She moved on". I need to understand what I am dealing with first before I ask him to change the name of the *Bassie* club.

"Where is this coming from? Is it because of Kari?" He asks, concerned.

“No love. If you are going to give me a house, I want it to be rightfully mine. I don’t want it handed down to me after it has belonged to another woman in your life. We can stay in my house for a while until we find what we are both looking for. Please love”, I continue.

“Okay baby. If that is what you want.” He says.

“And maybe we can sell the house in Tau”, I say.

“Nah babe. Property is an investment. We can either rent it out or turn it into office space”, him.

I will not argue even though I feel some kind of insecurity over the fact that he cannot get over Mimi.

“What’s on your mind?” He asks as if he can see that I am bit bothered.

“You will never be able to let her go, will you?” me.

“Huh?” him.

“Mimi. You don’t want to sell the house because you don’t want to let her go”, me.

“No baby. Listen, if it means that much to you then okay love, I will sell it”, him.

“You can buy office space anywhere, Shaka. You can always invest in any other property. All I ask is that you let this one go”, I say.

“Okay baby. Okay my love. We are selling the house”, he says. He then hugs me.

Marcus and Nathaniel walk into the office after a slight knock. I suppose Shaka unlocked the door after we got dressed and I did not even notice. They walk in with their wives.

“Bishop, I think it is time we take care of business with our managers”, Nathaniel says.

Bishop? I am the only one confused in the room and Shaka seems uncomfortable at the mention of that name.

“I am right behind you gentlemen”, Shaka says.

“The cars to take our wives home have arrived”, Marcus says.

“I will see you later, baby. Lock up when you get home”, Shaka says as he kisses me.

Penelope, Kim, and I walk to the back entrance and get into three different cars that are taking us to our respective Miami homes.

“Key-No!” Penny calls to me as she knocks on my window.

I roll my window down.

“I leave Miami for New York on Monday with Marcus. Kim and Nathaniel leave Miami for LA on Monday too. I know you and Bishop leave for South Africa on Monday. Let’s do lunch tomorrow?” she says.

Why is Shaka referred to as Bishop?

“Sure!” I agree. I guess now I will find out.

My car drives off.



I guess the party is over.

...

I could not sleep when I got to the Miami house so I decided to play around on my phone while I indulge in a glass of wine. I am showered up and walking around in bumshorts and a tight vest. I see that Nonhle's case is still going through trial. I wonder why I have not been called in yet as a witness or something. I also read that Kea testified. I need to find out how that went. The case is trending on twitter and I read that Nonhle was denied bail. Good.

I notice that I have an Instagram DM from Kea, which I open.

*Hey babe. Are you okay? I miss you. Reach out so that I know that you are good. Gugu told me about you guys meeting in Mtubatuba.*

I DM her back:

*It is honestly the weirdest thing – the world is too small. She is about to become my sister-in-law. I am good hun. How are the twins?*

She replies almost immediately, saying:

*The twins are great. Let's do lunch when you get back. We can even invite Hlobi. Mohato is out of the country so I have time on my hands.*

I respond:

*I should be back in Tholoana by Tuesday latest. Let's make it happen. Plus you must fill me in on testifying against Nonhle. I only read about it tonight.*

A knock on my door at 5am startles me mid-DM conversation.

I grab a gown and make my way to the door. I open the door. A young man dressed in black has a package and says, "This is for Bishop".

"Okay. Do you need me to sign anything?" I am not comfortable with this Bishop business, but I do not have to be rude.

"Ma'am, I have to give this to him in his hand", the young man says.

"He is not here", I tell him.

"Then I will wait", the young man says.

"I really don't mind. I am his fiancé. I will give this to him." I insist.

"I know exactly who you are. Everyone knows who Bishop's fiancé is. But still ma'am, I need to give this to him myself", the young man says.

"Love", Shaka says as he walks up to the door and bumps into his delivery man.

"This young man is looking for you." I say and walk away.

Shaka attends to the young man and after fifteen minutes, he joins me on the couch where I am now sitting with both my feet on the couch.

"Did you have fun tonight?" He begins.

"Why do people call you Bishop?" I ask.

He looks away.

“Don’t even think about lying to me, Maphumulo”, I warn him.

“I’m not quite sure if you are ready to hear what I have to say”, he tells me.

“Why are you referred to as Bishop? And why is it that everyone knows who Bishop’s fiancé is?” I ask him, using an authoritative and condescending tone.

“Don’t talk to me like that, Kenosi”, he threatens me.

I stand up and leave him in the TV room. He follows me but I slam the door in his face and lock it. He kicks the door down. I should be scared right now, but I am not. I do not know where my faith is at this point but I am not even flinching.

When he charges into the room after breaking the door down, I turn around and viciously take him to task saying, “WHO THE FUCK IS BISHOP?!”

“I am not going to tell you again to not speak to me like that.” He claps back. Anger is the accessory in his eyes but his voice is still low, as if worn out by breaking the door down so senselessly.

“Then stop following me. I want to sleep. I will find out about this Bishop name myself”, I say.

I attempt to walk away and he grabs my arm. I face him. Now I am scared.

He stares at me deeply.

In the intensity of the moment, he steps closer as if he is about to get aggressive with me. I am shaking now.

“Take off your clothes!” he commands.

What the fuck?

“Take them off”, he demands when he sees the puzzled look on my face.

I take off my clothes.

He takes off his clothes.

We are now both naked. I do not like this side of him. It seems so frightening.

“Lie on the bed”, he further commands. His voice is still very low but stern.

I lie down as told.

He bends over and his face hangs over mine.

“Open your legs”, he further says, staring me in the eye.

I am shaking now. I open my legs.

He inserts his penis inside of me. He humps me while staring at me. It feels good but scary too. This is not how we ask for sex from each other. This is borderline abuse. As he humps on me, he says, “I am Bishop. I am Bishop of the church. The church is a system that generates money in the illegal market”, he moans as the sex intensifies.

I am shocked. I want to ask questions but he is sexing me so good, I can barely speak.

“The underworld is governed by a church. We have about 500 priests across the world. We have 150 Deacons. We have four Bishops. And we have one pope. Only the Bishops know who the pope is. Not everyone gets the privilege of meeting him. He is a myth to most. The higher the rank, the more protected we are, the more associated we are to law enforcement and the more law enforcement protects us. But obviously, the higher your rank, the more dangerous you are”, he says.

Now he is viciously fucking me. We are no longer on the bed, I am now against a wall and he has pinned me against the wall. I am taking this in but not really.

“I cannot go into detail about what it is exactly that we do. However, I need you to trust me. You are safe with me. No harm will come your way. You are always watched and you are always safe”, he says.

We both cum and fall to the floor.

“Will you still have me?” He says as we lie on the floor.

I cry.

## Chapter 13

I woke up this morning feeling a bit sore from the heavy and crazy sex from last night. I showered up and dressed up in a denim dungaree and white Converse All Stars. I decide that I will find a hair salon to braid my hair after lunch.

I make breakfast for the bishop and me, still processing the kind of man I could potentially get married to. He walks into the kitchen mid-thoughts and I realise that I am actually burning the breakfast.

“Nosi”, he calls out to me.

I ignore him.

“Kenosi, I am speaking to you”, he says.

I ignore him.

“So you are not going to talk to me now?” him.

I ignore him.

He puts an American ID in front of me and says, “This man will take you everywhere you need to go and bring you back here when you are done with your lunch and whatever else you want to do”.

“I will drive myself around thanks. Or I will just take a cab. I don’t need to be driven around by your church”, I say this as I push the ID out of my face and back in his direction.

I feel his energy tense up.

“Kenosi, what exactly is your problem?” He says as he jumps onto the kitchen counter and folds his arms, ready to interact with me. Too bad that I am not in the mood. I just dish up the breakfast that I have been cooking, hand him his plate, and leave the kitchen to go and eat on our patio.

He follows me.

“Nosi, can we at least talk about this instead of acting as if we are going to ignore each other for the rest of our lives?” He says.

“You sure you would rather not be aggressively humping me while you say what you have to say?” I respond.

He is silent.

“I am sorry”, he finally says.

“So kahle hle your real job title is professional gangster?” I ask him.

“No, of course not”, he responds.

“Oh I am sorry... it is international executive gangster.” I know I am being childish, but at this point, I am allowed. He does not respond to me.

“Is this the reason why Mpumi does not live with you?” I ask him.

He nods.

“So what’s the plan now that we are headed back home and the plan is to bring Mpumi up to Tholoana to stay with us?” I ask.

“Well now that you know what is going on, I am hoping you can assist with that? Maybe it is best that we leave her in KZN?” He says.

“I want a normal life Shaka. I don’t want the life of a gangster’s wife”, I say.

“You do have a normal life, Nosi”, he says.

“No, I don’t. I don’t want to pray for you to come home each time I see you walk out of the door”, I say.

“Every woman prays for her man to come home every time he walks out of the door. The man can get into an accident. The roads are dangerous”, he says. He must think that this is funny.

“Shaka, please. I want to be a boring girl who meets a boring man and lives a boring life. I don’t need a holiday in Miami just to go clubbing. I am okay with going to the botanical gardens with fruit and calling it a picnic. I am fine with taking my kids to a good government school and struggling to make ends meet some months just so that my children can learn the value of struggling. You don’t have to do any of this illegal shit for me. I am good.” I plead my case.

He is silent.

“This thing that you do for a living... how would you feel if Mpumi married a man who leads this exact life?” I ask him. He immediately raises his head and throws a dagger my way. Good, I am getting through to him.



“Let this go, Shaka. You don’t need to be bishop for us to live a decent life. *Ngiyakucela, sthandwa sami*”, I make one last final plea.

The buzzer goes off aggressively and it invades our privacy.

Now that I know that this is the house of a bishop, I no longer open the door. Shaka gets up to see who is buzzing and perhaps deal with his business out of my sight.

He returns to the patio with Penelope.

“Penelope?!” I exclaim as I stand up.

“Hey Key-No girl. I thought I would just pick you up and we could drive to lunch together”, she says.

“That’s very nice of you”, I say –confused as to why she is in my house.

“You look cute girl”, she says.

I smile. I notice that she is wearing a maxi dress and has a bikini top on that is giving her breasts support underneath the dress. I look at Shaka to see if he is also looking at how gorgeous and sexy she is compared to my ‘cute’ outfit and me. He is not even interested. He is on his phone. Since I now know about the church, every time I see him on his phone, I assume he is conducting illegal business before I start thinking about the other stuff that men generally do with their phones.

“I will see you later, baby” Shaka says as he pecks my cheek. I assume the phone business is done.

I go into the house and grab my bag. Penelope is creepily following me around then we finally go outside to her car, the white Rolls Royce.

We hop into the car and drive off.

...

“Is Kim joining us?” I ask her as we sip on our drinks while we wait for our lunch.

“You never know with that one. Nathaniel decides everything for her. So if Nathaniel gives her permission, she will be here – late as always”, Penelope says. I get the feeling that this girl is the mouth of the south. She strikes me as a shit-starter.

“Tell me, what do you know about the church?” I ask her curiously.

“I hear pope is in town. Is it true?” She asks curiously. Now I know why she fetched me. Bishop is the closest thing to pope and now she assumes that pope is at my house.

“What makes you think that pope is in town?” I ask her.

“You just know when pope is in town. All of our husbands change”, she says as she sips on her cocktail.

“The church is the religion of the underworld, Key-No. Everything that happens after dark is determined by the beliefs of the church. The pope makes the rules alongside with the president of the underworld. The bishops and ministers work well to distribute the rules and policies. The

deacons see to it that every pulse of the underworld beats according to these rules and policies”, Penelope.

My eyes are wide open.

“Key-No, don’t you know much about the underworld?” she asks.

I sip my drink.

“You don’t know about the drug rings? The prostitution?” I choke on my drink as she says this.

“The child pornography? The human trafficking? The wars and smuggling of illegal weapons to war countries?” Penelope continues and now I am just numb.

“Key-No, this entire thing is funded, supported, and protected by presidents of countries”, she says.

I look up and see a man holding a gun against Penny’s head.

“Can we help you?” I ask.

“Shit”, Penny says.

“You didn’t know a thing, did you?” Penny continues.

“Ma’am, please follow us”, the man says to Penny.

“Where exactly do you think you are taking her?” I ask.

“We are merely following instructions, ma’am. Please do not make us make a scene. As the lady over here has explained, we are protected”, the man says.

Shaka comes out of nowhere and holds me.

“Make them leave her alone”, I demand.

Shaka signals something to them with his hand. The man and other men who we did not see until now walk away.

“Penny, I think we need to take you home. Marcus is worried sick about your safety for obvious reasons.” Shaka says suddenly sounding American.

What the fuck is going on here?

Penny nods and follows us to our car.

“P, where is your car?” I ask.

“They have already taken it back to Marcus”, she says as she wipes tears off her face.

## Chapter 14

Miami was weird. But I am realising just how much it has opened my eyes to Shaka's wealth and has questioned my moral compass when it comes to the amount of money I do not mind having attached to my name. I am also tested on the extent I am willing to be okay with crime to say I have a powerful man.

I had lunch with Kea two days ago, and more shocking discoveries came up. Kea knows about the church too. In our conversation, she was trying to open my mind to the good life that I will be living. It turns out the pope is actually Mohato. However, I am the only "Bishop" wife that knows that and apparently, it must stay that way. This explains a lot about Shaka's and Mohato's relationship. Now that I know what I know, I do not buy the mentoring relationship story. It seems as if Kea knows quite a bit about the church but Kea made one thing clear: I do not live the same life that my friends live. When a friend like Hlobi asks me about my day, she wants to hear about a shopping or gardening activity I may have discovered. If I mention anything about the church, I will be killed no matter how loved I am by my husband. I must give it to her though, she has kept the pope secret well covered. She must know now that Mohato will never let her go. Her only way out is by a coffin... and I guess the same reality applies to me, especially after today/tomorrow.

I am back in Tholoana and I woke up in my mother's house. I am at home, in Maja Perre, where my mother and sisters stay with some unemployed aunts and uncles who still herd cows for the king. I am here because my

lobola negotiations are about to kick off. Shaka has gone to Mtubatuba to fetch Mpumi and his family. They are expected to arrive tomorrow morning.

This part of Tholoana Kingdom is frozen in time. There is not much of a difference between eMtubatuba and Maja Perre. There is a huge reliance on the rural economy here and it is not a bad thing at all. If everybody floods to the city, the rural economy will suffer and that will consequently lead to the overall economy suffering. This chain of the economy, the rural economy, is simple. It is calm and less rushed. It adds value to the obedience of the black man against the capitalist system. It is also a firm reminder of the fact that the economy in the city thrives on the backs of our grandfathers working obediently for the rural economy.

“Knock knock”, I hear a voice as I am trapped in my thoughts and my eyes gazed out of the window. I turn around and see Kea and Hlobi dressed up and ready to walk this journey with me. I smile at them, beyond happy to see them. My sisters and I are not exactly the sisters that I can be claustrophobic together in one room for too long with, so I am very happy to see Kea and Hlobi.

“Hello makoti”, Hlobi says as she hugs me.

“You look beautiful”, Kea says as she hugs me.

“Thank you guys so much for coming”, I say as I hug each of them back.

“Have you spoken to your hubby-to-be today?” Hlobi asks.

“Yeah, I spoke to him this morning. They were on their way to Tholoana when I asked.” I tell them.

“Ok, well calm down. Let us sit and get you ready for the makoti journey”, Kea says.

Mapabatso, my sister, walks in and throws a grass mat at us.

“Mama says you guys must sit on this. We will be bringing your food shortly”, she says.

“No thanks, we are not hungry”, I say.

“*Hha chomi*, speak for yourself. I am starving”, Hlobi says.

“No, we are not hungry. Thanks”, I say again.

I do not trust my family. Sadly, I do believe that they might just poison us. So no, I would rather starve until these negotiations are over.

“Move! Move out of my way! Yhuuu I am exhausted! Would you please move out of my way! *Tshi!*” Sis Nora to my rescue barges in and skoots Mapabatso out of the way. She comes bringing containers upon containers of food and some paper plates and paper cups. I hug her with the greatest relief in my heart. I have never been happier to see this loud mouth adopted mother of mine. Kea and Hlobi help her with the Tupperware.

“We are sorted, Pabi. Thank you”, I say. I close the door in her face.

Kea, Hlobi, and I dish on the paper plates for the four of us while Sis Nora gets comfortable on my bed. She snuck in champagne for us and we are more than happy, we are even screaming.

“Please pour me a drink! I am so thirsty! *Yhu!* This place is far. But, my Nono would never get married without me! That champopo was bought by hubby-as-of-tomorrow. Here is an envelope he asked me to give to you”, sis Nora says.

Hlobi, Kea and I look at each other and giggle as we indulge in our food. I accept the envelope from her.

“Sis Nora, where did you see Shaka?” I ask her.

“You see Nono, I know how to use the resources that God gives to me. I am nothing like you, Miss Independent just because....” Sis Nora informs me.

“Sis Nora, where did you see Keano?” Kea emphasises my question.

“You see, I knew that my Nono would never eat the food that they give here. So, I cooked for my Nono. Then, I phoned Keano and told him to bring me here to deliver this food for Nono. Keano arrived to fetch me, because he is just so considerate, he dropped me off outside and gave me this envelope to give to my Nono”, Sis Nora says.

I smile.

I open the envelope. There is a letter. I eat some food and start reading.

*“My beautiful Kenosi, soon to be Mrs Maphumulo.*



*You are the best decision I have ever made in my life. I don't care what happens during the negotiations, you will be my wife. I don't care what happens in life, you are the one that I love.*

*I love you baby. I cannot wait to officially, lawfully, and culturally make you my first lady.*

*All my love*

*Shaka"*

I really am moved.

"What does the letter say?" Sis Nora asks me with the greatest smile on her face and her eyes wide open.

"He says he loves me and he cannot wait to officially make me his wife", I say cheesing.

"Yililili" Sis Nora ululates.

She starts singing a traditional wedding song.

My door opens and a bigger number of grown women barge in ululating and echoing Sis'Nora's song.

I am in tears. I am so happy right now. For the first time, I am excited to be getting married. I have forgotten about the fact that my husband is a gangster – an international executive gangster at that. I am happy. Everyone is here to celebrate our love past our problems. Everything that is wrong about my relationship and everything that is wrong with my

family does not matter this very moment. We are celebrating my final days of being Miss Ramphora.

My phone rings.

I run out of the room and everyone is caught up in song, they do not notice Makoti leaving the room.

“Mr Maphumulo”, I answer my phone.

“Soon-to-be-Mrs Maphumulo”, he says.

“I love you”, I say.

“I love you too, my love. You ready for tomorrow?” Him.

“I am very nervous. And everyone is within celebrations already”, I tell him.

“Tomorrow this time, you will be half-way on your journey to being Mrs Maphumulo”, he says.

“I am so excited. I cannot wait to be your wife.” I say this smiling. I lift my head and notice Mabutho standing in front of me.

“Oh my God!” I exclaim.

“What’s wrong love?” Shaka asks concerned as my tone has changed.

“Mabutho, what are you doing here?” I ask, deliberately mentioning his presence so that Shaka can hear everything that is going on.

“I asked you to drop those charges, didn’t I?” Mabutho says as he takes threatening steps towards me.

“Well I didn’t drop the charges. So what are you going to do? Hit me?” I am aggressive in my response.

“She was found guilty. She has been given fifteen years in jail. How are you expecting Lethu to be without a mother for fifteen years? I thought you loved him”, he angrily says, raising his voice at me.

“She killed my child, Mabutho. Does that mean anything to you?” I ask him.

“Yes it does. It means that child is dead. You never even knew that child. You never even got to meet her. Now my wife is doing time for a dead child that you never even met, and a living child is growing up without a mother!” He yells back at me. His words stab me in the gut.

I sob. How did I ever love this bastard? Shaka may be a professional criminal, but Mabutho is the professional bastard and the devil’s second-in-command.

I can hear that Shaka is still on the other line but now he is silent.

Mabutho charges towards me.

I scream.

He tries to drag me out of the yard but I fight him with everything that is inside of me.

I kick him in his private area a bit and run away but he fights back like a man who has nothing to lose. He hits me with a stone against my head and I pass out.

...

I wake up to complete silence in the room and a lot of chattering in the other rooms. I am in my bedroom again. Kea is sitting next to me. She notices that I am awake.

“Hey girl”, Kea.

I try to lift my head but an instant pain stabs my head and penetrates to my neck so I lie down again.

“Just relax okay”, Kea says. “The doctor checked you out. You just have a minor concussion but you will be okay. Your man’s family is negotiating your lobola.”

It’s the next day already?

“Kea, I don’t understand”, me.

Kea gives me painkillers and whispers, “The church is dealing with Mabutho”.

“Kea...” I start but cannot finish.

She nods.

“Nonhle is being dealt with by the nuns in Tholoana Female Prison. Mabutho... he is with the priests right now. Those two will never be a problem again”, Kea says this as if it is normal.

“Kea, these people have children. If the church ‘deals’ with them, what will happen to Lethu?” I ask. Has everyone suddenly become cold in church?

Kea does not say anything.

“Kea, please. Mohato listens to you. Please convince him to not kill Mabutho and Nonhle, please”, I beg her.

Hlobi and Sis Nora walk in with juice and scones. Yum. Kea helps me sit up. The headache is still there but it is bearable now. I eat the scones before me: Sis Nora’s speciality indeed. I down them with some coke afterwards and take some painkillers. Kea steps out to take a call from Mohato.

I ask for my phone and Hlobi gives it to me.

I dial Shaka.

“*Sthandwa sami*”, Shaka says.

“Baby”, I reply.

“How are you feeling, *sthandwa sami*?” he asks.

“I want to be with you”, I say as I sob over the phone.

Sis Nora and Hlobi look at me.

“I am outside, love. Can you sneak out in any way?” Him.

“Yes. I will climb out of my window. Wait for me somewhere with the car, please love”, I say.

“Okay, *sthandwa sami*”, him.

As I hang up, I notice Hlobi and Sis Nora smiling but judging me at the same time.

“Cover for me. I will be right back”, Me.

I climb out of my window and slow jog at the back of the big yard. I see his Merc G-Wagon driving slowly and it meets me half way. I get into the car and waste no time: I dive into his arms and allow myself to marinate in his arms. He passionately holds me.

“Love, I cannot leave the church. It protects us”, he says.

“I don’t want to talk about the church, please. Our families are in there negotiating the rest of our lives. I just want to know that I am not making a mistake”, I say.

“I love you – only you. I want to spend the rest of my life with you. You are my first and only lady. You are not making a mistake by choosing me, I promise you.” He says.

His phone rings.

“Sho”, he answers his phone.

...

“That’s fine. I will make the call”, him.

He hangs up.

“Love, you have to go back inside now. I am calling for the walking cows to be brought in, my beautiful wife”, he says.

I smile.

“It’s happening”, I say, smiling and giggling.

“It is, Mrs Maphumulo”, he says.

“So how much are they charging you?” I ask. These people have been very absent in my life. Now is the time for me to know if they see me as a child or a business deal in all of this.

“Mrs Maphumulo, go back inside. I need to get this over and done with so that I can take you home”, him.

We kiss.

I run back and climb back through the window of my room.

Kea, Hlobi, and Sis Nora are breathing heavily.

“You need to get dressed, quickly.” Kea says.

Singing starts again in the passage.

I laugh. I am excited. I am actually getting married.

I take off the dress and doek that I am wearing and wear a brown and pearl white seshweshwe maxi skirt with white lace popping out from the bottom. I wear a shirt-like pearl white top with brown seshweshwe trimmings. I wear a brown African printed doek on my head. Kea does my make-up and I seal my look with pearl white heels. I then wear pearl jewellery.

We hear ululating and a heavy vehicle coming in. We look out of the window and find a truck full of cows off-loading the cows. Sis Nora is so excited she cannot help herself.

There is singing and dancing in the yard as twenty-five cows fill the kraal.

“Nosi!” My mom barges into my room and joyfully announces.

“Mama!” I respond with joy.

“My son-in-law has arrived. They said they have to perform umembeso. I will call you when it is time for you to come out”, she says and goes back to the dancing.

Sis Nora leaves with my mother. Kea, Hlobi, and I sit and watch umembeso happen through the window. We are in awe. My entire family got blankets and plasma screen TVs. Even Sis Nora got and she is beside herself. I am happy for her though. My sisters now know how to smile with me and not at me. Mxm.

My family gives Shaka a goat for him to slaughter and enjoy with his friends.

Nyakallo opens my door and I hear her say, “Baby sis... it is time”.

I nod. Kea, Hlobi, and I smile and I walk outside.

I am greeted with ululating and absolute joy. Shaka stands up and walks to me. He kisses me and hugs me.

His father’s wives and his sisters take me back into the house. We go to my room. They undress me and dress me in isidwaba. I hear MaNgobese



say, "This is not the nonsense you find in town where cloth is used to make *isidwaba*, this is proper isiZulu attire for a woman". We all laugh. Gugu puts *ubuhlalo* (traditional beaded jewellery) on me and even my tommy sneakers are beaded. I have *ubuhlalo* on my legs, my hands, around my neck, and around my *isiqholo*, which is made of cow skin.

"You look amazing, MaRamphora", MaNgobese.

Ululating fills my room. Zulu women and young Zulu children break in song, announcing that *umakoti* is about to leave the room.

All these Zulu women accompany me to my husband. My husband grabs my hand, kisses me, then we walk down the street so that every neighbour can see that I am no longer a single woman. Everyone walks behind us, singing and dancing. I am so excited, I am even dancing. My husband just keeps on laughing. He is more overwhelmed than I am. I am just feeling myself in this isiZulu attire. I feel like a real queen. I see myself as Nandi, the mother of Shaka Zulu... her beauty, her presence, her queening status... I am all of that right now. Moreover, I have the most handsome husband in the world.

When we have finally paraded the streets of Maja Perre and everyone knows that I am taken by a Zulu man (yes, this makes headlines in Tholoana), we head back to the yard. Everyone settles down then Shaka goes down on one knee.

"Keep quiet! All of you! Please shush!" Sis Nora calms the crowd down. There is silence.

“MaRamphora, love of my life. Please my love... please marry me”, Shaka says as he takes out a ring. It is a diamond wedding band that completes the princess cut diamond ring that he proposed with. It is so beautiful. Am I getting another ring at our white wedding?

“Of course I will marry you, Maphumulo”, I say. He puts the ring on my finger. He gets up and we passionately kiss.

The ululating continues and the singing fills the streets of Tholoana.

...

All our guests, even those that I do not know, are now eating. Shaka and I are walking hand-in-hand greeting our guests and participating in small talk. Shaka eventually gets bored and goes to chill with his siblings. Kea and Mohato had to leave early so we will catch up when Shaka and I get back to the city.

It is getting late and my family and the Maphumulo family need to make their way to KZN for *umabo*. Shaka and I decide that we will drive together and our families will follow us.

The white wedding is taking place in Ballito anyway so everyone takes about an hour to pack then ten cars convoy to KZN.

## Chapter 15

Nyakallo, Mapabatso, my mother and I spent the entire morning buying gifts for *umabo*. Trust me when I say that I am the VIP of the moment in my family. Everyone is fussing over me and pretending to love me. That is what we do in the Ramphora family, we pretend to love one another.

Shaka calls to tell me that the family is ready and we all leave to go to his home. I am dressed in my seSotho attire and so is my family. We walk to the gate singing at the top of our voices. Shaka's family walks towards us singing too. It is a battle of the voices right now. Eventually the singing stops. My family pleads with the Maphumulos to let us come in, as tradition requires. We have to offer a living goat and the Maphumulo family accept it. The gate opens and we are welcomed inside. We walk through the gates singing yet again. *Umabo* takes place. It is so beautiful.

I am taken to get dressed up again in the same attire as I was dressed up in at *umembeso*. This time, we parade in the streets of eMtubatuba. We have Zulu warriors walking in front of us and showing off their war tactics. Animal gall is spilled onto mine and Shaka's hands, declaring us married. When we get back, I am locked into a room and elderly women, my mother included, tell me how to be a good wife to Shaka for a good three hours.

After the third hour, Shaka is called in to sit next to me and we are preached to about being good to each other for two hours. The party is happening out there and I am not allowed to be part of it. Shaka and I

make our way to the rondel (his room). We are so exhausted, so we both pass out instantly.

...

I wake up at 7am and find myself all alone in Shaka's room. There is a bunch of lilies next to me and a card that reads: "*Meet me at the altar in your white dress, Mrs Maphumulo*". I smile.

Someone knocks on the door. Kea, Gugu, Hlobi, and Mpumi walk in ululating. I laugh. I am genuinely happy.

"Come on *makoti*, you need to get dressed. Let's go", Gugu.

I quickly wear a maxi dress and leave with them.

We get to the Oyster box hotel where the wedding is taking place. I shower while the ladies get dressed. My make-up artist arrives and my hairstylist arrives as well. My look today has to be beyond what I come up with when I watch make-up videos on YouTube. I am marrying the love of my life. My whole life is about to change – even on paper. I need her expertise to make me look out of this world. I know she never disappoints. As soon as my hair and nails are done, the make-up artist does my make-up. As expected, she has not disappointed. I look better than I expected to look. Everyone is dressed up and I get dressed in my white wedding dress accessorised with pearls. My dress is a white wedding dress fused with the Zulu culture. It is priceless.

"You look like a dream", Sis Nora comes in and says.

“And you are just on time”, my mom says as she follows Sis Nora in.

“We are ready for you”, Mapabatso.

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My bridal party enters the venue with K-Ci & Jojo’s *“This Very Moment”*. Gugu is in first, followed by Hlobi, then Kea, my matron-of-honour. My partner in crime leading me in a church –literally and figuratively. The choir walks in behind them to the song too then the choir takes its position. The choir starts singing Langa Mavuso’s *“Spirit”*.

Ona and Khotso, Kea’s sons, walk in first as our ring-bearers. Two matured flower girls, Mpumi and Kefentse, dropping petals as they walk in, follow them. I then appear. I walk down the aisle. Everyone is suddenly blocked out of my view. All I see is my husband, crying. He is laughing at something that Mohato whispers in his ear and he seems to be calming down after that laughter. My mother is walking me down the aisle. She does not deserve this honour. But you know how they are, they mess up your life then want to be seen and acknowledged when beautiful things happen in your life. We stand in front of Shaka. My mother hugs him. He unveils me. The service starts.

Our vows:

Shaka: “Kenosi, you are the love of my life. I have never said that to anyone. There have been women who have come into my life and I have loved them, but not the way that I love you. Thank you for choosing me with all of my imperfections. Thank you for seeing a husband in me.

Thank you for sharing love with me. My love, I am pledging my life to you. I promise to love you when life seems easy and when life seems difficult. I will remain faithful and true to you, grow old loving you and only you. I am not a perfect man. I will never even claim to be one. But I am a man who wants to live the rest of his life with you: in sickness and in health, for better or for worse, until death do us part.”

I know that he means every word. I am in tears. I should have said my vows first.

I say mine from the heart: “Shaka, you are the man that God specifically created for me. When you met me, you saw something in me that not even I saw in myself. You valued me when I didn’t even value myself. Shaka, my situation was at its worst when we first met. Yet, you still chose to chase me knowing very well that at the time, I would have never chosen you. You found me in a mess, you sat with me in the dark, then you pulled me into the light. You never judge me. You never found reasons why I am not worthy. You always choose me. That is a love that I can spend years trying to explain but no one will truly get it until they are truly chosen. I will never judge you. I am sorry for all the times that I have. You have been my strength when I was weak. I want to love you in the best times and in the worst. I want to love you when life seems easy, and when life seems difficult. I want to love you in sickness and in health. Not because I owe you for who you have been to me, but because in loving you, I will be thanking God for bringing you into my life”.

Our guests are in tears now too just as both Shaka and I are. I see couples holding hands, gripping tighter onto one another.

Our rings are blessed. Then the priest says "Do you Kenosi Ramphora take Shaka Keano Maphumulo to be your husband?"

I reply saying, "I do".

The priest looks at Shaka and says, "Do you Shaka Keano Maphumulo take Kenosi Ramphora to be your wife?"

He smiles at me and says, "I do".

The priest instructs us to take the rings and insert them on each other's fingers saying "With this ring, I thee wed".

He then asks if there is anyone who has a reason why we should not be married; that person should speak now or forever old his or her peace. There is silence. With this, the priest proceeds to say, "With the power vested in me, I now pronounce you husband and wife. What the Lord has brought together, let no man separate. Shaka, you may kiss your bride".

Shaka wastes no time in leaning in to kiss me.

There are cheers, ululating and singing.

The choir sings Brenden Praise's *"Easy To Love"* as Shaka and I sign our nuptials. I am so happy.

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The reception is beautiful but Shaka and I have to leave early because my *makoti* duties need to begin. After we have had lunch, we drive back to Mtubatuba.

We take advantage of being home alone, have a lot of sex, and pass out by 7pm. My first instruction is to be up by 5am and ready to prepare breakfast.

“How long are we going to be here again?” I enquire after a steamy session with my husband.

“Just a week love. Then we go back to Tholoana Kingdom”, he says.

“Good. Because we need to find Mpumi a school”, I say just to seal the urgency. I do not care how amazing your in-laws are, no one wants to be “*makoti*” for longer than a week.