



Prologue

"I was going to die. Please God let her castrate me only not kill me and if she doesn't kill me and forgives me I will never look at any woman again let alone bring a child."

"I love you. Okay, point of correction I loved you and you go around and break my heart. I was fine single and picking up my pieces and I was doing fine. Was I just a pet project to you?"

It hurt deeply and I didn't know how to react. Was it the fact that she used past tense of love or was it the hurt I had caused her? Why didn't I take it from my parents? Does the apple not fall far away from the tree?

"I am taking my son away. He doesn't need you as a father figure."

She took another wax and I knew I was going to be in pain again. Why did I marry a madwoman? Who waxes her husband when she is angry?

"I am sorry baby; I don't know what got into me."

"Then Bukhosi I am going to remove the devil that got into you."

I was tied both hands and legs on either side of the bed. The pain was becoming my second nature. I should have known her silence was a sign.

"It is already gone I promise my love I will not do it again."

"You are right it won't happen again because we are getting a divorce."

I don't know what hurt the most? The wax she was torturing me with or the fact that she was leaving me. I confessed that at first I married her out of obligation but I got to love her. I

didn't mean to hurt her God know that. If she forgave me I was going to retire and stay home to build my family.

"Your mother is calling. I am done packing our things you won't even find our trace in the house."

I wanted to say he was my son, not hers but I knew what was good for me. She answered the phone then placed it on my ear.

"Mom; I am sorry please forgive me. Please talk to my wife to forgive me. I swear I will confess everything and repent if need be."

Mom: "What is going on?"

"She is leaving me with our son."

Mom: "Well I should have left you a long time ago."

She dropped the call.

"I will call the ambulance and wait for the police to come and arrest me. You know my phone number; give them if they want to arrest me."

She left me like that. I was bleeding my shaft I guess was as big as a log and I was losing consciousness. I just closed my eyes and it was lights out.....

Join me Bukhosi Radebe the last heir of Portia Radebe-Smith on my journey to adulthood.....

“May we hear the final argument?”

I looked at the judge and I knew the moment of truth was near.

“Your honour I would like to present my closing argument.”

That was Mr. Bayard the prosecutor. He had been so mean and I knew that I was going to go down. Go down for something I

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Prosecutor: “Your honour the evidence has been presented and the evaluation was concluded with the evidence presented we concluded that this crime was deliberately and with premeditation.

No. 1, Miss Rhodes motivated by hatred towards her former lover, in rage over the events that took place after the affair ended; she slowly planned to kill Mr. Buthelezi.

No. 2

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that she researched murder and educated herself all these years she was with him to kill him one day.

No. 3, that she at least looked for one scapegoat to let her take a fall; her mother. Unfortunately or fortunately she was too drunk to be a possible suspect and she had an alibi.

This is a murder case and as any other case murder case we introduced the victim who is our deceased. We also introduced our witnesses who saw Mrs. Rhodes threatening the deceased.

The co-worker also confirmed that she was acting shady the day before the murder.

The only thing she cared about was killing an innocent man and leaving a woman without a partner and a child without a father.”

Come to think of it all the years I was with him I never; not even once suspected he was traditionally married and had a child. That’s why he.....

Prosecutor: “Let me show the court exhibit 1003. This scene that the witnesses testified to, it was a sight that left the community in shock. And ironically, as the proof has established, one of the witnesses saw her at the crime scene just a few hours before the murder was committed.

Your honour what I ask for is a verdict of guilty of two offenses of murder and premeditated murder. I thank you for taking up more of your time today and for your attention.”

He bowed and sat down. I didn't even hear the rest of the mambo jumbo he was saying I was shaking like a leaf.

Judge: “We will take an hour recess and I will come back and I will pass my verdict.”

I was hoping for a miracle but I knew miracles were not for people like me.

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Judge: “May the defendant please rise.”

I couldn't stand because of shaking.

Judge: “In the case of Miss Lara Bonolo Rhodes versus the state I find you guilty of the counts of murder and premeditated murder. Therefore you will remain in custody till the sentencing on the 26th of the following month. The court adjourned.”

When he hit his gavel which pieced my already bleeding heart; I was too shaken to cry. Why was the world so cruel? Where

was my mom to protect me from this world? Did she even know that the court date was today or she was busy getting drunk and seducing another young man? Thank God my aunt took my little brother to raise him. Why did bad things happen to good people?

I looked at the far end as his sister wept. She could have saved me but it was just the two of us against his whole family. His brother looked happy to send me to the dungeon. How was I going to survive? When I read about people who were wrongfully accused I thought it was a myth but I believed it when it was happening to me.

1

Lara (Bonolo)

“All rise.”

That was the final day of the last nail in my coffin.

Judge: “May the defendand please rise.”

I was done praying because there was no need to waste my energy. If there was a God out there he would not have let me go through abuse then go to a dungeon for a crime I did not commit. Why was I born in the first place? I was not even

listening the only thing that brought my attention back to the courtroom was when he started saying my sentence.

“For the premeditated murder you get 25years and for the murder, you get a life sentence. You.....”

That was all I could hear as I just shut the world out. I wanted to plan my life inside the prison. Was I even worthy of this life? Why didn't I just die? Why didn't he kill me than doing this to me; after all the physical and emotional abuse? I should have left him or killed him myself.

I woke up when they said I can be escorted to my new home.

The ride there was a dream because I was mentally asleep.

“You are not in a hotel here; move it.”

It was like I was in a trance I was not even breathing well. I picked up my pace and peed on my track pants a little. All the stories I read; about jails; were coming to reality. When we approached it was smelly and I wanted to vomit. The holding cells were better I was even thinking of making myself comfortable there.

Male guard: “We have a newcomer here.”

Female guard: “She is walking like a queen wasting my time.”

Him: “Move it.”

It was as if he poured water on me I just let the pee pass freely.

Her: "What is that smell?"

Him: "Do not tell me she peed herself?"

Her: "She won't even last in here."

She took me to the showers where I was checked, showered; told to put my clothes in a plastic bag, and then I was given my uniform. That was going to be my new look for days to come.

Her: "Who told you that this place is bad and why would you pee in your pants at your age?"

The sarcasm in her voice was still there but it was not as harsh as the first time they introduced us. She looked at me with mixed emotions.

Lara: "Ia.....m s..o..r..r..y."

I was even shacking and very much jolted.

Her: "You need to toughen up because your cellmate is troublesome she has never kept a mate for over a year. They stay a night only and she almost kills them."

Was that supposed to scare me? If so I was really scared.

Scared was an understatement, I cursed the day I met Mlulami

Buthelezi. I wish God had just made me late to my classes as usual. I never commented from there I just finished in silence confessing all my sins because it seemed as if I was going to die before I even have my chance to prove my innocence.

Her: "Let's go."

Moving from there to my cell was like going to my sacrificial table. I was like a sacrificial lamb. When she opened the cell I saw my future going down the drain and my life flashing before my very own eyes. They say when one is about to die they don't see a future at all but they see their past life.

Her: "Gail wake up you have a new cellmate."

She groaned and it was a scary one.

Gail: "Sis Moo you like troubling me and I love you too much to send you to a psychiatric ward like your friend Reggie."

Her voice was not even soft I couldn't tell about her appearance because I was already hiding behind the warden.

Her: "Please let us not fight this early."

Gail: "Let me see my little pet."

I swear to God I died a thousand deaths.

Her: "Please be gently she is still a baby."

She said pushing me forward.

Gail: "Oh... Shiz niz."

She just looked at me with pitiful eyes.

Gail: "She is literally a baby. Wasn't she supposed to go to juvenile? Look at her she won't even last a day here. What have you done? You want to be punished by God."

Her: "Relax she is old and a murderer; so don't take her lightly."

Gail: "Nna I have spent more years here than outside and I can see a murderer from a distance. This one is just an angel wrongfully accused."

"Thank you; someone believes me but well she was not the judge so I was not going to get away easily."

Hell no I was saying it to myself because I had lost my ability to talk from the trial.

Gail: "Can she even talk?"

Her: "I only heard 'I am sorry.' It was even barely audible."

Gail: "God is truly going to punish you and your judges at least I know all these crimes I committed but this..... oh maybe she did it with the other personality. You know these model c kids will tell you my other self did it."

They laughed as if they were friends. I always heard that prisons are rough and cruel but these looked like sisters.

Her: "You never know."

I also was beginning to believe that I had a second personality who killed Mlulami. Maybe I was bipolar. What if my rage made me change to the animal which brutally took a life? I felt disgusted then I ran to the sink. I removed the contents that were remaining in my stomach.

Gail: "See what I mean. Don't worry sis Moo I will take care of her and she looks the same age as my daughter."

Her: "How old are you? Are you even over 18?"

Lara: "24"

It came as a whisper. I was shaking and hoping to die maybe the pain I was feeling was going to go away. I was going to ask Mlulami why he had to ruin me like that if ever I died. Warm tears braced my soft cheeks and I just wiped them.

Her: "I have a job to go back to."

She closed the door and secured it. I looked at my surroundings and sank on the floor. I had just started on my new job I was finally free from Mlulami and I had moved out of my mother's house but then all came crashing down. Maybe

happiness was not meant for me. I wished my father had not died and left me to my mother who was even spiteful enough to tell me that he was not even my father.

Apparently, my dad was some rich freak who blew his money and became a popper then left my mom pregnant. She met dad; the man I grew up knowing as my dad who was adopted from a young age and made his life simple and uncomplicated. It seemed mom was still stuck with the so-called sperm donor that she didn't treat dad well. All in all; the father I grew up knowing was the best because he loved me and my little brother unconditionally.

Gail: "Baby girl you have to toughen up because murder is a criminal offense that will always be taken seriously. If you can just close the outside world out for a minute and adapt to this environment. The first time I came here I was scared even

though I knew I was set up I didn't have time to cry foul. The following times were just a walk in the park because I knew I did it. The last time the person who had been giving me trouble is six feet under and I confessed when they questioned me because I was tired of her."

Lara: "Ah..."

Gail: "Are you sure you know how to talk?"

I just nodded not trusting my voice.

Gail: "If you say so. Lunch will be served soon. So you better stick with me because I like you like my own daughter. But you will have to toughen up.

I nodded again sitting on the bottom bed of the bunk bed. It smelt funny in the cell but that was my new home. What was I going to do?

I was thinking about the movies I watched about prisons where people lost self-respect and themselves. I was going to be part of the statistics. I didn't even play sports at school hence I was too soft.

Gail: "I think you are still in shock we will talk tomorrow let us go for lunch then you will come and rest. You are lucky there are no activities today. You will rest then tomorrow your old life as you knew it will be finished but your new life beginning."

I just nodded and followed her closely like a kid following their mother because they were scared of something.

Voice: "Gail

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I see you have fresh meat there."

Gail: "Do not even think of it. You have to pass through me; this is my daughter."

Her voice was terrifying the other lady just changed her face into a fake smile.

Her: "I was just making conversation."

When I looked around me there were so many pairs of eyes looking at me and I almost fainted.

"Get it together Lara Bonolo Rhodes get it together now!"

I reprimanded myself. I had to grow a pair because no one was going to fight my battles.

Gail: "Even in jail there are plastics and bullies."

Lara: "What?"

I just laughed looking at different tables with different women.

Gail: "At least you have a beautiful smile and laugh. You remind me of my baby girl. I think I have been given a second chance to

be a mother. I never mothered her I think its times I embraced my destiny too."

I just nodded and sat down. To say the food was bad would be an injustice to the word because the food was horrible. My

dad was not earning much but we had enough in the house to sustain us which was why we had more than enough.

“You must stop thinking about the good times and focus on the present.”

I think I was getting insane because I was beginning to talk to myself a lot. When we finished our lunch there was a group of women who went to the kitchen to do some dishes. Women, there were of different calibre, sizes, shapes, races, and nationalities. I guessed that I was the youngest of them all; not forgetting the smallest in size because I was very short.

I went to the bathroom to bath before I slept. Gail had gone to God knows where. I was not even comfortable in the showers and I wondered how I was going to spend the rest of my life there.

“Look at this; she is all alone I wonder where mommy dearest is.” “Let’s leave Gail won’t be happy.”

“I don’t give a, I just peed.....”

2

Bukhosi

“Come on Bukho it will be fun.”

Bukho: "Did mom send you?"

"Well, the thing is..."

Bukho: "I know you Busi and your mother are besties she probably gave you a go-ahead."

Busi: "Don't be a baby about it and she is your mom too. She is not trying to control you."

Bukho: "Yes; she is. Look at dad; he retired and he doesn't control the surgery anymore but he doesn't control what happens there unless they want his help. Mom asked, in fact, she begged me to join her I studied film because I wanted to follow her footsteps but now she is controlling all my projects come on sis."

Busi: "Come on my love it's as if you don't know your mother. She might not give up. Even if I fail to convince you next week we are going for a family dinner so she will grill you and manipulate you."

Bukho: "Then she will blackmail me and cry which will make her husband angry."

Busi: "Then the husband will start telling us how ungrateful we are for making our mother cry."

Bukho: “Then you and Belinda will feel guilty and start blackmailing me also.”

Busi: “From there the dinner will be ruined and my minions will start crying and their father will be mad at me.”

Bukho: “The rest of the crèche will blame me for being the worst uncle in the universe.”

Busi: “At least you get the drift now. Avoiding her has dire consequences than listening to her ideas. You might like them in the end.”

Bukho: “Don’t you have some babies to make with your baby-making machine husband?”

Busi: “You are getting too big of your boots.”

Bukho: “Just asking.”

Busi: “Leave us alone we have stopped making babies and you know that because I wanted only five babies.”

Bukho: “I am not commenting further but Kian is the man.”

She just laughed and took her handbag going out.

Bukho: “Some sister you are. You couldn’t even bring a burger. I am starving here.”

Busi: “You know the statistics in the world that women are more than men right. So I bet if you looked closer you will have someone bringing fresh lunch to you as I do to my husband.”

Bukho: “Lucky bas...”

Busi: “I will tell your parents that your mouth has sinned they will clean it with all the cleaning detergents.”

Bukho: “Please go before I sin again.”

She laughed and closed the door. I looked at the file that was next to my computer when the door opened again.

“I said get out.”

“Wowowowo; is this what I get for caring and bringing lunch to my nephew.”

Bukho: “Uncle Polly I am sorry I thought it was my sister.”

Polly: “So it was her. I saw her back I thought I was getting old.”

We laughed as we sat down. Uncle Polly had been in the company since he was an intern. He was more like a family member than a worker because mom had given him some shares as a wedding gift. He was not even ageing. He was based in the Cape Town branch.

Bukho: “To say I am happy to see you will be an understatement. I am ecstatic.”

Polly: "It sounded urgent over the phone. You can be so dramatic if you like. I am surprised that you were not a girl. Or you are one because you are still not married?"

We both laughed as he placed the lunch on top of the table.

Bukho: "I was really hungry; thank you for the lunch. You still know my favourite and you are my favourite uncle."

Polly: "I am your favourite uncle because I brought food for you."

I didn't wait for an invitation I went to wash my hands then came back to indulge.

Polly: "One could swear you haven't eaten in years."

Bukho: "I live on takeaways so this here. The food you brought is homely and appetising."

Polly: "Okay, I am flying back tonight because I can't be away for two days. I am taking them to school this week and you know how fussy they are."

Bukho: "You shelter them too much Uncle Polly."

Polly: "They are my girls and I am not ready to buy a gun. Besides they do not even want to get licences."

Bukho: “Okay, I want your advice. I have never done a documentary before. I am scared to the core because it needs a lot from me. I am comfortable with what we have been doing.”

Polly: “Change is good and inevitable my boy so I do not know what the big deal is.”

Bukho: “The problem is I will have to be hands-on.”

Polly: “You have been doing this for over a year since your mom retired.”

Bukho: “I know but it is difficult for me it will be out of my comfort zone.”

Polly: “Was directing not out of my comfort zone?”

Bukho: “You at least had experience and”

Polly: “Stop making excuses Bukhosi your parents didn’t raise you that way. You are not growing any younger soon your parents will be gone and the legacy will go with them. You are the only one who loves the company and if they pass on do you think your siblings will even want to carry on with the company. You are placed in the company to make sure the legacy carries on. One of my girls will be joining us because we will never live forever but you will need this legacy shortly. The world is revolving you cannot be doing the same thing forever so I say try this and see if it is not good then you will at least

know that you have tried but failed. There is no harm in trying is there?

Besides we do not have a time-consuming project we are free these days.”

Bukho: “I hear you and I understand. I think I will reconsider but I will need help.”

Polly: “There is no doubt about that because it’s a new project. All new projects are given full attention you know that. So we are going to help you all the way.”

Bukho: “Thank you very much for opening my eyes I knew I could count on you.”

Polly: “That’s what family is for. Do you realise that this is your first big project ever since you worked here permanently?”

I thought back and yes he was right I was going to do this on my own for the first time. I had made a promise that I wanted something breathtaking like what my mom did so this was my time.

Bukho: “You are right and I want to do my best. I want to make waves not because I am my mother’s child but because I am good at this.”

Polly: “Yes

that's my boy. Now welcome back to the world of the living."

We laughed as I finished my lunch.

Bukho: "Thank you for coming; this means a lot."

Polly: "Please do not disappoint me. I know your mom will be proud but I will be the proudest. You surprised me by choosing her side and I knew you had it in you to turn this into something amazing; just go for it."

Bukho: "I will make you proud especially mom. I know my siblings would want to help me but they won't do it all the way. You know how fast they get bored."

Polly: "No need to tell me because I practically raised you guys."

I just shook my head and laughed. We spent the rest of the afternoon before going with him to my parents' place. I was not staying with them anymore. Lolo was visiting I guessed as I saw his favourite bike outside. I was right.

Lolo: "Uncle B."

He ran to me. I just laughed because he called us Uncle B with Bran. When we were in the same vicinity I was Uncle B2 while Bran was Uncle B1.

Bukho: "Hay big guy. So you only visit your granny not your Uncle anymore?"

Lolo: "I was going to come but mommy said you are too busy. She said I will visit at the end of the year because we will be moving to Sydney for good."

Bukho: "She must be joking right. What is your dad saying?"

Lolo: "He is not okay with it but my other mom his wife said we will have to visit often so he agreed. It was my decision mom asked me to choose and I chose with my little sisters. They said they also want to visit that's why they want me to stay far away."

So much information, he talked like a grown-up. Beli was doing a great job he was just lovable. He saw Polly then ran to him.

Lolo: "Grandpa; what did you bring for me? Mom said we will swim with the sharks when we visit you also."

Polly: "She is right because I stay next to the ocean but the sharks are dangerous so I don't know about swimming with them."

Lolo: "We will wear...."

Mom: "Lawrence those are my visitors and you are distracting them."

Lolo: "Granny they came for all of us."

He said running to the house calling dad's name.

Mom: "What a surprise. Thank you, Polly, for coming we wouldn't have seen him in the next five years."

Bukho: "Come on mom; I visit all the time."

Mom: "When was the last time you were here?"

I tried to think and failed I guess it has been long but we did meet at church, work and surgery so I didn't get why mom was fussing.

Mom: "You see you are also a stranger here. Come on in."

A. kind of missed home with mom's home-cooked meals. That's why dad never liked eating out because he knew how good his wife was when it came to cooking.

Dad: "I wondered why it was raining. I should have known the winds where bring the prodigal son back home."

I just laughed as I gave him a manly hug. We went to the lounge. When my uncles were around then I became a non-existence object to my dad. Just saying not jealousy speaking.

Mom: "Lolo go and bath now dinner will be served soon."

Lolo: "Yes granny."

I followed mom to the kitchen.

Bukho: "So mom I was thinking."

Mom: “Nothing goes well when you think because your head is always empty so cockroaches are always swimming there.”

We both laughed as I shook my head.

Bukho: “Can parents be swapped? I wish to go to an exchange and get a new mom.”

Mom: “You will never find another Portia.”

Bukho: “Well I can google and assure you that there are several Portias”

Mom: “None who will measure up to me. So tell me, my boy, what is it that you were thinking about?”

Bukho: “Uncle Polly made me change my mind. I will try to go with the documentary and see how it goes. You will forward all the emails to me and what it’s needed.”

You should have heard how she screened and my dad had to come rushing followed by Uncle Polly.

Dad: “What is going on?”

3

Lara (Bonolo)

To say I was scared would be wrong because I was terrified.

Her: "Why are you not talking to me?"

Lara: "....."

Her: "She is rude now let me welcome her."

I just covered my face. She laughed and opened my hands by force; which made me fall. She kicked me. I was wondering what I did to deserve such a beating. I was going to train and beat them too. Anywhere who was I kidding because I knew I was never even going to manage to beat a fly on the wall? I was counting the slaps and the punches. I stopped at 50 because I was losing consciousness.

I was in a dark hole and Mlulami was there staring at me.

Him: "I told you that you will never leave me"

Lara: "What do you want from me? You have my mother and a string of girlfriends following you."

Him: "I was your first so there is nowhere you can go and there is no one will ever want you once I put my stamp on it."

Lara: "Are you a Satanist?"

He laughed sarcastically.

Him: "I just know because no one leaves me and live to tell the tale except if they are dead."

I was shaking because he was rough when it came to defying him.

Lara: "Please do not hurt me, I am so sorryyyyyyyyyy. Pleaseeeeeee....."

"She is having another seizure nurse call the doctor please."

I just felt numb and shaky, why was Mlulami giving me a hard time?

"The doctor is here. I tried to open my eyes but they were heavy and painful. I just cried and I felt someone shaking me.

Lara: "Please leave me alone Mlulami."

The shaking was harder than before as if it was real.

"Lara; it's me Gail."

Who the heck was Gail? I finally opened one eye because the other one was swollen. All the memories came flashing especially the recent ones. I smiled at Gail.

Gail: "She is alive."

She smiled from ear to ear I could swear she had tears in her eyes or was it my one functional eye that was deceiving me.

Doc: "Yes she is awake now go to your cell before you get me into trouble."

Gail: "Thank you very much please take care of her."

Doc: "I hear you are in Isolation for some time how did you even manage to get out?"

Gail: "It's prison doc, not hell. I will see you my little Goldie."

She hugged me and instead of feeling the pain, I felt my heart swell with love. Not even my mother had given a simple pat at the back. She was just one of those cold mothers. If I didn't look like her I would have doubted my paternity. She just didn't care that's why my father's sister took my little brother. I just had tears of joy. Even when I was in a place without hope my hope just rose. I had a seed of hope I just needed to water it. She left and the doctor just shook her head.

Doc: "You are very lucky because she is in your corner; now stay away from trouble."

Was I even in trouble or they are the ones who troubled me? I wanted to say it loud but I was not in the mood and I was in pain.

Doc: "We will keep you here for observation for a week or so."

I was hoping she will say forever hay it was just wishful thinking I know but a girl needs to dream right. I just nodded. She gave me an injection and I just slept.

Days turned into three weeks and I was getting better. The first time I saw my face in the mirror I was spookified I didn't even eat for two days. They had dismantled it, for what, I wouldn't even tell. While I was lying on the sick bed I was planning on ways to prove my innocence. I knew I was never going to pull the Michael Scofield's stunt as I not feet to break out of prison. Hell

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I couldn't even cover my face when those silly stupid faces were hitting me.

I had a plan I needed to talk to Gail as she was the only one on my side. The other advantage was the fact that she had been there for quite a while so I bet she knew the place in and out and who to approach for things like these.

The day I left the sickbay I was only limping but my face was back to normal; advantages of having smooth skin. The ugly one was the one who beat me hard. I bet she wanted me to be as ugly as her glove face. Do not tell him please he will beat me, or I forgot he was a she.

Gail: "You just made my day. I never prayed before but I prayed that you do not get better until my solitary days were over."

I laughed it was time I trusted Gail.

Lara: "I don't take you as a praying type but well thank you."

Gail: "Do not thank me I need to thank you. My daughter doesn't want a criminal for a mother so at least I will have you."

Lara: "Thank you very much at least do not leave me exposed to the hooligans."

Gail: "You need to toughen up my girl."

Lara: "Not everyone is born with a tough bone in their bodies. Some of us were born to be prey that's the hierarchy of life."

Gail: "Okay my Goldie I will forgive you for being born with a weak born."

We both laughed; I was thinking of how blessed I was to find a mother after all this time of crying for motherly love.

Lara: "Thank you for being in my life. You are the mother that I never had and I am grateful for that."

She was in tears also.

Gail: "You see you make a tough woman like me leak."

We hugged as we both cried.

Gail: "Do you realise this is the longest conversation you have had since you came in here and it's almost a month."

I smiled thinking about that. I had always nodded or given a single word answer.

Lara: "I might not be tough but I have a mouth and a brain I am planning on using them."

Gail: "That's my girl."

We went for lunch and the ugly duckling came to our table.

Her: "I am so glad you are back so we will finish what we started seeming your so-called mom wanted to fight your battles."

Gail: "I w....."

I held her hand as she was about to stand and reply to her crap.

Lara: "Whatever makes you happy. I do not have time to fight with you. You wanted to dismantle my face because when you look at the mirror you find this ugly duckling male face looking at you. I look at myself and don't feel my weakness because I am not tough like you. I see a beautiful woman whose life was changed because of some decisions she made. I don't feel sorry for myself anymore because what will change my destiny if I feel sorry? Nothing. Nothing will ever change so instead of being mean to the world I choose to be happy and use my mind

because God gave me that. You can use your powers for good to take care of yourself or to play some sport. You look at me

and hate me for nothing but I don't hate you for what you did I just know it was bound to happen but it will never happen again because if it does then I will know that your head is too thick to take some good advice and you will never change. If it makes you happy then continue bullying others and very soon the ugly duckling squad will dwindle because not everyone loves violence like you. I do not know what brought you here and you do not know what brought me here. Circumstances brought us together so let us stay out of each other's lives if possible and make this living hole a better home."

God, I did not know where that came from. It was as if when I opened my mouth the words just came out. I heard people clapping their hands; that is when I realised that they were all listening.

Gail: "I thought you need my protection but damn that mouth of your will surely protect you. Welcome to your new home Goldie."

Lara: "Thank you, mom."

She had tears in her eyes; I did it to make her realise that in her I did belong.

Gail: "You just made my day. No one has called me mom in....in forever man."

She hugged me. The ugly duckling family just went to their table without a word. When we were done we had to clean the dining hall while some washed some dishes.

Lara: "So there is something I have been meaning to ask you."

We were heading to our cell.

Gail: "As long as you won't ask me to rob a bank or break you out of prison."

I just laughed, sometimes her thinking was weird really.

Moo: "You want to break away just after two minutes you got here?"

We both turned and found Moo looking at us. She was not as bad as I initially thought she would be.

Gail: "People's conversations were never your concern what changed?"

Moo: "Do not even think about it. Look little girl, I love that you stood up for that bully welcome to the world of the living. I underestimated you when you were busy on a pee spree."

I just laughed covering my face. I was really embarrassed.

Gail: "I underestimated her too."

Lara: "I was shaking when I said those things. I even wanted to pee."

They both laughed at me as Moo left us going to check whatever she was checking. When we got to our cell I sat on the bottom bed.

Lara: "Do you have a library here?"

Gail: "Yes; we are even forced to go there one day a week but I set my foot there once since I got here 20 years ago."

Lara: "What?"

Gail: "This is my home; I told you. My first time was 20 years ago then from then I have been in and out of this place."

Lara: "So are there computers there?"

Gail: "You are asking the wrong person but I bet they are because I always hear some people saying they prefer to email their families than call. I wouldn't know because I am a fossil."

I just laughed this woman was something else.

Lara: "I will teach you how to use it then."

Gail: "You haven't heard about teaching an old horse something; something and taking the dog to the river to drink water."

I have never laughed like that in my entire life.

Lara: "It's teaching an old dog new tricks and taking a horse to the river but you cannot force it to drink."

Gail: "Yes I was saying that you see."

I just laughed and looked at her she was even serious.

Lara: "Okay enough about horses and dogs. Now back to my point. I want to study the law not study but I need to know how I can prove my innocence I know it can be a long shot but I am willing to try. Even if it takes years I want to see how I can get someone even my little brother, aunt, and Mlulami's sister to believe me."

Gail: "What happened?"

Lara: "I will tell you everything but I need you to tell me that you believe me when I say I never killed someone."

Gail: "Hello you are talking to me I saw it the first day. No killer can pee on her pants as you do."

I didn't feel offended I just laughed at my stupidity.

Lara: "Okay; okay; I am embarrassed enough so mentioning it will make me worse."

Gail: "Okay then let's hear what you have in mind."

Lara: "I have several ideas but all will be put to action if I have internet."

Gail: "Okay so I will have to be a regular there?"

Lara: "Yes but because you know a lot and I will need your help and guidance."

Gail: "Let's do this ish."

She said bringing her fist. I just fist-bumped and laughed. My life was begging and my old life was going to be buried.....

4

Bukhosi

Polly: "You forgot that your wife is full of drama."

We laughed when mom let go of me and looked at them.

Mom: "I am happy because my son decided to listen to me for once."

Dad: "What did he do?"

Bukho: "I am taking on the documentary so that's why mom is happy; even though I do not know why she would want me to take on it."

Polly: “Do not worry trust her judgment and this will uplift your career I am sure of that.”

Dad: “Thank you son for doing this. Your mom has been miserable since then.”

Bukho: “She was just being a drama queen.”

Polly: “For a reason and I can’t wait for you to get an award for the best documentary in Africa.”

I just thought about what he was saying and felt a rush in my body. I was finally getting my chance to make history. I was my mom’s son after all.

Mom: “Food will be ready soon.”

We left her there and I followed the rest to the lounge. Lolo was done bathing busy talking none stop.

“Today it’s going to rain cats and dogs. I think my inner person is more reliable now than before. I knew something was drawing me home.”

Lolo: “Mommy, when did you arrive?”

We all turned and I looked at my sister. Her pilot uniform looked good on her and I wondered why she was still not taken.

Bukho: “This uniform looks good on you. I wonder why you are still single.”

Polly: "I have been asking the same question myself."

She blushed going to uncle Polly and dad then gave them hugs simultaneously.

Beli: "I am waiting for Lolo to grow up. You see he took longer to adjust to his dad and his stepmom and sisters. What about you? When are we paying the bride price? Oh, I forgot you never had a girlfriend."

We laughed

Bukho: "Who said that I am single?"

Mom: "You better bring that girl home because I don't want nameless girls here coming to fight for you."

Bukho: "Never; I promise just after the documentary I will make sure I bring her. For now, I do not want to divide my time.

Dad: "Excuses and excuses. I bet you don't even know how to pursue one."

We laughed

Mom: "Belinda you are right on time for dinner."

Lolo: "Mommy what did you bring for me?"

There we go again. We all laughed because he was spoilt in that department. He always wanted something when the mother came back home and she always provided.

Polly: "I think you have to work and get your things."

Lolo: "I am working ask her. I clean my room and take care of the flower bed. I am washing dishes three times a day."

Mom: "Then you deserve to get a payment my boy."

Bukho: "I still say you are spoilt because you have a room full of toys that you never use."

Beli: "Wait till you have your child. Mom what did you cook before I kill your child here."

Mom: "No fighting in my house. What will Lolo do when you are fighting in front of him?"

Lolo: "I will take a video and post it online so that people will see that I have a crazy mother and the craziest uncle."

We laughed going to the dining table. We started in the kitchen because mom still thought bringing water to the dining table to wash our hands was being lazy.

Bukho: "So you will be flying domestic flights till you leave?"

We were washing dishes with her. From there we were going to drive Uncle Polly to the airport.

Beli: "Yes I am. Do you think I made the right choice to let Lolo chose the place for us to stay?"

Bukho: "Do you love your son?"

Beli: "More than anything in the world."

Bukho: "Do you love the place he chose for you two?"

Beli: "I wouldn't have chosen the better place myself."

Bukho: "There you have your answer. Look at our parents how much they sacrificed for us. I think once you have a child your choices have to come second. You did well with Lolo and I wouldn't have asked for a better mother for him."

Beli: "I will be visiting only twice a year and mom with not be happy."

Bukho: "I am not even in Egypt but how many times do I visit my parents? It's not about the distance as long as you call always and keep in touch. You see mom and dad are not even worried about your move because they know there will come a time when kids make their own decisions and live their lives."

"He is right; princess. You will always be my little princess but I have to let go at a certain stage. I am happy with your decision and I am not going to let you feel guilty about it."

It was dad standing at the door. Belinda had tears in her eyes she just went to him and they hugged.

Beli: "Thank you; daddy."

Dad: "Anything for my little girl."

Beli: "Come on dad I am a mother now."

Dad: "You will always be my little girl to me even if you find a husband and have 20 kids."

We laughed as he left going to the lounge. We finished then went to the airport. We took two cars. Uncle Polly was the best because he knew how to open my eyes always.

When I got home I felt lonely. I tried calling again and the same thing. The phone was on voicemail I just bathed and went to bed.

In the morning I was mentally planning my diary to make sure I will manage the documentary. I arrived at my office and my secretary got in. She was competent she never missed a deadline.

Bukho: "Morning Mrs. Ngobeni how was your night."

Her: "I am not complaining

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sir. The family is keeping me busy so I am good to go."

Bukho: "That is good. I hope the emails arrived did you reply to them."

Her: "Sorry sir no emails so far."

Bukho: "Didn't my mom sent emails?"

Her: "No sir I would have seen them."

Bukho: "Maybe she forgot; I will call her right now. For now please make sure that my diary is free as from next week."

Her: "It is not possible because we need to finish the series you started last year."

Bukho: "Let me call my mom then we will take it from there. I will work overtime if need be."

Her: "Okay sir I will be working on your diary in the meantime. Your coffee is ready."

Bukho: "Thank you very much what am I going to do without you?"

She smiled and excused herself I dialed my mom's number.

Mom: "Sorry I forgot yesterday I am on it just now."

She knew I wanted to talk about the emails I just laughed.

Bukho: "I was beginning to think you changed your mind."

Mom: “No I was just busy with a few things even in the morning now I am free; let me send them now.”

Bukho: “No problem then. I guess you had a good night's sleep.”

She laughed and dropped. I was not the one wrong I would have greeted her she was the one who went straight to the point. The emails came through immediately and I went straight to them. I just shook my head when I read the first one.

Bukho: “Mom you can't be serious.”

Mom: “Son most good stories come from weird places so who knows you might love it.”

Bukho: “I thought this documentary was going to change my life but now I doubt how is it going to do that.”

Mom: “Patience my son. Read all the emails and see if you will not like it.”

Bukho: “I will do mom.”

“Not.”

I said that after I dropped the call. I thought it was going to be an interesting documentary but I didn't know that it was going to be this kind of documentary. I logged out without finishing

with the rest of the emails. I was going to go back to them when I was comfortable or maybe not.

After two weeks I was wrapping up the series. I avoided mom at all costs but there was still that voice at the back of my mind that said I haven't done enough.

Mrs. Ngobeni entered my office before I knocked off on a particular Friday afternoon.

Her: "Sir, do we still reply to the emails your mother sent?"

I almost cursed but waited for her to finish.

Bukho: "What do you think?"

Her: "I take it you didn't read all the emails."

I tell you I was really curious.

Bukho: "Can I please go over them on Monday and come back to you."

Her: "I will be happy if you do. Happy Sabbath and have a blessed weekend"

Bukho: "Same to you and take care of your husband and kids."

She left and I just closed my eyes thinking of the emails. I was thinking about the way the emails affected others not me. I looked at my watch and it was just two hours before

the Sabbath began. I opened my emails. When I started reading them and I wished I had not they were vague.

I couldn't even have a peaceful weekend like I always had because of the emails. My mom had never pressured me to follow up but after reading the emails I was forced to call her.

Mom: "Bukho how are you, my boy?"

Bukho: "I am good; mom. Please explain to about those emails."

Mom: "I sent you to school my boy and I bet you know what they entail."

Bukho: "Mom come on."

Mom: "I love you son but not too much. I am not going to spoon-feed you at your age."

Bukho: "Mom; those emails are vague."

Mom: "Hence the need to follow up. I love you and bye I am enjoying my weekend with the love of my life."

She just dropped the phone like that.

Monday finally came and it seemed like a lifetime. I told my secretary to book an appointment for me. when I got there I had to check in every point. I regretted going there but I had to be patient. Finally, I got to my appointment desk. When I

turned to her approaching I wanted to go back. She was not what I expected.

Her: "You wanted me."

Bukho: "Yes you are the one who wrote to us."

Her: "Yes I wrote to your mom not you. Who the hell are you? I do not want some amateur or wanna-be director handling my delicate story."

Bukho: "Hay you are the one who...."

Her: "Look Mr cheese boy tell your mother not to send her spoilt son to handle this. I want someone better mature and professional."

She just stood up and left me with my mouth hanging. What just happened? She was just rude for someone that tiny and for someone who was at her position..

5

Lara (Bonolo)

The following day we went to the library. It had old computers my heart sank.

Lara: "Are these even working?"

Gail: "You are asking the wrong person."

We both laughed; she was right I was asking the wrong person.

Lara: "Let us try then."

Gail: "Do fossils like I need to be near the computer? You know it can malfunction just because I am next to it."

Well did I laugh? Hell yeah, I almost had hiccups because of the comment.

Lara: "They will see me and forgive you."

Gail: "Okay let us see what you are up to. I still don't know how this will prove your innocence."

Lara: "I do not have a real strategy yet but I am thinking of a few think. Woooowww."

Gail: "What is it?"

Lara: "The internet is very fast you wouldn't even tell the computers are outdated. I think the ram is also not carrying a heavy load as there are a few things in the hard drive."

Gail: "I only heard the first part the rest it was like those Chinese people from Chinese movies talking their foreign language."

Lara: "At least you heard the first part. Well, I am going to start by sending a video to YouTube. Maybe if someone sees it they will help me fight my case. I will also send it to my Facebook account."

Gail: "What are those that you are talking about?"

Lara: "Are you telling me that you have been here for that long?"

Gail: "The first time I got here there were only landlines then when I got out there were those Nokia 3310 and I couldn't even answer the call the whole day the frustration I had I smashed it on the wall. So yeah that's how technologically advanced I am."

Lara: "Why don't we go on a colonising Gail spree?"

She just laughed.

Gail: "As long as it is you then I will agree but if you become difficult then I will go on a di-colonising Lara spree."

We laughed

Lara: "Not funny. Okay, let me start with Facebook. This is my account and the platform is like this."

I explained to her. At least before our time was up I had managed to explain a few concepts.

Gail: "My adrenaline is pumping I can't even stop thinking about the things you taught me."

We were heading to the cell after our time was up. I managed to send a video that was short and precise. I was emotional in it and hopeful that someone was going to see it.

Lara: "I know the feeling. I felt the same way when I got called for my job just after college without experience. I was even planning my future then boom I am in jail for murder."

I was emotional, even though I had gained some confidence about myself there were those moments where I felt like giving up. I was slowly getting depressed.

Gail: "I know from the few days I have spent with you that you are one smart lady and you will find a way out with no time. I do not know why but I know it in my blood that you will be out before the year-end."

Lara: "You do not know how these words make me feel. I know I lose hope some days but I will hold onto the fact that I have you to believe in me."

Gail: "Do you know I have stopped dreaming the moment they sentenced me to life; here. When I see you I see your dreams coming true. It might not be now but I know with good behaviour you will be out of here with no time. Once

you get out do not even think of coming back here because I will kill you myself and get a double life sentence.”

We both laughed but I knew she was not playing. I was never coming back to the place once I got the chance to leave.

Lara: “I will be a fool to come back and they will think I killed him.”

Gail: “Why did you ‘kill’ him in the first place?”

Lara: “I wish I did. The hell he put me through is worse than this place. I am empty because of him. I would have loved to kill him myself but I was too weak that’s why he preyed on me.”

Gail: “Can I wake him up and kill him myself.”

I just shook my head and laughed.

Lara: “I give you my blessing because there is nothing that will give me pleasure as long as I get to watch you doing it.”

Gail: “On a serious note now. Do you think your plan will work?”

Lara: “if I need to email the president I will do it without a blink to prove my innocence.”

Gail: “We are in this together and I will be with you every step of the way.”

We hugged.

*

The week dragged like a century I wished we could go to the library twice or thrice a week.

Gail: "Do not be sad at least today we will be going to the library and because there is some meeting we get two hours there."

Lara: "Really?!"

Gail: "yes and I will make sure you get the computer to yourself the whole time."

Lara: "Thank you very much."

To their word

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they confirmed that we will be spending two and a half hours instead of two.

Gail: "Your ancestors are with you."

They were not with me at all because the comments I received from the videos were negative more than positive. The first one to comment on was his brother the pig. His sister sent an inbox

telling me not to expose myself again. Her message was confusing I didn't get her mood behind it. I just bowed my head and cried.

Gail: "Hay what is going on?"

Lara: "Look at these comments, people are so mean."

Gail: "Let me see."

I moved aside as she read. What pained me was that most of the first bad comments were from people I knew and I just felt like sinking. I was thinking of a way out.

Gail: "This was the first plan we said if the first plan doesn't work then we will go to the next the next the next and the next."

Lara: "I feel like....."

Gail: "No one has time for your feelings Lara Bonolo Rhodes."

Okay, that was the first she said all my names. I looked at her and she was not blinking. I shut my mouth before I could say what I wanted to say.

Gail: "No one said they will believe you in the first attempt. If the judge; who is educated to do what he went to school for couldn't believe you then who are those people to believe you in the first place. You need to toughen up and expect the expected. We will try everything in our power to prove your

innocence. I might want you here with me all the times but it would be unfair on you as you are innocent.”

Lara: “thank you very much I think you are right.”

Gail: “Do not think, I know I am right. Now, what is our next step?”

I was happy that she said ‘our’ she was involved too.

Lara: “I want to close my Facebook account because there are people who are mean and have negative energy if I let it on they will slow my progress.”

Gail: “How are you going to communicate with others?”

Lara: “I will change the names only and accept people I want to be my friends only. I will tell those few people not to say any personal stuff about me.”

Gail: “okay.”

When I was closing my page I saw a small video about some girl who made her documentary. I looked up for production companies in the meantime; maybe it was going to work. I emailed one that seemed like the well-known ones. It was going to have an added advantage in my case. I explained to Gail what I did.

Gail: "You are really intelligent I was never going to think of that."

Lara: "I hope it works."

Gail: "It will definitely work."

Weeks passed without an answer and I had given hope. I was hurt and frustrated mainly because I was running out of ideas.

Gail: "Do not worry all will be well."

Lara: "I am losing hope with every day passing. I feel like I belong here the more I feel at home and the more I become those mean ugly ducklings."

Gail: "I see you want me to turn against you for you to take this thing seriously."

Lara: "No I am so sorry I will never....."

Moo: "Lara, you have a visitor."

Lara: "What? Me?"

Moo: "How many Laras are in this cell."

Lara: "Who could it be?"

Gail: "Maybe your little brother and aunt."

Lara: "But I asked them not to come again till I know I have good news for them."

Moo: "Let's go."

I followed her wondering and frustrated. I never received any visitors and I never wanted to but then I had to. When I approached I got more confused and frustrated. He turned and I lost my sense of belonging. I was suddenly overwhelmed. He looked so clean and good. Those lips were so juicy I could think of so many things to do to them. He looked a few years older than me maybe around 28 or less but older than me. he cleaned up so well you could swear he was betting for the other team. I mentally slapped myself because I was behind bars because of someone like him. That's why he had so many girlfriends because of his looks.

I was boiling when I approached him. He smiled and showed his beautiful teeth. My temperature boiled to the maximum.

Lara: "You wanted me."

Him: "Yes you are the one who wrote to us."

Lara: "Yes I wrote to your mom not you. Who the hell are you? I do not want some amateur or wanna-be director handling my delicate story."

Him: "Hay you are the one who...."

Lara: "Look Mr cheese boy tell your mother not to send her spoilt son to handle this. I want someone better mature and professional."

I turned furiously going to my cell.

"Open up please."

The male guard opened he didn't even ask me because I was fuming.

Gail: "So how did it go?"

Lara: "I swear to God these people want me to go to hell-jail."

She laughed but realised that I was serious and my veins were popping.

Gail: "Hay what happened?"

I told her everything.

Gail: "So you are going to punish him for Mlulami's sins?"

Lara: "I am not punishing him. I asked for a Portia Smith or he has a female name."

Gail: "What if he is the manager sent by her to talk to you? We have waited for almost a month for them to respond they finally do and you blow your chances."

Lara: "He is a cheese boy and I bet he will come back because of a bruised ego."

Gail: "What is he doesn't come back?"

Lara: "Then I will stay here and try another company."

Gail: "Lara; I get it that you are wrongfully accused and you are frustrated but learn to control your temper."

Lara: "Yes mom dearest."

Gail: "I will slap that attitude out of you now."

Somehow I felt bad. I sincerely apologised praying that the cheese boy changes his mind.....

6

Bukhosi

I watched as she left me with my mouth on the floor.

"What just happened?"

I even said it out aloud. It was my first time to see a disrespectful person. I was never disrespected that way. Why did I even bother going there? The other part of me was curious about her story. I just clicked my tongue and left. What a waste of my time and energy. I was cursing all the way to my

car. I was done, if mom wanted to do the documentary herself she was free to do it. I called my secretary on my way home because I was never going to the office as crushed as I was.

Her: "Good morning Mr. Radebe."

Even though I complained to her about addressing me like that she never stopped. She was the same age as Busi so she was old to be calling me sir.

Her: "Is your meeting done already?"

Bukho: "Morning; I wasted my time going there I am never going there again."

Her: "What happened?"

Bukho: "You don't want to know and I don't even want to go to that topic again."

Her: "Was it that bad?"

Bukho: "Bad is an injustice to the word; what I can tell you is; I will never go there again."

Her: "But....."

Bukho: "No but. I called to tell you that I will be working at home today I will come tomorrow. Please move all my meetings tomorrow."

Her: "You have lunch with your father. You didn't forget that right."

Bukho: "Shiz niz."

Her: "I take it you forgot."

Bukho: "Can I postpone?"

Her: "Not a chance he called in the morning just when you left to confirm the time and place. I even forwarded it to your reminder."

Bukho: "This girl messed me up."

Her: "Or so she is beautiful."

Bukho: "I do not have a comment about that so see you tomorrow."

She laughed and I just dropped the call.

"Aaahhhhhh."

I screamed hitting the steering wheel. Why was I that mad anyway? Was she really beautiful? Who was I kidding she looked sexy on that orange overall. I bet if the orange was not her favourite colour she was supposed to change. What? No; she had a stinking attitude and not that good looking.

When I got home I couldn't work I just slept. Before I slept I tried her number for the millionth time and it was on voicemail.

“Listen here; I do not have time for your games. I am done following you around. I even passed by your place in the morning they said you left early. If you don’t get to me as soon as possible don’t even bother calling me again. Idiot!”

I wish I could delete that message I was angry and I didn’t mean it. I just screamed at my pillow and slept. I was awakened by my alarm I freshened up and went for lunch.

Dad: “You look terrible.”

Bukho: “I feel worse than I look.”

Dad: “Woman trouble.”

Bukho: “Kind of. The documentary that mom wants me to do is a no, no.”

Dad: “What do you mean?”

I told him everything and instead of sympathising with me he just laughed.

Dad: “Do not be intimidated by a girl.”

Bukho: “I am not intimidated. I just do not feel like doing it because she was rude I didn’t even get the chance to introduce myself.”

Dad: “We did raise cowards did we?”

Bukho: "Dad, I....."

Dad: "You don't even know her story but people in prison are bitter son. No one knows why she did what she did but she will tell you with time. She is like that maybe because of something or someone so the possibilities are high that you or the next person will pay for that. She expected a Portia maybe because she was abused so to talk to a woman will help her. Try to email her and see if you can get an answer."

I thought carefully. My heart was not even there.

Bukho: "I hear you but I am not going to take her attitude. She is too big for her boots and come to think of it; she is even so tiny you will swear she is 10."

He just laughed at me.

Bukho: "What?"

Dad: "Nothing my son. If you are not comfortable assign someone who will go there. Preferable a female because if she said she wanted a Portia then she would want a female."

Bukho: "I was thinking of cancelling it altogether."

Dad: "Are you mad? Do you have a death wish?"

Bukho: "Mom will understand."

Dad: "She will never understand I know that. She never canceled any task when she was taking care of the business do not disappoint her. The reason she entrusted you with her company was the fact that you will take it further not down. She worked hard for this company you know the history. She is on top now, so do not be the reason the company goes down. You know this industry once you are on top you have to keep on if you fall there is no way you can get up again. When you get down things change it will be difficult for your mom you revive it. You won't even manage to revive it. One bad word from the media and the name goes down the drain. The media can build you or break you; son. You see that's why your mom was never a media person. She only allowed interviews that will build her brand only."

What dad said was an eye-opener to me. I was going to ask someone to handle her if she didn't want me to.

Bukho: "I will think about it, dad. The last thing I would like to do is take down my mom's company and I joined her because I knew I could change it for the better. She has faith in me so I wouldn't dream about disappointing her."

Dad: "Yes that is how we raised you. Now you need to just trust yourself. Whatever decision you make I will support you. Please do me one favour."

Bukho: "I am all ears."

Dad: "Please do not tell your mom about all this. She will think you are too weak for the job that's why she needs to know that you are handling it."

Bukho: "I will never. I won't even mention it to any of my siblings."

Dad: "That is settled then. So tell me when are we meeting the potential daughter in law?"

I just laughed because I knew it was going to come up sooner or later.

Bukho: "Dad, come on."

Dad: "Do not be like me son. Do you know your mother was the only woman I loved dearly? I watched someone take her just under my nose."

We laughed because I knew he always told me that.

Bukho: "You are trying to make me open up?"

Dad: "No, I am just saying. Portia was the love of my life the first day I met her. Our first date together was the best I still have the picture."

Bukho: "Although you were not even dating then?"

Dad: "To me

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that was the beginning of our love journey and I will never change a thing because if I do I will not have you as my last born.”

Bukho: “Who knows maybe mom would have had me because sometimes doctors are not God.”

Dad: “Let us not go to the past because it is depressing as long as I have my family.”

Bukho: “You are right. Are we going to Limpopo again for the birthday? I miss that place.”

He laughed looking at me, more like fishing.

Bukho: “Do not look at me like that. I am not going to go after that girl; dad; she is going to get married next year.”

We laughed because there was a girl who followed me when we celebrated the twins’ birthday. She was beautiful but not

my type she was too forward. I would have been the woman in the relationship.

Dad: “She was even calling me her father in law.”

Bukho: “Wani was pissed Bran just laughed.”

Dad: “I feel sorry for her father in law and husband.”

We laughed. At least he cheered me up I even went to finish some editing at the studio. Nothing was going to put me down because I loved my job.

Editor: "Do you know that this series will be done before the stipulated time?"

Bukho: "All thanks to you. I think you will have to take a holiday."

Editor: "I will do it when we are done."

Bukho: "That's what you said last season and last season."

She just laughed.

Editor: "I am serious this time around I need rest. I will sign the leave forms to prove it."

Bukho: "That will make me happy."

Editor: "Thank you, sir."

I felt odd when older people said that. I just nodded and left with the final edited version to assess it at home. I was happy with the previous season but the current one then was going to be the best. I edited till late at night. Before I retired I just checked my emails and felt the edge to email, Miss Rude. That was her name from then on. I think I deleted a number of them

before I wrote the final one. I was not going to spare her feeling as she didn't spare mine.

From: bukhosi.r@pspublications.ca.za

Reply to: Bukhosi.r@pspublications.ca.za

To: larbizz@gmail.com

Date: April 8, 20...

Miss Rude

I do not know what you want from us but no one will deal with you except me. if you still want us to help you then you can email the reply to me, not Mrs. P.

I just hope the next time we meet you would have found your manners somewhere in the corners of your cell.

Regards

Bukhosi Radebe.

I sent without even blinking I was tired of rude people. After that, I tried her number for the last time. I was done.

"I am sending this last message please do not be angry when you hear my previous messages just know I am not mad at you I just wished you could have told me what is happening. Take care of yourself."

After the message, I just blocked the number and deleted it. I even cleared my call log so that I was not tempted to do that again.

The week that followed was hectic. I was finalising the series and starting on a short film. I was hardly in my office I was in the studio mostly or in field for the short movie. I got home very late and did not have time for myself. I wondered how my mom juggled with work and family “When last did you go to the office?” I looked at the editor. Bukho: “I will go tomorrow.”

Editor: “Your secretary left a message by the front desk she was heading home there is an emergency. I think she won’t come tomorrow.” Bukho: “I will.”

After work, I passed by the front desk when I saw the message I knew it was just going to change my life forever.....

7

Lara (Bonolo)

When I woke up the following day I was not feeling well emotional.

Gail: “What’s up with you?”

Lara: "This whole thing messed up my life. I was this quiet girl who is just the girl next door without any worry in the world. Then my mom decided to control all our lives and that was the end of my childhood as I knew it. Dad didn't have any powers to fight her. I was never a bitter person until one day I found....."

I started crying because the day was going to be always imprinted in my mind.

Gail: "Come here."

She gave me a warm hug. I felt at home in her arms.

Lara: "I do not want a male personel handling this because I feel like he will be biased and take Mlulami's side. There were so many production companies but I chose that one because of Portia."

Gail: "I get where you are coming from but beggars are not choosers my dear."

Lara: "I wish the bitterness can go away."

Gail: "You were just falsely convicted recently so the resentment won't go away just like that."

Lara: "I was not like that and I wish to go back to the way my dad raised me."

Gail: "There is no manual on how a person should react in stressful situations. I bet I will be talking to you in a few years and you won't even remember how bitter you were."

Lara: "Do you know the guy who came looked so clean and charming like him and I just felt like boiling and I lost it. If it were a woman I think was going to be better."

Gail: "Do not worry we will be going to the library in three days then you will email them and apologise while at it you have to ask for a second chance."

Lara: "I doubt they will give me a second chance. Even though I feel like I need a different approach may be that was not my time."

Gail: "Hell no; I am not going to let you give up just like that. Why will I let you rot here? If I need to pull you with your ears I will do it. I now know how to email; I will email them myself."

I just laughed, why did I teach her again; now she was going to use it against me all the times.

Lara: "Okay I will never give up. Will I be okay though?"

Gail: "If we knew our future will we be here?"

Lara: "I would have killed Mlulami myself."

We laughed. The following two days we had a tournament I loved watching sports although I was not sporty. It was fun to watch. That was the only time we could sit in unison without fights. The scene looked so real as if life was good and there was nothing that mattered in the world except for the moment.

Gail: "These things make me mooched that is why I do not attend you are the one who forced me."

I just laughed.

Lara: "What will you be doing when others are doing mooched stuff?"

Gail: "Kitchen duty."

Lara: "All those years?"

Gail: "Do not let me release my beast because of your questioning I am not ready to go to jail."

I couldn't help it but laugh. She was in jail hellooooo.

Lara: "Yes mommy."

Gail: "Do you think you will be able to play sport also?"

Lara: "As in me?"

Gail: "Who am I talking to?"

Lara: "I can't even dunk a slap how will I hold a ball or hit it?"

Gail: "Everything needs determination. You can stop thinking much and sports can do that to you. Lara, you are still young to give up on life and some adventures. There is no harm in trying new things is there?"

I was quiet for some time thinking. She was right there was no harm in trying but I had something in mind besides sports.

Lara: "Can I write a book about life here."

Gail: "I think it will be cool but what will be the production company doing?"

Lara: "A documentary about my innocence."

Gail: "As long as I am not in the book I will support you."

Lara "But I was thinking to go that route. I wanted to write about your story too. I have different angles and you won't tell it is your story."

Gail: "I am still young to die in jail, my girl."

Lara: "Who is the chicken now?"

Gail: "Like daughter like mother."

Lara: "Well its the other way around."

Gail: "Whatever it's not happening Lara."

Lara: "Yes mam."

On that particular day, I didn't sleep much because the following day I was going to check my emails. The most exhilarating thing was even Gail didn't want with her story I was going to write my story and my life behind bars.

Gail: "You are better these days. Today you are even extra h....wait a minute why are happy today?"

Lara: "We are going to the library and my fate will be decided today."

Gail: "Oh."

Lara: "You seem not happy about it why?"

Gail: "Are you going to write about me?"

I laughed.

Lara: "No silly, I respect your privacy and I will never do that without your permission. I am happy because even if they won't reply to my email I will start typing my story."

Gail: "I know they replied."

Lara: "How do you know if I may ask?"

Gail: "Just like me I think they are curious to know your story."

Lara: "Really?"

Gail: "Really I have a feeling I will be featuring there in the documentary and all."

I just laughed at her excitement she was like a child given candy.

Lara: "Do you realise that even if the documentary is about my life the people who will act it out on my behalf for it to look real."

Gail: "Not fair

I thought I would just appear there and be a staring who will become a celebrity convict."

I was even rolling on the bed with laughter. Gail was heaven sent she was going to make my stay enjoyable.

Lara: "Do not worry I will talk to them so that they feature you more than me on the documentary."

We went for breakfast then cleaned. I hated it more than the dishes. I loved washing dishes but hay we didn't have a choice at all.

*

"They replied to my email."

I said excitement engulfing me. I even had tears of joy but wait a minute is the cheese boy coming again?

Gail: "Let us read then. She read it first and laughed at me.

Lara: "What is going on?"

Gail: "Listen to this, 'I just hope the next time we meet you would have found your manners somewhere in the corners of your cell.' He has a weird sense of humour. He is not a bad person."

Lara: "So was Mlulami."

Gail: "Mlulami this Mlulami that. Just stop giving the dead guy some credit. He didn't give some ish about you that's why you are here not out there. Wake up girly and smell the coffee the world does not owe you anything that's why they found you guilty and you are here and Nyunyami is having a laugh with some sluts in hell."

I just wanted to laugh but she was right. Why was I giving this guy power over me? I needed to move on.

Lara: "I am sorry I will start to think positive now."

Gail: "You better."

I replied to the email then went to other social media platforms. I was polite in my reply although I was hurt by his blunt reply. Before I could go further with my comments on Facebook there was an email alert. Gail was busy with a book and it was the first. I reluctantly opened it.

“I hope I won’t have to fight with you this time around because I am not going to tolerate any rudeness from people. It’s all up to you. I will be having a meeting with you end of the week so you better shave that attitude far away.”

That was the part that made me laugh.

Lara: “He replied again.”

Gail: “So how does it work?”

Lara: “Maybe he is online. If he is online he can see my emails immediately.”

Gail: “That’s nice. I wish I had someone to talk to.”

Lara: “When I get out of here I will be online the same time with you so that we chat.”

Gail: “That’s the positivity I needed. I need to kiss that boy for the emails now you think like a human being.”

We laughed and I finished what I was doing. I had replied to his email but he never replied. Anyway, I was happy with the results. The week ended and he never came. I felt hurt but was surprised on Sunday when I was called for my visitor. Sundays were family times and I wondered who it was only to be met by Mr. Cheese Boy.

Lara: "Ah!"

Him: "I couldn't make it on Thursday but I thought it best to do the introductions today and start on Tuesday. I asked for Tuesday and Thursdays to make sure we finish this early."

Lara: "Don't you have a family."

Him: "Well Miss Rude I have better things to do so can we do this? I was also forced by my mother to take this documentary but you don't see me taking out on you."

So he is a mama's boy.

Lara: "Let's get over with this I need my weekend to rest."

Him: "Well I am the one who has a life here because you are always within these walls. So cut the crap and spare me."

Lara: "Well being rude doesn't suite you cheese boy."

Him: "And it suits you well because you look good Miss Rude."

I was boiling I just looked at him. Why was this man making me so angry? He was looking good on his casual clothes with a matching cap. Aren't men supposed to remove them in the house?

Him: "Stop staring at me as if you want to murder me because you will end up doing it."

Lara: "So because they said I am a murderer and you think I will do the same to you."

Him: "A..... okay now here is how this is going to work? I am Bukhosi Radebe the last born of the family. I took over from my mom so whatever you want to be done I am going to do it. If I don't see value in your story then I will not run with it."

I felt goosebumps because there was a possibility that he was not going to do the story.

Lara: "I...I al..ready introduced myself."

He looked at me with a smirk on his face. I wished the earth to open up and swallow me. I wished I had never asked for their help.

Bukhosi: "Well Miss Rude now that we have introduced each other will it be fine is I bring a recorder or camera to do this?"

Lara: "Will that be allowed?"

Bukhosi: "This is my job to worry. I want your consent."

Lara: "Okay, I guess."

Bukhosi: "I brought the consent form with me, please read and sign."

I was shaking I read which was not hectic because it was stating terms and conditions. I signed with my heart palpating, my hands shaking but with the hope of a promising future.....

8

Bukhosi

I am not someone who loves to intrude on people's privacy but I felt like I wanted to know more about Miss Rude. Beside her rudeness, I believed she was innocent. I didn't know how to explain it but my gut convinced my brain that she was innocent.

I was yet to find out. I had Monday to prepare the types of equipment or any other questions for her. When I got home I scanned and emailed the consent form to the lawyer. She needed to officialise it before we did anything. She also needed to finalise the contract and conditions of the documentation with the prison warden. It was not easy because there were so many legal steps to be taken.

“So you would prefer new equipment?”

It was the lawyer the following day.

Bukho: “Yes I prefer that because they will have to scrutinise it every time we go for a shooting. So I made the terms convenient in a way that this equipment will be left there. I will only take out the memory card for editing.”

Her: “It makes sense. I will finalise the contract you will have to go through it thoroughly; then have it signed and scanned and

emailed before you start with this documentary. We do not want loopholes that will land you in jail too.”

We both laughed.

Bukho: “I will do that before we even begin. We start shooting tomorrow; more like I will be interviewing her tomorrow.”

Her: “Just; don’t use the equipment tomorrow make it an introduction.”

Bukho: “Noted commander.”

I was glad there was not much work to be done. My secretary was done with the questions and I was ready. I was too nervous because the first thing was that it was going to be my first project that will require my full concentration. It was going to prove to me that I was capable of doing this on my own. The

second reason was Miss Rude who was going to give me trouble. Signing the contract meant I had to see the project through and I was nervous about working with the rude lady.

I knocked off early on a Monday because I had not rested well the previous day. I had switched off my phone because I knew someone was going to disturb my rest.

The following day I was well-rested I was early because I wanted the driver to help me before he went on set.

Driver: "What time should I pick you up sir?"

Bukho: "Do not worry yourself the equipment was bought specifically for this project so we will collect it after the whole documentary is over."

Driver: "All of it?"

I felt like a school kid being asked impossible questions by his teacher. Was I that too much when it came to this documentary? I pushed it aside.

Bukho: "Is there a problem with the equipment?"

Driver: "No sir not at all."

I felt so bad because he sounded dismissive. I was just hoping that it was going to be a success or else I would have wasted company money for nothing.

Matron: "Sir I hope you will be able to cover more ground in one session because they wanted me to give you only 45mins but I fought for an hour for you."

Bukho: "That is better than nothing. I will make sure I cover more grounds and edit faster so that we won't take much time."

Matron: "I hope for your sake this young lady is not taking you for a ride because this is the first documentary to be shot at this prison and if it doesn't work it might be the last."

Bukho: "I am also praying it will be a good one."

Although I was not convinced at heart I put a convincing front with the matron. He was a good and reasonable guy. After scanning the documents to the lawyer we had to wait for a few minutes then her reply came through.

Matron: "We can go and start now. I think I will have to inform all the staff members just in case you come when I am off one of the days."

Bukho: "I will highly appreciate that sir."

When we got to the place we will use the guards were already there he talked to them then excused himself. They helped me to set up and she was then called.

Her: "Why are you late?"

You see, if I couldn't strangle her before the end of the documentary then I would deem myself a calm person. I just wanted to remove the rudeness out of her."

Bukho: "You don't even greet me then you jump the gun without even asking politely why I came at this time."

Her: "I do not have time....."

Bukho: "Listen here Miss Rude I won't waste my time on petty issues with you. If you don't want me in your hair just tell me now. To answer your questions even if you didn't ask politely. I am fine thank you and how are you? I came late because I was

waiting for the lawyer to finish filling the contract. I was then given time to set up the equipment from then I was told I can only have an hour for this visit. So if you don't mind stop being petty and sit down because already you have wasted a few minutes of the little time we are given."

Her: "I am sorry I...."

Bukho: "Save it; for someone who actually cares. I am here for my job. Now sit your stupid behind down so we can start."

She laughed at me I just shook my head.

Her: "Yes sir. So you know; the mean words don't suit you cheese boy and I am sorry we can begin now."

Bukho: “Thank you. Lara right or you prefer your other name?”

Lara: “Lara will be fine but any name that is comfortable for you cheese boy.”

I couldn't help it but laugh a little. This was going to be a hell of a bumpy ride. I needed to buckle up big time.

Lara: “I would love to tell you about my childhood but it is not necessary because I am here not because of my childhood but it all started on a fateful Tuesday morning when I was early for my second-year class.”

She looked aside and I just opened my mouth not sure of what to say. The camera was ready the recorder was more than ready and I was ready for action.

Lara: “I am always a late person I never take note of the time but that particular day I was early because my parent fought the previous night which led to that particular morning. I loved my dad and I hated it when mom treated him like trash. I left early without even eating breakfast taking my little brother with.

Zain: “Why are mom and dad always fighting? I wish to have a different mom. Zuki's mom is cooler than ours.”

Lara: “She is stressed all will be well.”

I was not even sure that all will be well but it pained me to see my brother and hear him say those things. I bought breakfast for him and left him at school before heading to my class. I thought I was late because my phone was off as I couldn't charge it from the storm the previous night which took our power out. That's why we heard all the mean words they exchanged because there was no electricity. When I got to the auditorium I just budged in and looked for a space to sit. In a haze

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I didn't even realise that the lecturer and students were different.

I sat down breathing heavily when I looked at the slide show and the students who were looking at me laughing I just wished the earth could open and swallow me. I didn't have the energy to go out I just sank and covered my face with my book. They were almost done so I just sat there and closed the world out."

She was smiling weirdly I wanted to laugh picturing Miss rude embarrassed there in the big auditorium. I didn't comment I looked at her as she continued.

Lara: "When they left I just cursed loudly without realising the lecturer was still standing there. Surely it was not my day because he was just a few steps away from me."

Him: "Bad day?"

Lara: "Yes sir but I will live."

Him: "I have those too sometimes. You can call me Mlulami, not sir."

Lara: "No sir you are a lecturer and it won't be appropriate."

Him: "Which hole did you crawl out from?"

I looked at him confused.

Him: "You are really serious about this. I am hurt to hear that you are the only one who doesn't know me."

Lara: "Are you kind of famous should I know you?"

I was embarrassed but I didn't want to show it.

Him: "I am not a lecturer I am a student so we do have classes to lecture sometimes as I am doing my Ph.D. here."

Okay, to say I was embarrassed would be an understatement.

Lara: "Sorry I didn't know....."

Him: "It's fine Lara I"

Lara: "What? You even know my name how is that possible."

Him: "Who would miss a fine lady like you? I always wonder why these small boys haven't made their move."

Lara: "Who told you that they haven't? They have but I am not interested."

Him: "Will you be interested in me though?"

He was so fine and out of my league. I was not going to go for him no matter what.

Him: "I will not stop even if you say I am not your type."

How did he know? Was he a psychic or what? I just looked at him without a proper answer for him.

Him: "I have been trying to get to talk to you for months now that I got the chance I am not going to let you go and that is a promise. Here is my number I have yours but I do not want to use it before you use mine."

He said writing it at the back of my book. I was speechless so I couldn't answer. Some students started coming in from my class. I was relieved. He took my hand kissed it at the back and said

"I will be waiting for your call my love."

Then he left. My friend came in smiling from ear to ear.

Simo: "So you and Mr. Charmer."

I found myself blushing.

Lara: "I didn't even know him. He was almost hurt that I don't know him."

Simo: "Which hole do you live in. No do not answer I know you are coming from a hole in the game park."

I laughed pinching her playfully.

Lara: "I am not like you."

Simo: "You are okay like that. I love your nerviness. It makes me the most appealing one. Do not change because I love you like

that. On a serious note; you are good like this and that's why you are my friend. You are down to earth and lovable."

Lara: "Thank you very much, even though I am coming from a hole in a game park."

Simo: "Opposites attract my darling. I wish to be you sometimes so no I will never have another friend than you."

Lara: "Thank you so tell me more about this guy."

Simo: "The lecturer is here but I can write a book about him."

I laughed and concentrated on the lesson although my mind was far. You know when they say curiosity killed a cat. I was drawn to him like a magnet I didn't even wait for Simo to tell me about him. I wish I had waited

She had cloudy eyes and I knew she was not going to carry on. My time was almost up so I wrapped up. It was like I was watching a movie unfolding I just wished her story didn't end....

9

Lara (Bonolo)

This was going to be an emotional journey. I just wiped my tears heading to my cell. I hoped he didn't see my tears because I didn't want to look vulnerable. That is what Mlulami fed on; my vulnerability.

“How did it go? Is he coming again? Did you change your attitude today?”

Gail attacked me with questions before they could even close the cell door.

Lara: “Okay I guess.”

Gail: “Just okay?”

Lara: “It reminded me of my dad. If he didn't leave me I guess I would have never dated that pig.”

Gail: “I am sorry but you have to remember the good times you shared. If you say that you know that dead people are

looking down at us. If he hears you saying that he will feel guilty and come back here.”

I just laughed because her skewed sense of humour always made my day.

Lara: “I guess you are right. He is coming on Thursday again. They gave him an hour per session.”

Gail: “That’s better than nothing I guess.”

Lara: “Yes, I feel like I will be able to tell my story now. I know it will be an emotional journey. Please be with me on this one because already emotions are killing me on the first day.”

Gail: “I am not going anywhere Goldie I am with you all the way.”

We hugged and I was relieved. I remembered Simo who was always there for me. I knew if she was not out of the country she was going to be there for me all the way. She was lucky that she got a scholarship to go and further her education in Australia.

The following day was library day. I was studying law online. I wanted to know more about my chances besides the documentary part.

Gail: “Your marks are back for the first test you took do you know that?”

Lara: "I am even scared to open them."

Gail: "Well I opened them for you and I might say you are clever. Now pass and get the hell out of here before you become like me your dummy mom."

I laughed looking at my results. I couldn't help it but love the results. Well coming to prison was not all bad at all. I submitted my assignment and finished up.

The following day I was eagerly waiting for Mr. Cheese boy. He usually brushed me the wrong way but this was my freedom we were talking about.

Lara: "Hello, how are you?"

Bukho: "You don't look rude today."

Lara: "Are you here to do your job or judge my character cheese boy?"

Bukho: "Well that's Miss Rude I know."

I low note laughed looking aside.

Lara: "If you missed me that much you should have told me."

Bukho: "Okay the camera is rolling we were at the time you met the Ph.D. lecturer."

I wanted to laugh but I thought of the time I will be wasting. I took a deep breath then I continued.

Lara: "I was curious about what he knew about me and who he was. After the lecture when Simo was going for another class I was free so I charged my phone for a few minutes and called him.

Mlulami: "That was quick."

Lara: "I will drop the call."

Mlulami: "Okay no worries. I am in the cafeteria from the south side. If you are not busy come now."

I didn't even hesitate because my phone went dead on me there and then. I took my things and left my laptop with the guy I trusted from my class. At least I had an hour before my lecture.

Mlulami: "You came."

Lara: "Yes I am curious about what you know about me and why."

He laughed taking my hand as he entered the cafeteria. So many eyes were on me and I almost went back. He pulled me to him. I swear to God ladies looked at me with wicked eyes and I wondered why. There was a group of people I didn't know

in the table he took me to. He introduced his friends both male and female friends.

Mlulami: "Guys this is Mrs. Honourable."

I wanted to protest but he took my hand and his laptop on the other hand then pulled me with him.

Mlulami: "I will see you, tomorrow guys."

Girl1: "Have mercy on the kid dude."

Guy: "Don't do what I wouldn't do."

He laughed pulling me with him. He took us to the pavilion. I never did sports so going to those areas was like seeing the moon for the first time. I just admired the place and sat with him. He talked about himself and his dreams an ambitious young man with big dreams and a drive. I fell in love with him. People were like "there is nothing like love at first sight" but I did fall in love hoping he was also in love.

Mlulami: "So what do you think? Do you want us to create dreams together or what?"

Lara: "Yes."

It was like some supernatural power that had possessed me. I was on cloud nine. It was my first love and I had never experienced something with anyone what I experienced with him.

Mlulami: "You have made me the happiest man alive."

On that particular day for the first time

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I skipped my two classes because we were busy building castles in the air. When I went to the rest of my classes I was floating. I didn't even realise that from the first day he wanted us to talk

about him and the future he had in mind. He never bothered not even once asked me what I was doing and what I wanted in life.

These are the things we do not consider when entering relationships. I was like someone on drugs. As long as I was with him I was okay.

Lara: "So dad; I met someone?"

He was in his workshop at home. He did that mostly when he was stressed and fighting with mom. I was closer to him than mom. He loved us unconditionally.

Dad: "Princess, you always meet people."

Lara: "Come on I mean the male part of the person."

A smile crept on his face as he stopped what he was doing.

Dad: "Are you are telling me that you are not afraid of boys anymore?"

Lara: "Come on dad I was not scared of boys."

Dad: "So you say."

Lara: "Dad you are not okay what is going on."

Dad: "Come; sit here." He had this sad look in his eyes and it scared me very much. "You know I love you very much right?"

Lara: "Dad, you are scaring me what is going on?"

Dad: "I want you to know that no amount of blood will take you away from me. You are my firstborn and I will love you till I breathe the last. Promise me you will never hate me because of this?"

I didn't know what to say but I was never going to hate my dad no matter what; maybe my mom because of her attitude and self conduct.

Lara: "You are my favourite parents and I will never hate you. Please don't tell mom because we will be in trouble."

We both laughed and he told me something that changed my life forever.

Dad: "I am not your biological father."

Was he hallucinating or what? He was married to my mom way before I was born so what was he talking about.

Dad: "I was still struggling then I couldn't provide your mother with the luxurious life she wanted. Then she got a job so I thought. She had met your father you made her fool me that she was working. She travelled a lot and I never thought of anything because she was always providing the money every month-end and she loved me. The travelling stopped when she said she was going to make me a father. I was happy I even worked two jobs for us to improve our lives. I even worked on weekends. Months peeled away and when she was about to

give birth she came clean that I was not the father. She had done some tests that were going to put your life at risk but she wanted the truth before you were born. The lover abandoned her for a younger woman who was not pregnant and married. That's when your mother became bitter and hated you. The day you were born I was at home when she had pains. I loved her God knows I still love her. I went with her when you were born. The first cry you had you were in my arms and I fell in love. From that day I vowed to protect you and take you as mine. We were married so there was no way she was going to humiliate herself by saying you were not mine.

Thank God you took after her. Our life went back to normal but she kept whining that I can't give her a good life. She never

treated me well from then. When I wanted to divorce her she threatened to take you away and I knew I was never going to win. I was not prepared to lose you so I begged her to stay. We mended our fences and I also got a better paying job which was a permanent post. From there we had these small problems but manageable.

Now coming to my point; I never; not even once saw you as a stepdaughter. You were mine and always will be mine. Your mother made me chose because I am tired of this life. She is forcing me to take life insurance I am not ready for that and she started threatening me. I told her it won't work because you

and your brother are old enough to choose. That's what we have been fighting for since last month."

I wondered why she wanted dad to take a policy. Did she want to kill him? Hell no she had another thing coming.

Lara: "Dad you are my dad and I do not care what DNA says because no amount of it will take you away from me. I love you and I will always choose you. You know what I wish?"

Dad: "I am listening."

Lara: "I wish mom was the one who was my stepmom."

We both had tears in our eyes.

Dad: "You don't mean that."

Lara: "Or trust me I mean every word."

We laughed and I vowed to take the secret to the grave but on that day I hated my mom so much and I wished she was not my mom.

"Hay my love what is wrong?"

It was Mlulami a week after my dad's revelation. I was still hurting but I didn't want my mom to pick up that I knew anything.

I told him everything and he just hugged me. While we were still like that I got a call that left me paralysed and my world

shattered. My dad had been involved in a car accident that claimed his life at the scene.

Lara: "I do not want to go home for now."

Mlulami: "Let me take you home. To my place I mean."

I just nodded and went to his car. He was driving a fancy car but I didn't have time to admire as I was caught up in the bubble of denial.

Mlulami: "Come, my love let us eat."

I had fallen asleep after a while he came with a bowl of soup.

Lara: "I am not hungry."

Mlulami: "I will feed you."

We both smiled as he placed the bowl on the sideboard leaned over and kissed me. That day I lost my innocence to the man I thought cared about me and was my future.

Mlulami: "Come let us go my love. Your family could be worried sick about you."

He was so gentle. I was so ashamed to have lost my innocence at a time when I was supposed to be mourning my father the only person who truly loved me besides my little brother.

The days that followed; Mlulami was so gentle and was there for me. Simo was also there for me but Mlulami fulfilled not

only my emotional desires but also my physical desires. We could sneak out at night and make love in any place possible. We were almost arrested for disturbing public peace but he sweet-talked his way out.

Life seemed perfect and I was happy. Little did I know that the day my dad died was the day the word peace and happiness stopped existing in my life.....

I wiped the tears and looked at Bukhosi who had little tears. I wanted to laugh at him but my emotions were all over the place.

“I cannot stomach anything more. That will be all for today; cheese boy see you Tuesday.”

I was trying hard not to break down. I didn't wait for the answer I left him there going to my cell...

10

Bukhosi

When I left on that particular day I was emotional I wished she could carry on yet stop telling the story because of how emotionally draining it was. I didn't bother to go to the office. My phone woke me up after a few hours of sleep.

Bukho: “Hello.”

I said in a sleepy voice trying not to sound sleepy.

“You are seriously sleeping on a Thursday afternoon when we are here slaving away.”

It was Uncle Polly I just chuckled.

Bukho: “I am tired; I am from prison.”

Polly: “Oh; how is that going?”

Bukho: “So draining that's why I am sleeping at this hour.”

Polly: “In a good way or a bad way.”

Bukho: "If you mean I want to quiet well I will see it through and even though this Lara character is rude."

Polly: "You have found your match."

We both laughed.

Bukho: "Not at all I doubt she was rude from the start. So far from what she told me is that she was not rude. She became rude somewhere along the way. I hope I can help her get out of there if she is really innocent."

Polly: "Do you think she is innocent?"

Bukho: "Besides being rude she is just delicate and a beautiful soul."

He whistled and I knew what he was thinking.

Bukho: "Not that way uncle P just that there are no killer genes in her that's all. So to what do I owe the pleasure?"

Polly: "I wanted you to email the copyrights of the movie we are shooting this side."

Bukho: "Will it be late if I email them tomorrow?"

Polly: "Not at all. I will remind you in the morning because we are almost done you will have to fly in on Friday next week to finalise everything."

Bukho: “No problem I am ready when you are ready.”

Polly: “Please take care I will hear from you.”

We said our goodbyes as I dropped then called for food after our call. I was lazy to cook; maybe it was time I visited home more often to get fed. I laughed at the thought.

My Fridays were always hectic so I did have time to go over the documentary. The following day after Sabbath I spent it with Bran and Wani. Wani and I got closer during our college days. She was one happy soul. Their marriage always gave me that hope about marriage. They went through thick and thin together but they were still standing.

Bukho: “You have gained weight, do not tell me you are on baby number four already?”

Bran: “Leave my wife alone.”

Wani: “I will never go for number four and technically it will be baby three because baby two decided to have a partner.”

I laughed at her.

Bran: “She stopped training because of pressure at work and school work.”

Bukho: “I told you that it was a bad idea to go further this year.”

Wani: "I will get the balance soon don't worry and as for babies we are okay with these three because Emmanuel even told us that he will be mad if any of my babies come and mess with his room and toys."

I laughed because their son was too dramatic.

Bukho: "If I were you I was going to make another baby just to piss him off."

We laughed

Bran: "I do not want to lose my son because one day he really packed his clothes we found him outside waiting for cab money to leave the house."

Bukho: "Where did he want to go?"

Wani: "He said the father should rent a flat for him."

I couldn't contain myself I just laughed till I had pain under my ribs.

Bran: "Do not laugh because he wanted to have a cool flat like yours."

Bukho: "I am a good uncle I lead by example. I will rent a flat for him next time."

Wani: "When he is working not now,"

It was pleasant spending time with them. I went to my place very late. Before I knew it I was driving to prison for another session. To be honest I kind of missed listening to her story. I was even mentally planning how it was going to work out on her advantage when we released it.

Bukho: "You don't look well today."

Lara: "Good morning to you too Mr. Radebe."

Bukho: "We are grumpy and kinky today."

Lara: "Can we please get over with this. Do not pretend as if you are my friend here. Just do your job."

Somehow I didn't even feel offended because she didn't even look well. She was a little pale so I didn't want to bother her.

Bukho: "Alright the camera is ready, let's do this."

Lara: "Just after the funeral I confronted mom to see if she had anything to do with my dad's death. Do you know her answer was? I will tell you anywhere, 'Maybe or maybe not.'

That was all she said. When we came home daily there was a piece of my dad's future or thing missing. At first

we didn't care because it was things we didn't use at all. My brother was hurt because he loved tools but I comforted him telling him that my first pay was going to those tools. I

managed to keep my promise three years later but I was not done when I was arrested. Now back to the year my dad died.

When I asked her about her selling the things in the house she told us that it was her pay for being a housewife of a poor man all those years. Do you know what she did with the money? She just quenched her shopping thirst. She was shopping and living large. If you asked what she was doing with those things you

wouldn't get a proper answer. She wanted to 'fit' in the circle of kept housewives. We saw how serious her addiction was the moment she sold things in the sitting room and dining room. My brother's room had a tenant who looked young and slutty. Excuse the language but that's the only way I could describe her. I had to share it with him in which I didn't mind at all.

I made sure I found my aunt because they were only two of them. My grandparents adopted them at the same time and my aunt found not a rich but a well up husband. My mom never liked my aunt that's why we never had a relationship with her. She was happy to see us and she promised to take care of us. Especially my brother because I had a scholarship that was taking care of me, my brother needed someone to take care of him. We started visiting her a few times a week then her husband started the process of being our legal guardians. My mom found out and made our lives a living hell. I made sure my brother leave and we managed to do that. The

social workers told her never to contact him if she was going to cause drama.

She never talked to me properly from that day. She would always yell. The best part was that she spent time with her socialite friends. I was always buried in my school work and Simo was there for me always. She always covered for me when I was in need financially and I didn't want to bother my

aunt because I knew she was already doing more than enough for my little brother."

Bukho: "If you don't mind me asking where was this Mlula....whatever guy?"

She just laughed a little because some jealousy was in my tone. I didn't want to sound jealous but I felt like I needed to hear more about him.

Lara: "Well all was going well although Simo was against it. I just thought she was just being mean. He treated me well, introduced me to his circle of friends and family. I passed the second year despite all the challenges I was facing at home. He was also there for me emotionally. What I discovered was that our relationship never had that strong communication base. I never had a say all the time he had a final say even if it was not what I wanted.

One day a certain lady told me she was also in a relationship with him. She even told me that his family knew about her. I looked at her and felt like she just wanted to spoil things for us. When I told Simo she said I had to leave him because he was exactly what the girl said he was. I had a fall out with her. I confronted Mlulami about the information and he said I should stop listening to people.

I never saw that girl but one day I met her with a blue eye; wearing a scarf on a hot summer day. She tried running away from me but I caught up with her. She told me she went home after confronting me with the truth then when she came back she was beaten to a pulp. She even wanted out but he told her he is the one who has the key out. So she was stuck with him.

As naive as I was I asked him again he was angry that he almost beat her to death. When I went to see her in the hospital she just told me to run while I still can. From there she disappeared from the face of the earth. I only saw the woman who was with her at the hospital and she told me that she moved to her father's family who lived in Swaziland. I became scared I wanted out but I didn't know how because when I started the second semester of my third year I needed him financially also as Simo had distanced herself from all the fiasco."

Bukho: "Where were your mom and aunt then?"

Lara: "My mom was not even talking to me because I had moved some of the remaining furniture to the storehouse. My aunt was there but I didn't want to be a burden too. She was taking care of the food in the house which mom used without care when her friends came through. So I was not at liberty to ask for money for most of my need."

Bukho: "So were the allegations about your boyfriend true?"

Lara: "From the time I asked him I was always on edge things went back to normal when he took me to Sun City for my birthday. One day I wanted to surprise him at his place. His car was parked so I knew he was home. I didn't knock like usual. I found him humping someone, she was on her fours. I only released a sound that made them turn. Do you think he stopped? No, he didn't he wanted me to join them. It was as if he was high on something. I told him it was over then went home.

You will think he will listen but no; the following day he was at my door taking me for my first abortion. I didn't even know I was pregnant and he knew. I was panicking I have never done anything like that. I bled for almost a month and he was nowhere to be found. I was lucky because I was on a school

holiday. When we were about to open he came and apologised saying he didn't mean to hurt me. I tried refusing but he forced me or else I would disappear like her other lovers. I didn't have family out for the country so I had to try and make it work. I mended fences with Simo.

Simo: "Why don't you go to the police?"

Lara: "I have thought about it but he is well connected that's what I heard."

Simo: "There is no harm in trying?"

Lara: "I wish my mom could fight for me. She thinks highly of him says that's the only good thing I ever achieved on my own."

Simo: "What will she say because she is looking at the money he has."

Lara: "This is too much and to think I still love him. He killed my first child."

Simo: "God will never forgive you two. You killed an innocent soul."

Lara: "I feel worse please do not kick me while I am down."

Simo: "The fact that you are down doesn't make it right. I love you like a sister I never had and I will never love you with

lies. When you are wrong I will rebuke you. You should have left when he didn't own you now he feels entitled to you."

Lara; "I am so sorry that I didn't listen to you. He seemed genuine from the start."

Simo: "There was nothing genuine there you were just in love."

Lara: "I was slowly mentally distancing myself from him; even financially I learnt to cope without much of his help.

Mlulami: "Hay love; please come visit me for a weekend I will be home alone."

I never had a bone to say no to him so I just thought I will have to survive the weekend. I still loved him so much through it all.

Lara: "Do you want anything specifically so that I can prepare it before you get home?"

Mlulami: "My favourite although I would prefer that you wear that sexy number and just spice my bed."

Lara: "Stop being naughty here."

Mlulami: "I will see you later my sexy mama."

I laughed dropping the call. I packed my few things because most of my things were at his place. Even though I wanted to leave him somehow his sweet talk always drew me back to him. I cooked his favourite meal and waited for him. He was a

little late I ate bathed and wore what he wanted me to wear. Unfortunately, I fell asleep.

I woke up when I felt someone touching me. It was like I was in a dream but I just felt it one more time which forced me to open my eyes. That was the day I wished I was dead.....”

I wished she could tell me but she just stood up and left me with a palpating heart. What just happened then? I folded my things and hoped Thursday was not going to come while I was in ICU from anxiety.....

11

Lara (Bonolo)

I was really drained and not feeling well. The moment the guard opened the door for me I just fell and it was lights out.

“Well, she will be awake soon.”

That’s what I heard before opening my eyes. I was in the stupid sickbay again.

Gail: “I think you will have to get out of here soon before I kill you with my bare hands. You want to send me to the early grave I see. Since you came here I have more than ten grey hairs.”

Who wouldn't laugh at such comments? I just laughed and the doctor looked at us and laughed.

Doc: "You see; she is fine; now; be a good girl and go she will be fine."

Gail: "These rules."

Doc: "You always break them at the end of the day so don't complain."

She laughed showing her beautiful smile. There were only three people who were the recipients of that beautiful smile. It was

Moo; the doctor and I. I was lucky to be amongst those because Gail was not an easy woman to impress.

Gail: "You need to get out of here today because you know you have a lot to answer to. If this boy stresses you he will...."

Doc: "No need for treats I told you that she has a fever so relax it's nothing hectic and I know my way around sick bodies."

She shook her head hugged me and left.

Doc: "I have never seen her care for anyone this much since I started working here ten years ago. She cares about you. Please make sure you take care of her because she portrays this strong front when inside she is as vulnerable as anyone else."

I felt her words warming my heart. This was touching in a good way.

Lara: “I promise I will. I never had motherly love since I was growing up. My mom always blamed me for losing her lover. She said if she never had me maybe she was going to go far with my dad. I was always the mother figure to my little brother that I never missed motherly love. Since I got here I feel like I needed such when growing up. I love her like a mother I never had.”

Doc: “Everything happens for a reason; now let us see what we can do about this fever young lady.”

I laughed at her comment as she checked me thoroughly. I was under their watch for the night. I was sweating like a leaking water pipe. By morning they had managed to break down the fever. I spent the following day in the sickbay with Gail who came every chance she got. I went back to my cell; the same evening.

Gail: “I missed you.”

Lara: “It was only for one night.”

Gail: “One damn long night. How are you feeling? We wouldn’t want to miss Mr. Cheese boy.”

I laughed because I didn’t think she would register that name.

Lara: "You don't have to call him that. I want to ask him to come next week because I am not up for him. I am drained."

Gail: "I wish I never said I will see the documentary when it's finished. I am already curious about what is contained in that which is making you sick."

Lara: "I am regretting ever going that route. I wish I chose a different route."

Gail: "There is no going back now let us do this and see it through. You know taking cowardice way is not good at all. You have to see this through."

Lara: "I will have to toughen up and relive my past one last time. I do not even wish to watch that documentary no matter what."

Gail: "I will watch for you don't worry."

We laughed and talked about something else. When morning came I was still feeling under the weather. I had to do the interview because the sooner we finished the sooner I was going to be free.

Gail: "Please; do not strain yourself. You see you are still not well."

Moo: "I will tell that boy not to."

I laughed going ahead of sis Moo. I was determined to finish this as soon as possible.

Moo: "Please make sure you don't strain her she is not feeling well."

I mentally rolled my eyes to the back of my head; couldn't she at least; not show him that I can also be vulnerable sometimes; I also needed that?

Bukho: "Why didn't you tell me? Did they take you to the doctor?"

Moo: "Yes we do and why do you seem concerned are you and her...."

Bukho: "Eeh I was just worried that's it."

Lara: "Relax sis Moo we just have a working relationship only. I will be fine now let me do this so that I can go and rest."

Moo: "Okay I will leave you to it."

She had an 'I am watching you' eye on her face I wanted to laugh but thought otherwise. She left and Bukhosi looked at me with concerned eyes.

Lara: "I am fine really."

Bukho: "If you say so."

Lara: "I am serious. Let's do this before I think otherwise."

Bukho: “Miss Rude; even in sickness your rudeness doesn’t end.”

I laughed because he was even making funny faces.

Lara: “I was never bitter and rude so you know. I am also not rude even now. I am just in a defensive mood since I realised that people always took and took from vulnerable people and never even gave a damn about their feelings.”

Bukho: “Okay the camera is running. I was unable to sleep for the past two days wondering what happened.”

Lara: “You don’t have to worry much because you will know now.

When I opened my eyes it was his big brother looking at me lustfully. I panicked because I didn’t know what he was going to do.

Lara: “What are you doing?”

Him: “What are you doing here when you know that your boyfriend is not home?”

Lara: “He is the one who called me. I even cooked for him.”

Him: “Where is he right now? Do you think I am stupid? I see you flirting all the time. My brother is so naive not to see it.”

Lara: "What are you talking about?"

Him: "I know your kind and I do not let them get what they want for free; you will beg me to never let go."

Lara: "Please leave me alone just go."

Did he listen? No; he didn't he just continued and raped me. I felt so dirty and cheap when he was done I ran to the bathroom and scrubbed myself crying till I felt like I was clean but it never happened only to cry and run back to the bathroom again. When I finally got the courage to go back to the bedroom I was hoping he was gone only to find them fighting with his brother. I went to his arms crying only to have him shave me and I fell on my butt.

Mlulami: "My bother; really Lara?"

Lara: "What are you talking about he rapped me."

Him: "Oh please aren't you the one who asked and you; we bu....."

Mlulami: "Just get out, please. First

it was Tasha now it's Lara. What do these girls want from you? I let Tasha go to you because I never loved her. This; I will have to deal with it."

He had a smirk on his face when he left and Mlulami on the other hand was written murder in his face. I prayed a thousand prayers on that particular day for God to protect me. I said if He protected me I will go to church every Sunday and leave that life behind. He never listened to the God they taught us about every Sunday abandoned me.”

Bukho: “It is not that He abandoned you. He is always there and always makes sure we.....”

Lara: “Save it Cheese boy you may read all versions of the bible to me but I know what I am saying because I was there I am the one who suffered in the hands of His ‘child’.”

I saw that he wanted to say something but he wasn’t about to preach to me when I was not ready for that.

Lara: “When his brother left I tried to explain.

“Baby he raped me.”

Mlulami: “Shut up will you?”

Lara: “I am telling the truth I was waiting for you and he raped me.”

Mlulami: “Do you know how many men are in prison because of girls like you? There is something that my brother has that you are all drawn to him.”

Lara: “I was never attracted to your brother even once. He is a

psycho and I

I never got to finish the sentence because I felt like an alien ship fell on me only to discover that he slapped me. I was down on my butt again within a second.

Mlulami: "All I do is love you and what do you do?"

Lara: "....."

I was crying I couldn't say anything. He beat me until I was unconscious. When I woke up his sister was nursing me; he was nowhere to be found.

Her: "What happened?"

I thought if his brother never believed me then who will believe me. I just let tears flow on my face. Why was I in such a cruel and toxic relationship?

Lara: "We had a misunderstanding."

Her: "You know that you can tell me anything? I love you like a sister and you are safe with me. Do you want to open a case for him?"

My heart was beating fast. I was a little excited but remember I will have to tell the truth and no one will believe me. So I just shook my head no. I was asking myself if there was a God because no God will let their children suffer like that. I was

nursed to health he didn't want me to go home until I was fine. He would say my mom knows where I was because he would come with my changing clothes sometimes.

Lara: "Baby; I am sorry for everything."

I had to apologise when I had done nothing wrong because he was keeping me, prisoner, in his home. I wanted to soften him and get out of there. I had made up my mind that degree or no degree I was leaving him and leaving the country forever.

Mlulami: "Why did you have to do that to me?"

Lara: "I am sorry."

Mlulami: "I love you and can you imagine I wanted to propose last weekend when I found you like that."

Lara: "I am sorry."

I was crying not because he was not going to propose anymore but because he still thought I was guilty while I was hurting and dying inside.

Mlulami: "Can you imagine I wanted to stop cheating on you. I wish I slept at her place that day after our steamy lovemaking but I left her to come to a slutty girlfriend."

I was shaking from anger. I felt like vomiting I ran to the bathroom and vomited while I let the tears warm my cheeks.

So because his brother raped me I had to endure that also. I promised never to say anything because that was my ticket out of the hell hole. He didn't even follow me but I was okay with that. After I was done I splashed my face with water.

Mlulami: "What did you eat?"

Lara: "I am not feeling well."

Mlulami: "Rest because tomorrow you have classes."

I only nodded and slept. That was all I did from the day his brother violated me. Simo had given up interfering in my life. She was glad I was back but she never commented about me being scarce and bruised. She loved me still and gave me space.

Simo: "Can I give you a lift home?"

Lara: "Yes, I wanted to go take my things at Mlulami's place but I think I miss home."

I was going to leave those things. I didn't even tell her I was leaving. Once you tell one person about your plans it might end up in the wrong ears. I was done with that life.

Simo dropped me home and I didn't realise that mom had company because she was never home. I entered the house and heard funny noises coming from her room. I got scared and ran to her room.

I was breathing heavily when I opened the door.

Lara: "Mom what is going on?"

When I finally looked at her I got the shock of my life....."

Lara: "I think we will end here for today. I need some rest. I promise we are finishing it next week. If it means telling sis Moo to give us more time I will."

Bukho: "I...."

He wanted to protest but I was tired. Fever medication also makes one drowsy.

Bukho: "Okay thank you."

I usually left him tidying up so I never waited for him I just stood up and followed the guard to my cell.....

12

Bukhosi

"Please God don't let it be what I think it is."

I was shaking from shock. You see when you grow up in a different world you would think everything is just black and white. In the world, I grew up knowing that parents are supposed to protect their kids. I was sure that I was going to

have a long weekend. I was going to drive back to family time on Sunday. The first thing was to check if she was okay and the second part was to let her tell me what happened because curiosity was killing me.

“I need your professional help.”

I said getting into dad’s office. I knew there was a confidentiality clause that I had signed with Lara but I needed to help her.

Dad: “Hello to you too my son. I am very well and thank you. I am pleased to meet you.”

I laughed because he was always like that.

Bukho: “Hello dad, I know you are fine and how is mom?”

Dad: “She is angry that I came to the office today because it was supposed to be our day out together.”

Bukho: “I will be angry too because you have retired so why leave your beautiful wife alone. Or you want those small boys to do your job? She still looks young you know.”

Dad: “If someone wants to die then I am giving them a go-ahead. There are people out there who want to die but are afraid that God will blame them for committing suicide so I wouldn’t mind them meeting my fist for your mother.”

I just laughed. If I had half of the love that my parents shared then I was going to be the happiest man alive.

Bukho: “You will go on your killing spree after you have helped me.”

Dad: “Okay let me hear it then.”

Bukho: “Do you think you can help me find a lawyer for Lara so that she can appeal her sentence?”

The look he gave me didn’t need any explanation; I just told him what was going on. Of course, I was leaving the delicate part which was too personal.

Dad: “So you want the company to pay her fees?”

Bukho: “If it can’t I will have to make a plan from my savings.”

Dad: “What is really going on here my boy? What are you not telling me?”

There was nothing to tell and I was in a dilemma myself so how was I going to answer that.

Bukho: “Nothing much dad only that I feel like all the people around her seemed to fail her and I was hoping she should get justice somehow.”

Dad: “If you say so. I can ask Muzi he knows several people and I bet he can get a better one.”

Bukho: "Thank you very much, dad."

Dad: "Then he tells me nothing is going on as if I was born yesterday."

I just laughed and changed the subject.

Bukho: "Beli said she needs my help packing some of her stuff from the backroom because she decided to rent out the house."

Dad: "I wonder why you do not want to go and stay there as she has asked."

Bukho: "When I am moving from that apartment I want to be moving to my house and I have still not decided yet."

Dad: "You are truly your mother's son."

Bukho: "She taught me well. I am not in a rush to buy a house as I am still single."

Dad: "Talking about being single w....."

Bukho: "Goodbye dad, tell your wife that I love her so much. No; that didn't come out alright and it doesn't sound okay. Tell my mother I love her so much. I will come to visit her soon."

I said that standing up to avoid any confrontations.

Dad: "You will not run from me forever young man. This conversation is far from over."

Bukho: "It is over dad."

Dad: "We will see about that."

I just laughed and left his office. I never even checked her since I blocked her number and I was not even thinking about her since I started the documentary. Maybe it was a good thing. I was going to move on amicably.

Friday before I knocked off I asked the warden if I could visit Miss Rude during family time.

Warden: "What happens over the weekend is none of our business as long as it is within the prison rules and regulations."

Bukho: "Thank you very much, sir."

Warden: "You believe she is innocent?"

Bukho: "I believe even if she is not she will need a fair trial."

Warden: "If you say so. Okay then; but make sure no rules are broken."

We said our goodbyes as I punched the air celebrating. Why was I celebrating again? I just laughed going home to prepare for the Sabbath. I was not going to join my parents we were going for a big Sabbath in Mpumalanga coming back the same

day. Music was part of the family that all of us were blessed to like and take well.

On Sunday I woke up with excitement oozing from all the pores of my body. Why was I that excited again? I just prepared for my day without delay. I knew she was going to be surprised to see me. I bought a few things for her on my way. Why was I doing that again? The answer was always there in my head. Yes; it was the right thing to do.

Lara: "Mr cheese boy what are you doing here? Don't you have a girlfriend or a family maybe?"

She was not going to kill my joy no matter how hard she tried.

Bukho: "Miss Rude

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it is my pleasure to see you too, and do not mention it because I know you didn't have anyone to visit you so I am grateful to make your Sunday a happy day."

She looked hurt and I regretted saying that.

Lara: "I know I am all alone here but it doesn't give you the right to mock me."

I felt bad.

Bukho: "I am so sorry I didn't mean it like that."

Lara: "Okay now get to your point."

Bukho: "I brought these for you. Are you now feeling okay?"

I said giving her the plastic which was scrutinised by the door when I was coming in.

Lara: "Oh... thank you I guess. Yes, I am well now thank you."

I smiled because it softened her a little. She looked like she wanted to cry but we didn't want that before we got what we went there for; can we now?

Bukho: "The real reason I came is I never slept well for the past days and I think I was not going to survive till Tuesday. I want you to tell me that what I am thinking is not true."

Lara: "What are you thinking?"

Bukho: "I would rather not assume but please tell me. We are not going to record because the equipment is locked up over the weekend but I will record with my phone or just write.

Lara: "Oh so you came for the story. I should have known."

Bukho: "What do you think I would come here for?"

Lara: "Now he is being truthful. You could have fooled me, cheese boy. Don't worry I am not going to hold it against you

that you bribed me with toiletries. I will take it as a payment for me to work for you over time.”

She laughed and I looked at her; her laugh was music to my ears although she laughed less I would have loved for her to laugh more. Get a grip Bukhosi; you are here to work.

Bukho: “Okay Miss Rude I admit at least I am man enough to admit. I came for more juicy news. There you have it; I hope you will admit also when you are put on the spot.”

She just giggled.

Lara: “I will make sure to remember that and don’t you dare remind me.”

That side of hers was something I never thought I would see.

While I was still looking at her she continued.

Lara: “I have never felt motherly love from the time I was growing up but I had always loved and respected my mother.

On the day in question, all the respect went out of the window. You know it takes years to build up the respect from people but sometimes it can only take a second to destroy all the work you have done to gain respect.”

She was breathing heavily and I was too curious to wait.

Bukho: “What happened?”

Lara: "It was my mom and Mlulami's brother."

You know I have never been so relieved like that way in my life. He was a scam yes but had it been him there like I thought I think I was going to be sick.

Lara: "I wanted to walk away but I felt the edge to confront him.

"What are you doing with my mom?"

Mom: "What are you doing just budging in my room? Have you lost your manners? Don't you know how to knock?"

Lara: "I was talking to him not you? Do you know that he raped me and then denied everything?"

I didn't mean to blurt it out.

Him: "Get over yourself princess you wanted it."

Lara: "I hope you two will burn in hell."

Him: "After"

Mom: "Will you two just shut up and young lady leave my room now."

Lara: "You know he is young to be your lover."

Mom: “Isn’t your boyfriend also young for Mrs. Rivers my friend?”

Lara: “What?”

Him: “Oops he will be mad when you disturb him too.”

I burst out of the room and ran to Mrs. Rivers? She was staying just three houses away from us. I was not surprised when I saw Mlulami’s car parked there. So he and his brother were just cut from the same clothing? Why did I even bother? I called him.

Mlulami: “Hay baby, please take a taxi home I am tied up at work.”

The bastard lied while I was watching his car.

Lara: “I didn’t know that your office was now at Mrs. Rivers’ yard. Anyway, it’s none of my business because you and I are history and you come near me you will see a breasted snake.”

Mlulami: “Shit....”

He dropped the call. I ran home like a whirlwind and packed my clothes. I packed what I needed the most the rest I was going to ask Simo to get them for me. I called her in the process to hurry. Luckily enough she was still around our neighborhood.

Her boyfriend was driving for her.

Lara: “Please drive and stop not even for the traffic officers?”

I said closing the door as fast as I could.

Simo: "What is going on? What just happened?"

I didn't want her boyfriend to be involved.

Lara: "Drive to campus please I will tell you when we get there right now I need to think."

I sent one of my classmates a message. She was reserved and friendly so I was going to squat with her till I see what to do. I had changed my mind I was going to finish my degree and stop running. It was time I stood up for myself because clearly, no one was going to protect me as my mother was not going to.

When we got there I asked her to take me to the library. Just behind it was a free spot with chairs to rest. We left her boyfriend in the car.

Simo: "What is going on?"

Lara: "I do not have anyone and I trust you with my life now. Please I need you now more than ever."

Simo: "You are scaring me Bonolo."

She usually used my second name anytime she wanted to. I just looked at her. I was conflicted to talk to her because somehow I had lost my trust in people.

I finally told her everything. She looked at me with tears in her eyes.

Simo: "I have a confession to make."

What the.....

Lara: "Okay cheese boy I will forgive you for taking my Sunday time because you brought something for me to snack on."

I just laughed. I knew she was not going to change her mind. I watched her as she walked away. She was always wearing a beanie I wondered what was going on with her hair.

Well at least I was not as anxious as the previous time but I was hoping her friend was legit.....

13

Lara (Bonolo)

I was smiling all the way to my cell. The gods were looking up to me because I really needed toiletries after all I was using some with Gail.

Gail: "Why are you all smiles?"

Lara: "Mr. Cheese boy never fail to amuse me."

Gail: "Was it him? I thought it was your aunt."

Lara: "My aunt will come at my request because I do not want to trouble them. I am straining their finances as it is."

Gail: "You asked him to come."

It was more of a statement than a question. Or should I say it was more of a rhetorical question.

Lara: "He just came because he wanted me to finish the story. To my surprise, you know what he brought?"

Gail: "I am hoping you are going to tell me fast because you are eventually going to tell me."

We laughed; I knew she hated guessing I just wanted to poke her.

Lara: "Okay party pooper let me show you."

I showed her all the things he brought for me.

Gail: "He bought all this just for you?"

Lara: "I was surprised too. I think it's the payments for making me work on a weekend."

Gail: "He has taste I can hand it to him."

Lara: "Whatever."

Gail: "Look at the mirror and see how green you are."

It took me looking at the mirror five minutes to realise what she meant.

Lara: "Gees come on."

Gail: "Envy makes you green you know. You did well by teaching me the internet I always google such ish." I just laughed looking at her and she was serious. "You know Goldie; life doesn't wait for anyone. Someday I might get out of here. If and when I get out of here; I want to be at least computer literate."

Lara: "Damn right I want a literate mother."

She laughed and started eating a bar of chocolate, I took a piece also and she was right he had a taste.

Gail: "Told you he has taste."

Lara: "I admit yes he has taste; an expensive one for that matter."

Gail: "When I was growing up my first boyfriend bought a PS chocolate for me. I fell in love with him because of the chocolate. If someone buys a bar of chocolate you know what it means right."

Oh my God, I was thinking about what Gail was saying. She was joking I guess.

Lara: "You are joking right?"

Gail: "I am just saying. If I would have been patient I was not going to be in jail. He loved me but he was too soft for me. I hated soft men back in my days. Well

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how is this cheese man?"

Lara: "It's Mr. Cheese boy."

We laughed

Gail: "Same difference."

She wasn't even making sense but she was my mom and I was used to it. Who knew that I will find a mother who will understand me and talk with me these boys' stuff? We ate the

goodies chatting about everything and anything. Our Sunday was not boring at all; at least we didn't have chores on Sunday.

On a Tuesday I was feeling much better physically. The fever was gone and there was not even a trace that I had it. The doctor was happy when she gave me a clean bill of health.

"You look much better today."

He was looking at me without even greeting me first. I just let him be because I didn't want to spoil my good mood. I was

not going to take any more of the bad medicine so I was over the moon.

Lara: "I even feel more than I look."

We both laughed. He had a cute laugh and smile which made him look even much younger. How old was he anyway?

Bukho: "Ready?"

I was still looking at him I didn't even realise that he was looking at me ready to start.

Lara: "Okay I am ready."

Simo: "When you were not attending classes last week I heard these other girls talking about you. I didn't know it was about you until I heard Mlulami's name. One of them is dating him and she said he was with her when you 'slept' with his brother.

I wanted to ask you what was going on, and then I thought you will say I am making it up again."

Lara: "He raped me; after that, I didn't even tell him how it happened because he beat me to the pup."

Simo: "I also knew about your mother's friend. He has been going there for months. I saw him once and I thought he had business there then the next time he was kissing her."

I felt like vomiting. I was going to brush my teeth until the end of time.

Lara: "So he has been out and about."

Simo: "I didn't want to say anything and lose you as a friend. I have been trying to give you clues but it never happened. Always when I came with you this side maybe he was with his other girlfriends."

Lara: "I feel stupid. I do not even know why I am continuing with the school if I can't even learn from the few things I have seen from him. I thought he loved me."

Simo: "Love alone is not enough sometimes. Do not blame yourself."

Lara: "I had to kill four kids because he forced me to."

Simo: "What?" I could feel from her voice how disappointed she was I just looked at her without saying anything. "Besides babes there are diseases have you ever thought of that?"

My heart started beating so fast. He was my first and my only so if I was sick it was going to be him. We had never used protection since day one.

Lara: "I am so stupid. I think I should let him kill me now because I can't take this."

Simo: "You are not stupid these things happen. Andrew and I decided to wait for marriage. That is the choice we made together; if he decided to deceive me God will punish him."

Lara: "I wish I had also waited."

Simo: "Do not beat yourself up you will find someone who will treasure you."

Lara: "I am done with relationships."

Simo: "I will ask you in the future. You will get someone better and loyal someone who will treasure you."

Lara: "I am not even thinking about anything now except for the fact that I am on the run and I might be sick."

Simo: "Do not think too much. So what will you do now?"

Lara: "I am not running anymore I will hide only because I do not want to go home I do not want to see my mother in..... forever."

Simo: "What about your things?"

Lara: "I have the key and I was hoping you could help me when mom is not around. I need a few things only; the rest she can burn or do whatever. The rest of the things I put them in storage so they are safe."

Simo: "I will help you don't worry. Where are you going to stay?"

Lara: "I asked Zoe."

Simo: "Good choice she doesn't have drama and she is also loyal. Then what will happen to your mother."

Lara: "Whose mother? Do I have a mother?"

Simo: "Okay then let me go. Please keep in touch I will see you tomorrow."

Lisa: "Yes please let me go and get my bags from the car."

Simo: "You are like a sister to me; please do not hesitate to come to me."

Lara: "I will don't worry."

"That is how my brave new life started."

Bukho: "So did he leave you alone?"

Lara: "Hell no. You do not know Mlulami. The following month I was starting my practice with the Insurance broker company. Mr. Nails was a good man but a mean boss. One day when I was getting in the office. I was always the first one to get there and the last to leave then I will disguise myself."

Bukho: "I thought you had taken control of your life?"

Lara: “Do you see Chuck Norris when you look at me? I had taken control but that man was still there looking high and low for me; he always won. So when I got there I usually got out of the disguise then get ready for work. Mr. Nails was early on that particular day and he watched me place my head on my hands after removing the wig and stuff.”

Nails: “Hhhhhh. Are you okay?”

I jumped because I wasn't expecting anyone.

Lara: “Yes...Ia...a m okay.”

Nails: “You are not okay and I have noticed that. Now come to my office I made coffee. I am not letting you work without the truth.”

Lara: “So you are firing me?”

Nails: “Who talked about firing? I am saying today you will tell me the whole story before you do your work. Anyway, I can't

fire you because in a practical sense you were not hired; you are doing your internship. Remind me to fire you in the future when you have signed the contract.”

I just laughed because he always had a skewed sense of humour. So I sat down and told him practically everything. He was like a father to me can you imagine telling your father all those weird stuff.

Nails: "I would like to help you."

Lara: "How? No one can help me."

Nails: "You might be surprised. Besides this company, I was once a dedicated lawyer so I know the law. I miss practicing so don't say I am rusted because I always make sure I keep up to date who knows I might be a lawyer in my next life without interruptions."

We both laughed he was a funny man.

Lara: "So what do you suggest I do?"

Nails: "Give me a few days and I will tell you what to do. In the meantime go to the police station and ask for a protection order."

Lara: "Thank you very much."

I worked with renewed energy on that particular summer. Simo told me that Mlulami was out of the country for some time.

Somehow my life went back to normal and I even forgot about the protection order. Mr. Nails had also made me meet his niece who was also a lawyer. We left things hanging when I went back for my final semester.

I had changed my number surprisingly my mom was doing well without us so I was cool. But I started receiving threatening

messages. Mlulami's sister was communicating with me but on those rare occasions and we only used email and Facebook. She loved me but things were not going to change.

I didn't take those messages seriously because there was nothing about me so I thought it was a wrong number. Until one day when I received a call.

"You can run but you can never hide from me."

That voice alone was scary enough to send me to ICU. I just dropped the call and blocked that number. I was still squatting with Zoe's sister and her in their private room. I was happy and buying food so the internship helped although they paid us little money. I wrote my final exams without stress; then when I was done and I was adamant that I was in the finishing line the devil tempted me again. This time leading me to my hell hole....."

Bukho: "You are not seriously going to leave me hanging?"

I laughed.

Lara: "I don't want to but look at him."

The guard cleared his throat.

Bukho: "Seriously dude." We laughed but the guard kept a straight face. "I guess I will see you on Thursday then. I wish

I had taken those three days offered but well I never thought your story will be that intriguing.”

I just laughed leaving him there. I was feeling my heart contracting. I hoped to God it was not what it was.....

14

Bukhosi

I looked at her as she walked away. She looked better than when I was there on Sunday.

I laughed alone. This woman was a mystery that I wanted to unwrap. I shook my head as I packed my things.

When I got to the office I called Bran because I needed his advice.

Bran: “You know it’s rude to call your big brother all the way uptown.”

Bukho: “You are glowing what are you eating?”

Bran: “I have kids who drive me crazy but who mean a world to me; a wife who worships the ground I walk on”

Bukho: “You love your family.”

Bran: "I wouldn't trade my life and family for anything in the world. They drive me crazy sometimes especially the twins but I love them still."

Bukho: "Okay then let me not keep you."

Bran: "Why did you call me here?"

I told him everything; he was all smiles and I was wondering why.

Bukho: "What is so funny?"

Bran: "You are whipped; my boy. No one can talk about what he is working on or who he is working on or with. Do I even make sense?"

We both laughed, he was making sense although not really.

Bukho: "How was it when you fell in love with Wani?"

Bran: "Oh boy"

Bukho: "Please I do not want all the details I just want a straight answer."

Bran: "Okay, for both of us it was love at first sight. It differs from people but as for me I saw her and I saw my forever. She tells me every day that she fell for my voice and when she saw me she knew she was not going to look at anyone else."

Bukho: "You guys are lucky?"

Bran: "I bet she is your soul mate."

Bukho: "I am scared."

Bran: "Why if I may ask?"

Bukho: "For starters what if she never gets out of the prison and second what if she doesn't want me."

Bran: "Have you ever pursued a woman?"

Bukho: "Not really what I had I can't even call it a relationship."

Bran: "Then you will need to be a patient and persistent man. Good things don't come easily."

Bukho: "She told me she will never go for any man again."

Bran: "She is hurting she will be fine and she was telling her story. What if she has healed and she would want to try it with you."

Bukho: "Will she even look at me? Will you look at someone like me?"

Bran: "You are talking to the wrong guy. Besides I am straight dude I will never look at you even if you were the last man standing."

I laughed looking at him.

Bukho: "I was not saying it literally."

Bran: "Whatever man. I love you and you are my brother but mom shielded you too much and you are afraid to be adventurous. Do you think I will be this happy if I had not followed my heart? I know the answer; don't even answer. We spent a year and some months trying to get approval from my father-in-law, most of the people ended up discouraging us but that didn't stop me because I developed a backbone for that."

Bukho: "Okay I will try."

I knew I was not going to manage because I was already nervous. We finished our talk and I went back to work. I was having bad dreams of this guy chasing after her but I knew it was just my fear taking over.

The day I went to her I was confident that I was going to tell her how I saw her in my eyes but well.....

Bukho: "Miss Rude how are you?"

Lara: "I am still rude and I can see you are still the cheese boy that you are."

We both laughed

Bukho: "Before we start may I please ask you a personal question?"

Lara: "Is it related to the documentary?"

Bukho: "Forget I asked."

I was feeling intimidated by her.

Lara: "No, no

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no, you don't get to say that. I will revisit the answer.
Yes please, you may ask I don't mind."

We both laughed.

Bukho: "If you were to be given a second chance will you try on the relationship thing?"

Lara: "I don't know how relevant it is to the documentary but no, I will never. I am done I think when I leave this place I would love to change the world and be rich."

I wanted to laugh at her statement but I was hurt by the answer.

Bukho: "Why if I may ask?"

Lara: "The reason is simple; when everyone is enjoying the pleasures of life I get indigestion?"

I just laughed and thought of continuing because I was fighting the losing battle.

Bukho: "Okay let us start then."

Lara: “Okay. I was adamant that I had gotten rid of him but when I started the New Year he started his stocking tendencies. Mr. Nails had told me that they were hiring me and some of the students I had an internship with the previous year. I was happy but I still didn’t have a place to stay. I was always on the move from one classmate to the other. Some whose parents were out of the country or province I stayed longer.

When Mr. Nails gave us the offer I needed a stable place so I asked for an advance. He was a good man he gave me and I asked one of the workers there to share with me. It was going to be less. I got the chance to collect the furniture that I had placed in the state facility. Luckily enough the storage fee was not that ridiculous.

That’s when he started stalking me when he heard I was staying at a flat with a friend a week later I was out with Simo and other friends because she was preparing for her wedding and then; she and Andrew were going to move to Australia on a student and work visa consecutively.

When I got back my roommate told me he came and told me to watch out. She said he threatened her too. I flipped because I knew he was dangerous so the moment he isolated me I was going to be vulnerable again.

I was fuming I went to his office.

Lara: "Really; really what do you want from me?"

I was standing at the foyer I didn't even want to go to his office because I was going to be exposed there.

Mlulami: "Hello to you too."

Lara: "I am not here to play games with you. Tell me what do you want from me?"

Mlulami: "You know what I want from you and this drama is not necessary you know it."

Lara: "What drama because you are the one causing drama to my life. Get a life and leave me alone."

Mlulami: "Look I....."

He tried to touch my hand and I just flipped it.

Lara: "Listen you touch me you will be reunited with your ancestors. I am tired of you making my life miserable."

Mlulami: "Are you threatening me, princess."

Lara: "Whichever way you see it. I have heard enough with you and I do not want to see you near me or I will murder you."

It was just a figurative speech I was never going to kill him. I was just standing my grounds. I left there going straight to Mr. Nails' office. I was starting to be this happy and he had to

do that. I was even building a strong bond with my aunt and brother and he had to be a moron again.

Nails: "What is wrong I thought you were not working today?"

Lara: "I need your help."

Nail: "What have you done?"

I told him everything about Mlulami from the day he saw me worried about the moment I got to his office.

Nails: "I told you to go and get a protection order we were going to report him now that he has overstepped the boundaries but now look at what he is doing to you."

Lara: "I am so sorry I was busy with exams and he was out of the country when he came back he never bothered me."

Nails: "Abusers never change unless they get help and I doubt he ever got help. If he did he wasn't going to trouble you."

Lara: "He is a proud man who will never go for help. So what do I do?"

Nail: "My niece is in Cape Town coming back after the weekend so from then I am taking over because you are playing with your life. I will be the one to handle this and you will have to sign a permanent contract because her company doesn't represent seasonal or temporal employed people."

Lara: "Is it going to be fine with....."

Nails: "This is not negotiable young lady."

I was emotional and stressed at the same time.

Lara: "Thank you for everything I do not know what to do to repay you."

Nails: "Just do your best to deal with this guy and the rest will fall into place. I am flying to East London tonight I will be back

after the weekend; then first thing on Monday I am taking you to my niece's office to sort this out."

Lara: "Thank you very much you are the best."

I hugged him tight and left with some hope. From then on I switched off my phone and took a taxi home. When I got home my roommate had left a note that she was going to sleepover at her boyfriend's place because she was not working the following day.

I slept like a baby and woke up with a smile and renewed energy. I was even singing but it was short-lived as there was a banging on the door.

Lara: "Okay I am coming."

I was still wearing my gown. When I opened I got the shock of my life. There were three police officers at my doorstep.

Lara: "Morning, how may I help you?"

Lady: "Morning to you too."

Man: "We are looking for Lara Bonolo Rhodes."

Lara: "That will be me."

Man2: "I will be in the car."

He was the scary one and I just looked at him go.

Woman: "Where were you yesterday between 6 pm and 9 pm?"

Lara: "I was at home sleeping."

Woman: "Do you have an alibi to confirm that?"

Lara: "Well I was alone."

They showed me some paper which was a warrant to search my apartment and of my arrest.

Lara: "What?"

Man: "Here is the hoody she was wearing yesterday in the footage."

Lara: "What is going on here?"

Woman: "Lara Bonolo Rhodes you are under arrest for the murder of Mlulami Buthelezi you....."

Lara: "What?!"

Woman: "You have the right to remain....."

I was shaking and had zoomed out. What was going on?

Man: "Let her change then we will take her. I will wait outside with these clothes."

He left and I will never tell you how I dressed and how we got to the police station because it was a haze to me.....

She was quiet and I knew it was going to be the end of the session for that day.

Bukho: "Please Nolo; tell me more."

Lara: "Do not call me that and I am done for today see you on Tuesday."

Bukho: "Oh no I am coming again on Sunday."

Lara: "Suite yourself."

She was hurting and it pained me. I wished I could do something then like hug her I just wiped a tear that was about to fall as I packed my things.....

Lara (Bonolo)

Hearing him use my name like that brought some bad memories.

“Nolo, I love you baby.”

That is what he always said even after taking me to abort my kids he will say that. What kind of a person does that? On the other hand, he had a son and a wife. Although she stayed with his grandmother in the rural areas she was still his wife and the kid worshiped him. I remember I asked once about the photo in his wallet and he said he is the nephew.

When I got to my cell I just buried my head in my pillow and cried. Gail gave me space. That’s what I loved about her; she never pressured me into talking or anything else.

I slept till I was woken by the food commotion. It was time to eat and I was not even hungry.

Gail: “Are you okay?”

Lara: “I am somehow not good at all. “

Gail: “What is wrong Goldie?”

I smiled a little. When she called me like that I always pictured Goldie and his friend Bear.

Lara: "Bukhosi called me Nolo and it brought bad memories."

Gail: "Who is Bukhosi?"

Lara: "Mr. Cheese boy, hellooooo."

Gail: "I am sorry; I know how bad it is to be reminded of something you would rather leave buried away."

Lara: "I do not want to go back there. I want to move on but I can't"

Gail: "You will move on one day."

Lara: "I doubt it will be anytime soon. Do you know what he asked me?"

Gail: "I know you will eventually tell me right?"

I laughed a little.

Lara: "Let me put it the way he asked: "If you were to be given a second chance will you try on the relationship thing?" that is what he asked."

Gail: "What did you say then?"

She seemed so happy and I just looked at her confused.

Lara: "Okay now I am lost why would you be happy about this question? I told him I am okay with my life. When I get out of here I will make money be rich and live large."

Gail: "Or God; you are thick"

Lara: "What do you mean?"

Gail: "No man can ask a lady such a question just in passing. He likes you and he would like to try it with you."

Lara: "Nah.....do you think.....nah; nope that's not what.....do you....nah."

I laughed but looking at her she was serious.

Gail: "You are thick this man likes you if he doesn't love you already."

Lara: "No; he can't love me. Tell me you are joking. He is not supposed to love me not even like me."

I was then pacing up and down shaking my head because she was not making sense.

Gail: "Well try to go back and look at the signs maybe if there are no signs I am not correct. From my knowledge, I told you no man can just buy chocolate for someone that he doesn't like."

I looked back and some of the things were making a little sense; his concern about my sickness, the toiletries

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and then his question. Then I thought about the.....

Lara: "No he can't"

Gail: "Why not?"

Lara: "You wouldn't understand."

Gail: "Try me."

Lara: "Well you see... no, he can't....."

Gail: "What is wrong?"

Lara: "Let's just leave it like this."

Gail: "Okay I will leave it like that. For the record, I wouldn't mind having him as my son in law."

I just laughed,

Lara: "You haven't even met him."

Gail: "I feel like I already know him. So he will be coming for the last time on Tuesday?"

Lara: "He said he is coming on Sunday again."

She mumbled something laughing and I just laughed because arguing with her was going to be a waste of my time.

On Sunday as promised he came. To my surprise, he also brought a few things for me. I couldn't even look him in the eyes. I was blaming Gail for putting ideas in my mind because I didn't want him to love me. I didn't want anyone to love me.

Lara: "Why are you doing this?"

Bukho: "Doing what?"

Lara: "Bringing things and all the....."

I trailed because I didn't want to sound too forward.

Bukho: "It's family day so what better way to disguise my interview?"

I breathed with relief Gail was making me imagine things. This was making me uneasy.

Lara: "I am relieved because I can't afford to let someone love me or love someone else."

Bukho: "Huh?"

Did I just say that out loud? Or God I was tossed. I looked down and cleared my throat.

Lara: "Let's start because today we have to finish. So it will be your last day?"

Bukho: "Why would you say that?"

He was a little hurt and it confused me.

Lara: "I thought we will finish and"

Bukho: "Let us continue what we do today will determine whether we will go to the next stage of the documentary. This is your documentary so we need to make it perfect to convince people if you are guilty or not."

Lara: "Fair enough. Let us do this."

"When we got to the station I was taken to the interrogation room. There was footage of me arguing with him the previous day in the foyer at his workplace.

Detective: "Miss Rhodes is it or not you on the footage?"

Lara: "I am in that footage."

Detective: "Did you or did you not threaten Mr. Buthelezi?"

Lara: "I didn't threaten him."

Detective: "Let us play the footage again."

I was tired of even explaining.”

Lara: “This was just a figure of speech to let him know that I was tired of him abusing me.”

Detective: “So your figure of speech killed him?”

Lara: “I am not saying that because I can’t explain to him being dead after my visit to let him back off.”

Detective: “We still cannot confirm your alibi on this one.”

Lara: “I told you I was alone sleeping at home because I was tired and stressed hence my phone was off.”

Detective: “Could it be probably that you switched it off deliberately then you left it at home because we were going to trace it.”

I was lost for words because I knew I was sleeping.

Lara: “Am I not supposed to get a phone call or a lawyer if you are interrogating me?”

Detective: “Are you guilty Miss Rhodes? People who are guilty need lawyers.”

Lara: “It is my right to get a phone call.”

Detective: “You watch too many movies now tell me; why were you threatening Mr. Buthelezi?”

Lara: "I told you it was a figure of speech and I was angry because of his abuse."

Detective: "Why don't we have even one record of your report of domestic abuse?"

Mr. Nails' words came flushing and I knew I was screwed because I didn't have evidence. I didn't even report him not even once.

Lara: "I was scared of him. Some of his lovers disappeared after reporting him."

Detective: "Are you sure about that Miss because we do not even have a single record of his arrest."

Lara: "What do you want me to say because it seems he is your friend and you covered everything for him. I wouldn't be surprised if you were part of his team."

I snapped because I was really tired and I didn't know how to answer him.

Detective: "Are you accusing me of being a corrupt officer Miss?"

I couldn't answer; while I was staring at him a lady came through and whispered something into his ear. He went out and came back with more evidence. How it got into their hands beats me.

Detective: "Well Miss it seems we have new evidence. We will also need your DNA sample and for you to identify a few items brought from the murder scene."

Lara: "How is that possible?"

Detective: "You tell me. I am the one who is supposed to be asking questions not the other way around."

I kept quiet because I was fighting a losing battle from the start. I so wished those detective series I was always watching was not just on TV. Who was I kidding this was Africa, people never bothered to investigate further.

He told me my mom had passed out at home because I had thought of her as the first suspect to frame me.

Detective: "You say Mrs. Rhodes is capable of this but right now we are trying to sober her up because she is drunk."

Mom drank but not to the extent of being sobered up.

Lara: "You see something doesn't add up. Mom and I are not in good terms but I know that she will never drink to that extent. She is an occasional drinker, not a drunkard."

Detective: "Now you are confusing yourself which one is which? Your mom or who else could have framed you."

Lara: "Yes his brother."

Detective: "The one who is out of town you mean?"

I was defeated.

Detective: "Tell me is he the one you had an affair with while dating the deceased?"

What the hell?

Lara: "I never had an affair with him. He raped me. I never loved him and I will rather die than date him."

Detective: "You love this death word."

I was lost of words. They grilled me for hours. After some time I was drained and tired. They finally let me be but I was still under their custody. My roommate came that day shocked.

Her: "What is going on? "

I told her everything and she was shocked.

Lara: "I do not know what to do."

Her: "What is going on because yesterday when I was in the club I lost my keys and phone together with my wallet? I had to walk to my friend's place to call my boyfriend. I got home that's when I heard about your arrest. This can't be right. It seems like someone has already planned this."

Lara: "My suspicions exactly. "

Her: "You didn't let them take your fingerprints without your lawyer or even a statement without a lawyer present did you?"

Lara: "What was I supposed to do?"

Her: "You do not do that. Once your prints are in the system they can manipulate you. The lawyer was going to help you."

I was naive. I wished I had known. Maybe I was not going to be here.

Lara: "Please do me a favour."

Her: "Anything."

I told her about Mr. Nails and his niece. She tried helping me but already I was in deep. Mr. Nails was out of town and the universe seemed to have been against me and it forgot about my existence.....

Bukho: "So Mr. Nails never helped you?"

Lara: "The niece couldn't because of the company policy and I was not employed anymore as we haven't gotten to the signing of the contract. I got a state lawyer who didn't even take me seriously. I bet he also thought I was guilty....."

Bukho: "So....."

Lara: "Time is up Cheese boy."

I looked at his sad face as I left with yet another plastic bag full

of goodies.....

16

Bukhosi

Why was I not confident enough to just tell her what I wanted to tell her? I looked at her and felt the edge to stop her but I couldn't. I needed to rethink my strategy.

Guard: "She is an intriguing lady isn't she?"

Bukho: "What do you mean?"

Guard: "I would kill to have someone like her in my life."

Bukho: "I don't follow?"

Guard: "I have been watching her she is one in a million. I was talking to Moo she told me that she is innocent. Do you think I have a chance if ever I want to ask her out? I mean some of us do not get the girl because of either out low life or low paying jobs. Sometimes I do not even want to try because the first thing I am asked is 'where do you work? Where do you stay? Which car are you driving?' It's worse when you see your age mates getting serious and getting married because they have money and they have a good background."

That was a lot to take in and I didn't even know what to say. I had to pick up my socks because I had a competition. On the other hand; I just felt sorry for him because he suffered and people judged him because of his background. When all was said and done I just wanted to make it clear that she was mine.

Bukho: "She a very good woman that's why I would like to make an honest woman out of her."

Guard: "Are you..... you mean..... when.....you...."

Bukho: "I know right but like you, there are some demons that stop me from telling her."

Guard: "You mean to tell me that you have it all but you can't even try to tell her?"

Bukho: "People think rich people do not have problems with ladies I say it's very difficult especially for someone like her."

We both laughed, to my surprise he was not mad that I was after what he also wanted.

Guard: "By the way I am Benjamin but you can call me Ben."

Bukho: "You already know me."

Ben: "Yes Mr. Radebe."

I laughed

Bukho: "I am Bukhosi only, please. Why are you cool when I say I want her too when you want her?"

Ben: "I am used to it so that's why it doesn't hurt too much. I have a girl I love too much. This one I like her yes but not the way I love my Thula."

Bukho: "I think we have to do something about that?"

I didn't know what but I felt like I needed to help him because I was going to take Lara away from him.

Ben: "Will you help me for real?"

Bukho: "We will see what to do."

I packed my things and left with a heavy heart. I needed to find a way to sweep her off her feet. Like a 'boom' kind of way. I was not that blank I had to think like a man. Then there and there when I was driving back home I had an epiphany.....

Tuesday came before I expected it but I had started with my plan execution. The drive to prison was as fast as Bolt's 100m sprint.

When I saw her coming towards me my heart just skipped. She was looking very good she didn't have a beanie on but a head-wrap that was making her glow with her medium eyes exposed and I just couldn't help it but drool.

Lara: "Stop looking at me like I am your last meal."

I just laughed but looked at her smile. She looked relaxed.

Bukho: "Hello to you too Miss Rude."

Lara: "Even if I am not rude to you Cheese boy you still call me Miss Rude."

Bukho: "Sorry my love you can't change your birth name. What do they say about the first cut?"

Did I just call her 'my love' was I okay?

Lara: "Well at least after the documentary I won't hear it as you will be out of my life."

Bukho: "Are you sure about that sweetheart?"

She looked at me with wide-open eyes. I just smiled and started the camera.

Bukho: "Let us continue then. What happened after the interrogation?"

Lara: "After my roommate left I felt hollow because I had made the biggest mistake of my life."

"May I please get my lawyer?"

Lawyer: "Right here."

He said getting in. I wondered where he was when they were busy grilling me. The officer left and he was carrying the charge sheet.

Lara: "You know that I didn't do all these things right?"

Lawyer: "But there is evidence in the crime scene and that video where you were threatening him."

Lara: "I was angry and I never meant to do it. I have never been in their home since we broke up and that is more than months back. How could my DNA be there it was surely planted as a lawyer you should know that."

Lawyer: "Are you questioning me?"

Lara: "Instead of finding solutions you are questioning my innocence. I will never kill anyone."

Lawyer: "Listen I am trying to help you here."

Lara: "Okay."

I was done fighting because I didn't have powers. I looked at his lips moving. He wanted me to plead guilty so that I can get a lesser sentence. I couldn't lie at the stand so I told him I will never do it. I was ready to die in jail because I was not going to tarnish my image. I was drained but very adamant that I was not going to lie. I knew once I lied I would forget and crucify myself in the process.

“So these people will never help you? What is the use of these lawyers? You know I always thought that the state lawyers and persecutors are friends. Now I see why I was always suspicious. I wish I can do something for you.”

It was my roommate who had visited me after they refused my bail. I was done hoping for a miracle.

Lara: “Please take my things and take care of my little brother for me. Check on him often even if it’s only once in a few months. Simo will help you too.”

Her: “I feel like you are going to win this case so do not be making last wishes like a dying person.”

We both laughed.

Lara: “From the bail hearing I can see where this is going so don’t bother.”

Her: “I will pray for you and ask for other people to help me with the prayers.”

Lara: “You do what is best for you as for me I doubt there is a God out there because if he was would he let me suffer for being born from infidelity to a mother who thinks I ruined her affair with her lover.”

Her: "These are only trials and tribulations and you will get through this."

Lara: "I have made peace with my life so don't worry about me. Thank you for checking up on me."

Her: "I will get a roommate who will use your room and help me pay the rent. Is it fine with you?"

Lara: "That will be a great idea and you know the money that you are getting is too little so please look for someone who would never give you problems. The other thing; stop wasting money coming here because I will feel so bad knowing that you used the money for food to come and check on me."

She looked down shyly and I knew I had guessed right. I felt tears forming but I had to be strong.

Lara: "Please do not make such sacrifices, I understand your situation."

She never listened to me because she visited a couple of times before the trial and all those times she came with her boyfriend so I knew it was saving her money. Besides she was my only visitor and I was grateful as she knew how to cheer me up.

Since I came here she hasn't called or visited, I saw her posts they changed her shifts so she is working even on weekends and overtime.

When the trial started I was blur; as in I was in a dream and I couldn't think. The persecutor made my life a living hell in the stand. My lawyer was not a match for him. He couldn't even cross-examine the witnesses and was crushed like a bug. I even suspected that he bought his law degree. I just lost hope when the DNA in the crime scene matched to mine.

Bukho: "So you mean to tell me that you couldn't ask for a different lawyer."

Lara: "He bragged and told me that he was the best in his department that's why he was always assigned to serious cases."

Bukho: "That is so unfair but why didn't you try?"

Lara: "Changing a lawyer takes time. They told me that I had to file a complaint stating my reasons which will be filed and reviewed after some months from then it will take time to file at the courts for the case to take shape. He told me I was going to spend years before I even go to the trial. I think I gave up too easily I should have waited. Anyway

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I gave in and he continued."

Bukho: "You say he did not even try a character witness for you?"

Lara: "I didn't know about these things until I was here."

Bukho: "Who is helping you now because you said then?"

Lara: "I am taking an online law degree now under the correctional services education programme."

I was impressed I think I fell in love. She was not just the beauty but also the brains. Was I smitten?

Lara: "Why are you smiling?"

Bukho: "Nothing; I just want to know how this degree is going."

Lara: "Is this part of the documentary?"

I was taken aback but of course, it was part of the documentary.

Bukho: "Yes dear it's part of the documentary. We need to make it real because if you are to be proven guilty or not all facts need to appear there. Do you think a murderer would want to further her education to prove her innocence?"

Lara: "You are making sense."

I breathed a sigh of relief there.

Bukho: "So tell me did they ever suspect anyone?"

Lara: "I have several suspects in my head but I do not want to speculate. The reason I want to do this documentary is to find out who killed Mlulami."

Bukho: "Do you think he didn't commit suicide or fake his own death."

Lara: "Killing himself no; he loved life to the fullest to end his life unless he was forced to do it. As in faking his death there might be a possibility but I doubt; the autopsy never lies."

I switched off the camera

Bukho: "Off the record. Who do you suspect?"

Lara: "I have a number; his brother, his wife, the girlfriend who was with him when I was raped, the girl who was beaten who moved to Swaziland; or the family of the girl who disappeared without a trace."

Bukho: "It's a long list our lawyer will have a hard time trying to solve this one."

Lara: "Our what? Wowowowo what is this about whose lawyer are you talking about."

I didn't mean to let the cat out of the bag but it was done.

Bukho: "Please do not be mad at me but I hired a lawyer because we might need one when they start re-investigating

the case.” She shook her head with a blank stare. “Say something.”

Lara: “I am just wondering when did it become ‘our’ case.” I was blank I didn’t know what to do. “What do you want from me Bukhosi?”

Bukho: “I.....I...”

Lara: “Look; no man can just go to all the lengths for nothing. I know that this is not all about the documentary so please enlighten me.”

Bukho: “I want you to get a fair chance; my dad advised me to get a lawyer so that your case won’t just be dismissed.”

God, why was I scared of this woman?

Lara: “If you say so I am very grateful and I have realised now that you know your job and I will get the documentary I expected. Thank you very much.”

Bukho: “Trust me I will and please Nolo may you let me in.”

Lara: “I am sorry Bukhosi I can’t. Besides the hurt and the heartbreak I am” She trailed looked at me with teary eyes.

“You will tell me when you need more information about the documentary for now that is my story. Help me find who killed Mlulami and framed me. Thank you for your time.”

She was even polite I was shocked. I looked at her walking away as I felt like losing a piece of me.

17

Lara (Bonolo)

He is not supposed to feel anything for me; he can't.

I was shaking and I didn't want Gail to see me like that. I asked sis Moo to take me to the bathroom so I can wipe my face.

Moo: "Are you okay?"

Lara: "Why do all these things happen to me?"

Moo: "What did he do to you?"

Lara: "Nothing at all."

I didn't know how to answer. I just sank on the bathroom floor and cried.

Lara: "Don't I deserve some happiness in my life? Why would I endure torture all my life and then get sent here when I did nothing to anyone. Why does God hate me so much? Who did I offend? Why did I have to be born in the first place?"

I felt arms wrapping around my shoulders.

Moo: "If you are innocent God will help you; my child."

Lara: "I do not think there is a God out there. If he is there then people lied that he is love because I have never experienced that all my life. If he is the one who created me then why did he do that to let me suffer as I do?"

Moo: "You know without suffering there will be no compassion. Without bad, there won't be good."

Lara: "I just wish I was bad maybe I will feel better because I would know I deserved it. Sometimes at night I feel like committing suicide but I want to prove my innocence; then I will end all the suffering."

Moo: "There are people who haven't eaten a thing in a few days but they have hope that all will go well. We have parents who are always crying at night because they do not know where their children are, they don't even know how to talk to them because they will never listen. Some children are raising themselves because their parents are too busy enjoying their lives to care. Some are raising themselves because the beast of the disease took their parents. Should I continue"

I was still crying but her smooth hands were soothing me.

Lara: "I will think about it. Thank you for listening."

Moo: "No problem Goldie and don't get used to it."

We both laughed, the name had grown I didn't even mind anymore. After a while I was calm she took me to my cell.

Gail: "You took longer today."

I knew my eyes were swollen but when I smiled it covered the swell.

Moo: "You were even counting microseconds." We laughed "It's allowed to care a little you know. Goldie here has some special powers you see. She made you and I softies overnight.

Lara: "You grannies sure know how to gang up on a child."

Moo: "Child my wrinkled boobs."

We laughed as we watched her leave. Who said there was no life in a hellhole? We had our moments of fear of cause; with strikes that will be led to food rationing and removed privileges. Above all these two women and the doc made my life easier.

Gail: "You are not okay are you? "

Nothing went past her.

Lara: "I am better now but today was draining. I am done with my story now he has to compile everything including sound and actors with actresses for the documentary. So do you think it will take long?"

Gail: "You are asking the wrong person"

Lara: "I just want this to be over and done with. I am not trying to run away from this place but....."

Gail: "No need to explain I think you have overstayed your welcome here child and you will end up like me your mother." I just laughed. "Time is running fast and you will not catch up on life if you are stuck here."

Lara: "Okay

let's hope it won't take time."

Guard: "Lara; you have a visitor."

Gail & Lara: "What?"

Don't tell me he came back again? I was not ready for him again.

Guard: "How many Laras are in this cell?"

Lara: "Okay I am coming."

We both looked at each other with Gail and shrugged our shoulders. It was not sis Moo but a guy I usually saw here and there. There were only three guys and the warden; the rest of the staff were female.

"Hlengiwe what are you doing here?"

This was a surprise she looked good. You must be wondering who she was; yes you guessed right my roommate.

Hlengi: "You don't want me here."

Lara: "Are you kidding? I would never; I am just surprised I know that they changed your shifts so you are free today?"

Hlengi: "I am free for two weeks. I am going away for a holiday I have been slaving forever so I needed this. I wouldn't have left without seeing you I was going to have bad luck."

Lara: "Are you telling me that I am a good luck omen?"

Hlengi: "Do not flatter yourself, woman. How have you been though?" I told her everything about the documentary and my good and bad days. "I knew you were going to find a way. I have also been asking around but you know my time is limited so it was only a few people who are not lawyers who told me about an appeal. I am happy for you. I can't wait for you to come back home. Have good news too."

Lara: "Out with it."

Hlengi: "It seems your boss started paying your part of the rent so there was no need for me to get a roommate."

Lara: "Did he tell you that?"

Hlengi: “No I wouldn’t even think of approaching him. Do you know how scary Mr. Nails is? I went to the bank the first time to pay and they told me half has been paid already. I then asked who paid when they named his company I knew it was him.”

Lara: “I do not know what to say. There is some positivity at least. I know you wouldn’t have been comfortable sharing with someone else.”

Hlengi: “You know me well. I am happy that you will not worry when you get out of here. I wish it will be soon enough I miss my roommate so much. I feel lonely even when Mr is around he can’t even close your gap.”

Lara: “You are still together?”

Hlengi: “He is my ride or die.”

We laughed; it was good to spend time with her; she had brought some goodies and toiletries. I was lucky.

Hlengi: “Simo settled in well when I told her I was coming here she felt hurt that she is far.”

Lara: “This is great and I hope she will invite us for her graduation.”

Hlengi: “We are going there don’t worry. I told her I was going to go there for my honeymoon.”

Lara: "When is the wedding?"

Hlengi: "In future my love."

We laughed hard as we continued to chat about other things. I thanked her as she left very happy that there was the hope of

me getting out of the place. I was wondering whether Mr. Nails was going to pay the rent up until I got out of prison or when I died there.

Gail was surprised like I was about the issue. She was only happy that I was going to have at least some support system when I got out of there. She was also happy that I had a caring roommate. I had given up hope but her gesture made me change my mind. I was going to get out of there for my little brother and Hlengi; not forgetting my aunt.

The week ended and I didn't hear anything from Mr. Cheese boy. I was missing him somehow. I liked to see his face when I was rude to him. During the weekend we had a picnic which was once in a few months so it was made special. The food was not that great but the fact that the setup was heavenly so we didn't have anything to complain about. Some families came and they had a great time while I somehow wished Mr. Cheese boy was there.

I was surprised when he came on a Tuesday of the following week. He was a little agitated and I didn't know what was going on.

Lara: "I thought we were done here or you had changed your mind."

Bukho: "Hello to you too my love."

Okay, I was going to pretend I didn't hear that.

Lara: "Hello."

Bukho: "Sorry I missed the picnic if I knew I was going to come because I knew you were alone. Anyway, I had been having sleepless nights helping the guys finish the documentary because I wanted it done as soon as possible. For now, we are left with the final touch-ups then by tomorrow I wanted to approach several entities and TV stations. I also want to cover all the social media platforms as long as the rights are approved."

I was shocked he was that fast. He was worth giving a chance. I didn't know what to say really; I was ecstatic.

Bukho: "Let us start with the performers. I want you to be comfortable with how they portray your story so here we go."

He turned the laptop and the guard had to check what we were doing but I didn't mind it was that friendly guy and it seemed Mr. Cheese boy knew him well.

Bukho: "Do not mind Ben. Ben; please check everything also it will help us with your opinion."

He smiled so his name was Ben. At least it was going to be easier for me because more heads were better than one.

I was happy with all the cast. My character was taken by a beautiful young lady and she was a better version of me. Don't even think about it I was not jealous. Overall I was happy with the cast and the setup. When I was done he made me sign an agreement that he was going to use for online permission.

Bukho: "So tell me are we on the right track?"

Lara: "Are you kidding me? This is more than I expected. If I doubted you before I am sorry I was wrong because you know what you are doing."

Bukho: "This is the first documentary I do not want mistakes besides it has to get you out of here because I am not going to survive if"

The last part was a whisper but I heard I was feeling my heart palpating a little.

Lara: "What did you say?"

Bukho: "Nothing I need to make sure that you get out of here because that is the purpose of that in the first place."

Lara: "Thank you very much."

Bukho: "No need this is my job. Is there anything else that you want to ask or add so far in the documentary?"

Lara: "Will I watch it first before it goes public."

Bukho: "I will have to talk to the warden but I don't see any problem."

Lara: "That's great I can kiss you right now."

Bukho: "That will make my day and it just gave me an idea."

I just laughed but then looked at him and he was serious. What the.....

Lara: "It was just a figure of speech don't take it literally."

Bukho: "Do not spoil my mood because I just needed motivation for what I am about to do now."

Lara: "What do you mean?"

He looked at Ben and nodded I was more than confused. Ben took the camera and I watched him going down on one knee. What the.....

Bukho: “I know you won’t believe me right now but I can’t think of a better way to say this. I have never been in a relationship so that’s why I do not know how to do this. When I came here I was sceptical but when I got to know you I got to love you.

I am not feeling sorry for you for what happened but I love you for who you are. I know you doubt yourself worth these days but I am willing to wait. Even if it means I take your case to Supreme Court I will do it because I want to be happy too and make you happy. I am not perfect I know but I want to try to

please you the way you want to be pleased. I am also not good at words but I hope my actions will speak for me. Please Bonolo Lara Rhodes will you make me the happiest man and marry me.”

What was going on? Was I dreaming or what? Aren’t people supposed to date before they propose or something? Why was this God of theirs giving me a serious man when I was in prison and when I was s.....

Bukho: “Please say something.”

Lara: “I.....”

18

Bukhosi

My knee was killing she was just looking at me with tears in her eyes and as if I had horns in my forehead.

Bukho: "Please baby say something my knee is killing me."

She just shook her head and took my hands making me stand in the process as I looked into her eyes. She looked at the ring and back at me. I had bought it the day I told Ben I was in love with her. It was neither cheap nor expensive; I didn't want to scare her at the same time I didn't want to make her look cheap.

Lara: "You are really serious."

Her voice was shaking

Bukho: "I am as serious as a heart attack and as sure as the rising sun."

She looked down then she looked at Ben.

Lara: "May we have some privacy."

Bukho: "I need my answer first."

Lara: "He will continue later when I am done."

Bukho: "I hope it will be something to soothe my heart because I have a small heart and I do not want to be admitted to ICU before I make history with my documentary."

She just laughed; her laugh was all I wanted to hear all the time.

Lara: "How about I send you to the mortuary then?"

Bukho: "As long as you are there I won't mind going to that mortuary."

Lara: "You are really crazy."

Bukho: "About you yes."

I asked Ben to give us some privacy as I knew that she didn't want him to hear what was going to be said.

We looked at each other for some time and she relayed her reasons why we can't be together. I looked at her without any emotion. She looked down but all in all, it didn't change how I felt about her.

Bukho: "Is that all?"

She looked at me confused or was she expecting me to back down because of the information she relayed to me. To her surprise, I didn't freight.

Lara: "You see I can't do this to you."

Bukho: "Nolo even if you had one eye I will still love you. I am in love with the whole of you. I am not in love with a broken young lady who was telling me a story but I am in love with the

woman behind the entire mask and all the hurt. We will walk this road together hand in hand and I will not go anywhere. I know as much as you are not perfect I am not perfect too but that won't stop us from being happy."

She was in tears. I looked at Ben he approved and I just stood up and hugged her. She fitted perfectly in my arms. I knew that was probably the last time I felt her warmth on my skin; contact was not allowed so we were going to treasure that for this moment up until she was out.

Lara: "Why would you do that?"

Bukho: "Because I love you."

Lara: "How do you know that you love me?"

Bukho: "I can't do anything without thinking of you. When I imagine the future I can't imagine it without you in the picture. When I picture our kids I only see the girls with a splitting image of you."

She smiled.

Lara: "But we can't have kids."

Bukho: "We will; never doubt the power of God."

Lara: "I do not believe in God."

Bukho: "You will eventually. So tell me I am still waiting what do you say?"

Lara: "Okay."

Bukho: "Okay what?"

Lara: "I will give it a try only because I am here so it will give me time to think about this whole thing."

Bukho: "Yessssss."

I punched the air, I was over the moon and I knew this was the beginning of my life. I had the zeal to get her out of there.

Lara: "You are such a baby Mr. Cheese boy."

Bukho: "I am your baby Mrs. Cheese boy Radebe."

Lara: "Not yet."

Bukho: "As soon as you get out of here you will be."

Lara: "if you say so."

Bukho: "Hay man; am I allowed to kiss the bride?"

Ben and Lara just laughed with her closing her face with her hands.

Ben: "Just this once and if I get fired you two will pay."

I didn't wait for the other second after the permission I took her to my arms and crushed my lips into hers. Hell, that was heavenly and I couldn't resist deepening the kiss.

Bukho: "I love you."

She didn't say it back but I was not worried because I wanted to give her time. I knew they didn't want rings or earrings inside but I knew she was going to make a plan.

Bukho: "Do you like the ring?"

Lara: "Are you kidding I love... it's okay."

Bukho: "You are not a good liar my dear I will take the first part and finish it myself."

We both laughed.

Lara: "Let me go before I get into trouble."

Bukho: "Do not miss me too much."

Lara: "As if I will."

Bukho: "We will see about that. If you miss me you have my number."

I smiled knowing that I will be away so she was going to see me after a week or two. I was going to come back when the documentary was done and dusted. I wanted to work extra hard so that she got out of that hellhole.

Some people might think I was not in love it was just on impulsive. Then who knows how the heart works and who has a manual for love? You may get to know a person for years and feel like you don't know them at all. You may marry someone at first sight and live happily ever after.

Lara: "We will see Mr. Cheese boy."

Bukho: "You don't say that to your husband."

She laughed kissed my cheek and left. I shook my head.

Ben: "That was some proposal. I am happy she said yes. At some point, I thought she was going to say no." Bukho: "I was even shaking on my boots."

Ben: "Now what should I wear for the wedding?"

Bukho: "Wowowowo tiger I have to work hard you see how I grovelled to get my proposal I have to work hard before the wedding talk."

Ben: "I will be waiting."

Bukho: "Do not forget the weekend plan."

We had become friends although his working hours were always clashing with mine.

Ben: "I will be there and don't forget my things."

Bukho: "Cool."

I packed and left a happy soul. I was driving straight home my parents needed to know that. I was serious about marrying her regardless of all odds.

Mom: "Today it's going to snow candy I tell you."

Bukho: "Hello to you too mom"

Dad: "Oh the rainy clouds are forming already."

Bukho: "What kind of parents are you? I thought you will be happy to see me here. I think I will start the process of adopting new parents."

They both laughed.

Mom: "Never heard of parent adoption."

Dad: "Good luck with finding awesome parents like us."

They fist-bumped I just laughed. Those two you would swear they got married yesterday when they had been married for years; like decades ago.

Bukho: "You are not cool at all. Well, let me go back to my house with the good news I was bringing to you."

Mom: "Come on my son we are waiting."

Bukho: "I knew you were going to be the first one to comment. Anyway

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no one will spoil my mood then. You have to sit down for this."

They looked at each other and sat down.

Dad: "Do not keep us waiting."

Bukho: "Drum roll please."

Mom hit me with a cushion.

Mom: "Do not make me beat you now."

Bukho: "Well I am getting married."

They both stared at me like I had developed another head.

They looked at each other and then back to me.

Dad: "Please this is a fast-forwarded movie."

Mom: "Yes I feel like I saw the beginning; then the end of the movie before I watched the middle part."

Dad: "Please rewind to the part when you are dating and introducing your girlfriend to us."

Bukho: "Well I just proposed today and she reluctantly said yes."

Mom: "If I hear another riddle coming from you Bukhosi Radebe I am going to murder you."

Bukho: "Yes ma'am."

I sat up straight and looked at them. God, it was difficult but I had to say it.

Bukho: "I am marrying Lara the one I am working with on the documentary."

Both: "What?"

Okay, I was in trouble then.

Dad: "You mean to tell me..."

Mom: "Are you sure about that?"

Bukho: "I love her mom and I want to spend the rest of my life with her. I know it might sound odd but I do not need to date someone to know I want a future with her."

Dad: "That's a brave move son and you are really brave to do that, what did she say? Details man I need details."

Bukho: "Dad when did you become this nosey."

Dad: "Since you left me with your mom who is always telling me all these stories."

Mom was just staring into space.

Bukho: “Mom; please say something.”

Mom: “I do not know what to say but to say I am finally alone. All my kids are married now.”

Bukho: “I am not married yet.”

Dad: “Are you happy for him though?”

Mom: “Are you kidding me. This is like the best news ever. I was thinking maybe he was not getting married ever, no girlfriend nothing you see.”

Well, that was not so bad but I knew questions were going to follow sooner than expected for the moment I wanted to enjoy the happy moment.

I went home late I was going to be tied up on the documentary so I needed rest. After my bath, there was a knock at the door. When I opened the shock I got...

Bukho: “Please not today devil.”

What the.....

19

Lara (Bonolo)

I was crying again. This time around I didn't know why; it was not intense I just went to the cell conflicted.

Gail: "Are you okay?" I just nodded. "It seems like I am asking this question a lot these days Goldie. What is going on?"

I just showed her the ring.

Gail: "Wowowowo please back up a little, what am I missing here in this equation? I know I was not good at Maths but I know an equation is supposed to have an X and Y."

I just laughed.

Lara: "Not all equations are supposed to have the unknown."

Gail: "Hay you Goldie I am not here for a Maths lesson. I shot the Maths teacher with a slingshot now I don't want to be reminded of those traumatic days."

Lara: "Okay, okay; well I am engaged."

Gail: "I see this is an engagement ring but to whom and wait.... well start from the beginning because some of us are slow."

I told her everything and she was smiling; then frowning and smiling so I couldn't read her at all.

Lara: "So I am not sure I just told him that I will think about it."

Gail: "Well I think accepting it is thinking about it so are you happy?"

Lara: "Wait till you watch the documentary and then you will ask me that question again."

Gail: "Well party pooper but I am happy. Now this will motivate him to work harder for you to leave this place."

Lara: "In reality, I do not know how to feel. What if he hurt me too?"

Gail: "Then you will murder him and come back here."

We both laughed.

Lara: "You are not serious."

Gail: "Just giving you some ideas don't shoot me. Well on a serious note there is no guarantee that he won't hurt you and you also do not have a guarantee that you will leave this place alive so my advice is to take a leap of faith and live a little because you only live once."

Lara: "Well I will think about it. For now, I am concentrating on getting out of here."

Gail: "Yes that should be your priority because if you don't leave this place he will find someone else."

My heart was palpating I almost peed on my pants. Was I really thinking about him in that way? I had a few months to think about it because I knew it was not going to be overnight. He was going to have to work hard to convince the judge for a re-trial.

Gail: "I have to give it to him. This ring is expensive and to think that he straight out proposed it shows that he is not here to play games."

Lara: "My thoughts exactly that's why I gave it a thought. We will see how this whole thing turns out. Otherwise, if he is not serious at least I will be out of here soon."

Gail: "You know that jewellery is not allowed here so what will you do?"

Lara: "I was thinking about this too. I will have to ask Sis Moo maybe she will have an idea. I also do not want her to get into trouble with the warden; you know how scary that man is."

Gail: "He might even take it for his wife. This thing is too expensive; you can also ask your 'fiancée' to keep it safe for you."

She said air quoting the word fiancée, I just laughed at her

Lara: "I do not want him to have it. What if he changes his mind at least I will still have the ring to myself."

Gail: "No negative thinking please Cheese man is not like that."

I cracked up with laughter.

Lara: "Mr. Cheese boy."

Gail: "No boy can propose; he has graduated from Mr. Cheese boy to Mr. Cheese man."

Lara: "What am I going to do with you?"

Gail: "Nothing at all except to marry my son in law and make many beautiful babies that looks like you"

There we go again; the baby talk. I was scared all the time. I was going to tell Gail later not now. It was still a sensitive issue. I was still wrapping my head around about the issue too.

Lara: "If you say so."

We laughed but my heart was sour. Why didn't I meet him first before I met the monster? Well

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life was so unfair. I didn't even want to be happy or think about the future I just took each day as it came.

Moo: "So you were hiding this from me?"

It was after we told her about the ring.

Lara: "It happened so fast I didn't know he had feelings for me."

Moo: "Liar; I saw the way you two always looked at each other."

Gail: "Is he handsome?"

Trust Gail to just ask random questions at a serious time; at least she gave us a laugh.

Moo: "Handsome is an understatement. If I were his age I would do him any other day."

Gail: "You don't say."

Lara: "Eew that is so gross."

We laughed again.

Moo: "Well there were no words in my vocabulary to explain how handsome he is."

Gail: "Now I have the clear picture."

Moo: "I will see what to do. For now, keep it with you and then I will ask the warden then take it from there. If there are witnesses it won't disappear don't worry."

Lara: "Thank you very much."

Moo: "He is really moneyed this ring is expensive."

Gail: "Exactly what I told her. I wish to be at the wedding. I am so green with envy."

*

The week passed without a word from him. To his word, I missed him so much. I wasn't in love yet but I just missed our fights. I ended up calling him.

"P.S Productions how may I help you?"

But I called his personal cell phone?

Lara: "Ah...ah..; wrong number."

Bukho: "I told you that you will miss me."

This man wanted to die I tell you. The voice was of a woman at first so what was going on?

Lara: "You have a death wish I see. Who was the lady who answered the call?"

Bukho: "Jealous are we, Mrs. Radebe."

Lara: "I will drop this call now."

Bukho: "I missed you, Miss Rude."

Lara: "Bukhosi!"

Bukho: "You call my name in such a seductive and sexy way. I wonder how you will call me when I am pleasuring you."

I was even blushing and I knew he was doing it deliberately.

Lara: "I will....."

Bukho: "I missed you too my love but I am busy working day and night so that this will be over soon. To answer your question: I learnt that from my drama class so I can even make monster voices."

I just laughed; my money was not enough so the call was about to be terminated.

Lara: "Sorry I don't have enough units to call you. We will talk some other time as long as you are fine."

Bukho: "Okay Mrs. Radebe take care of yourself I love you and....."

I couldn't hear the rest because the call was terminated. I was holding the phone receiver like a retard smiling.

"We also want to use the phone; missy."

I looked behind me gave her the phone then walked away smiling.

Gail: "Someone is in a good mood."

Lara: "Never ask and you will hear no lies."

She laughed. She knew I was going to call Bukho so she just wanted to fish.

Gail: "Well I hope tomorrow there will be a reply to the last email that I sent."

My heart sank because I was there happy while she was still fighting some demons. She had started emailing to her daughter but there was still no response. I am the one who encouraged her and went all out to look for the email address. I think she was still angry. I was planning on paying a visit to her once I managed to get out of the dungeon.

Lara: "I still believe that she will definitely get back to you."

Gail: "I want her back I am a changed person even if I am here I feel like I can still be in her life somehow. You being in my life changed everything. Thank you for being here. I want you to get out of here soon but at the same time, I want to be selfish. I had been a loner but you changed that."

Lara: "I am not going anywhere I will always be here."

I said touching her heart. Gail: "And I will always be here."

She touched my heart. She was right people like her came once in a lifetime so I was not prepared to lose her.

Gail: "I think I will miss your stupidity more and your pee."

I just covered my face with both my hands. She reminded me of my early days in the hellhole where I peed every chance I got. I was stronger and I knew nothing was going to move me once I was out of there.

Another week passed and I was even agitated not trusting that he was going to come at all but on Sunday when it was going to be two hours visit from the families he came. I looked at him as he connected the laptop. Most families were out in the picnic tables. He was looking so fine with his blue jacket which matched his sneakers with the cap. He was wearing white jeans with a white T-shirt. He was looking good and he smelt so good. I wished I could just bury my face in his chest.

Bukho: "I know I am handsome; baby but I am all yours do not look at me as if I am your last meal before the sacrifice."

I was ashamed I just looked aside.

Lara: "Do not get ahead of yourself Mr. Cheese boy."

Bukho: "You know Miss Rude if you call me Mr. Cheese Boy it automatically says you are Mrs. Cheese boy?"

Lara: "Not cool, not cool at all."

Bukho: "See I love it when you sulk and I want to do it while I am on to....."

I knew where this was going so I just cut the conversation.

Lara: "Do not make me murder you, Mr. Radebe."

Bukho: "Yes Mrs. Radebe."

I just laughed and Sis Moo laughed also from the far end. I just covered my face and looked down.

Bukho: "Alright the documentary is done so we are watching it now. Do you want her to be around?"

Lara: "Are you for real?"

I couldn't believe we were done and my journey was about to begin.

Bukho: "Yes we are done and I asked you if you want her here."

He was talking about Sis Moo. I wanted to watch it alone first before other people saw it. I wasn't sure if he included or excluded some personal things the way I wanted them portrayed. Lara: "Is it possible to lose her?"

He nodded yes.

Lara: "Okay then please I would like to watch it alone first."

He nodded and gave me a pad and pencil to jot down what I needed to change. They went outside with Sis Moo leaving me to myself. My heart was on its own race I watched it and

in some places crying but I was happy with the result. He was really good. I shouldn't have doubted him from the start.

Bukho: "So what do you think?"

Lara: "I....."

20

Bukhosi

"What do you want here and who gave you my address?"

I was not in the mood for this guy he was a nuisance and so was the sister/ cousin or whatever."

Him: "I am here because I need your help."

Bukho: "I have nothing to help you with because you always invite trouble wherever you go."

Since I deleted her number; I never heard from her, not even an email nothing now her cousin who was always in trouble was at my doorstep.

Him: "I do not need your money I just need your help."

Bukho: "I am not going to get into trouble because of you please just leave in peace."

Him: "That's why Yoli left you, you are such a douche."

I was fine as a douche because I didn't need them at all.

Bukho: "What trouble did you run into now?"

Him: "You are not going to help me so why should I tell you?"

Bukho: "Suite yourself."

Him: "These walls and money cannot protect you forever
sissy boy."

Bukho: "Wowowowo hold t there tiger are you
threatening me?"

Him: "Whatever; but watch your back."

Bukho: "Well I think it's time you left my place before I call the
police."

Him: "Typical of you spoilt brats."

I slammed the door on his face because we were still standing
by the door. The devil was really tempting me. I was not
going to entertain him because I was still happy that I got the
girl finally.

The following morning I got to the office earlier than anyone
else editing the documentary. After the editing, I was going
to let the guys direct it, and then I was going to check the
final product.

Editor: "Did you sleep here?"

Bukho: "I might as well; it feels like I never even slept this is too much work. I need to finish this before the next month ends. I need to talk to all media houses I need to go all out."

He looked at me with inquisitive eyes and I just continued with my editing. I didn't want people knowing that she was my

fiancée because they were going to say I took it for that reason only.

While I was working I received a call from my dad.

Bukho: "Missing me already."

Dad: "Do not even flatter yourself. How are you?"

Bukho: "I can't complain I am good."

Dad: "Yesterday when you left we discussed with your mom."

Oh; oh that was not good at all, I was praying they were not going to stop me from marrying her.

Bukho: "Good or bad conversation?"

Dad: "Good."

Bukho: "Well that is better because I was thinking you would stop me."

Dad: “We will never choose partners for you. Well, we never discussed the bride price and all. When are you planning the wedding?”

Oh boy

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I forgot about those things but as for the wedding, I was planning a surprise wedding for her.

Bukho: “Well as for the bride price I don’t know I will have to ask her but I know she will have to ask her aunt and the father’s family. I was thinking of asking Mom and my sisters to help me plan a surprise wedding for her.”

Dad: “Dreaming big are we?”

Bukho: “I feel like going these small things for her and I want to make it memorable.”

Dad: “Do not take her as a pet project.”

Bukho: “Never; if I wanted a pet project I would have looked for someone free.”

Dad: “If you say so. I would advise you to know her first before you guys tie the knot; also make sure it’s the wedding of her dreams. Some women do not want big weddings.”

Bukho: "I will because I want it to be perfect. Besides she is a reserved person so I do not want her feeling uncomfortable on her special day."

Dad: "You already know her that much."

Bukho: "If you love someone it becomes your duty to know every little thing about them."

Dad: "I taught you well my boy."

We both laughed.

Bukho: "Do not even flatter yourself I know where I got those genes and your wife will attest to that."

Dad: "Your mom has nothing on me, my boy."

Bukho: "Keep lying to yourself if it will make you feel better."

Dad: "Whatever hater. I love you, my son."

Bukho: "I am not a kid anymore and my wife will not like it at all."

He laughed

Dad: "Wife or no wife I can still whip your black behind in front of her. "

I laughed and dropped the call. How did I get so lucky and have such parents? I imagined how Nolo felt when she was all alone in this world. I was going to make sure I closed that gap.

The week passed without my notice as I was too busy. I missed her so much but I needed to work around the clock to make sure I finished the documentary. The second week she called me and that made my day and gave me the oomph to finish on time.

I was happy with the end product and I needed her to watch it first. I knew what her request was so I let her be.

Moo: "You really love her?"

We were looking at her through the glass window as she watched the documentary.

Bukho: "It feels like I have known her all my life I do not even have any doubts that she is the one."

Moo: "I hope for your sake you won't hurt her."

Bukho: "You like her too?"

Moo: "Just like my own. I somehow feel like she doesn't belong here. She has that thing in her that draws you to her. She even tamed our Gail will you believe it."

Bukho: "Who is she?"

She told me all about her stay since she got in there. I was amazed that the two of them were that kind to her.

Bukho: "I never knew that's what she went through. This will also add value to her documentary."

Moo: "She has been through a lot that's why I am saying if you hurt her I will be the one on the other side next time after murdering you."

Bukho: "I never thought prisons had people like you and this Gail woman."

Moo: "Not all people are mean and not all prisons are bad. Some days are bad but we make the best out of it. I have

worked here for most of my life and I came to see different people. Some can drive you to the monstrous side but the good ones will keep you going."

Bukho: "Well this documentary will not only change people's minds about prison it will also educate them. I realise now that not all people who are behind bars are guilty. You and Ben have shown me the other side of life that I have never even imagined it existed."

Moo: "You are always enclosed in your protective walls; that's why I am glad you took this job maybe next time you will talk to

the warden and write and film about life behind bars and within these walls.”

Bukho: “That’s a swell idea; see we have a long way to go together.”

Moo: “I am glad I could help and then you will get to meet Gail the one who had been nurturing and mothering her from the time she got here.”

Bukho: “I can’t thank you enough. Well, it looks like she is done let us go back in there.”

She was done and wiping her tears. Her documentary was touching so she was bound to cry as I did too. Do not even think about telling her because I will murder you.

Bukho: “So what do you think?”

I was looking at her sitting there opposite me with an expressionless stare.

Lara: “I.....”

Bukho: “Just a review so that I can go and polish it a little if need be.”

Lara: “You are good at what you do. I am not complaining a lot.”

Bukho: “I am good at so many things. I can even show you how good I am at.....”

I wanted to lighten up the mood she was too tense. I couldn't blame her I was that tense too when I finished it. She laughed covering her face and her laugh was always making me weak.

Lara: “You are very naughty. Are you always this naughty?”

Bukho: “But baby; I was not being naughty I was going to say I want to show you the series I am working on.”

Lara: “I know you are lying love.”

She called me ‘love’. Let me poke her.

Bukho: “Did you just call me love?”

Lara: “What?”

She was acting surprised but I was going to take it. She was slowly warming up to me.

Bukho: “I will take the first comment, Mrs. Radebe. So back to the documentary; what do you want me to change?”

She gave me the pad where she wrote the changes which were not many so I was good to go. It gave me the courage that I was on the right track.

Lara: "Thank you again for this. I am always crossing my fingers that this works."

Bukho: "Pray also, it will help a lot."

Lara: "I am in between for now. I still believe your God is punishing me for what I do not know so I will pass."

Bukho: "I will pray for both of us that's what husbands are supposed to do."

She widened her eyes.

Bukho: "What?"

Lara: "You are not my husband."

Bukho: "Yet. While you are on that topic; my dad was asking about the bride price and stuff he wants to know where we should go."

Lara: "What?"

Bukho: "We can't get married without those formalities I know you know that."

Lara: "Why the rush? I told you I am still thinking about the proposal."

Bukho: "I am not going to play games with you. I know what I want and I will neither disappoint you nor hurt you."

Lara: "This is too much for me; may I please shelve it till we are done with the documentary and the case."

Bukho: "I will take that. At least you are not entirely dismissing it but shelving it. I love you."

Lara: "Okay."

Bukho: "I know you love me too so do not worry."

We both laughed as I folded my things. I wanted to make sure the documentary was aired the following week. At least most of the television stations had signed the agreement for it. I was left with international platforms only.

Bukho: "I know you will be out of here soon. So better plan your wedding and email the details to me ASAP."

She choked on her saliva.

Lara: "What?"

Bukho: "I love you more baby."

Lara: "That is my cue to leave."

Bukho: "Do not miss me too much this time around."

Lara: "Mr. Cheese boy leave before I murder you and stay here for the right reasons."

Bukho: "Yes Mrs. Cheese boy I will not say anything."

Lara: "You are crazy."

Bukho: "Just because you drive me crazy Mrs. Radebe."

She just laughed and left me admiring her. I always wondered how she looked without a head tie. What is love?

One said it is truly giving and receiving affection; we don't even ponder such philosophical questions we just feel and move on.....

21

Lara (Bonolo)

Happy was an understatement; I was ecstatic about the documentary. Besides showing the Zoe part a little vague and leaving some facts about his brother that he left out.

When I got to my cell after watching the documentary I had mixed emotions in a way that I couldn't even think straight.

Gail: "I think I am getting tired of asking you what is going."

I just shook my head and looked at her.

Lara: "The documentary is draining and perfect so I hope you will be watching it soon. Then he asked about the bride price thing and me planning my wedding."

Gail: "What?"

Lara: "Well that's why I have mixed emotions."

Gail: "Okay let me start with the documentary. So are you happy with the final product?"

Lara: "Mr. Cheese boy knows his job we are good to go. I was even surprised at some of the scenes he included. Now we had to hope that all goes well."

Gail: "Everything will be well. I want you gone out of here and I know you will be out soon."

Lara: "Not soon enough because this will only lead to the chain of events that will only lead to a re-trial."

Gail: "Even though at least there will be some action. Then, let's talk about the bride price thing."

Lara: "He wants to go to my family and pay in the meantime and I should start planning my wedding. His words, not mine."

Gail: "Shut the front door."

Lara: "This internet thing is getting into your head I see. You now know about shutting the front door."

Gail: "Do not be a loser; I am celebrating because my Goldie is getting married. I am supposed to be popping some champagne instead of being laughed at."

We both laughed

Lara: "I am scared."

Gail: "Why if I may ask?"

Lara: "This is too good to be true. What if he also changes what will I do then?"

Gail: "Life has no guarantees, my baby, you might let him go and then be alone for the rest of your life. I know what I am talking about, trust me. Life is like a soccer game you win some and you lose some but do you stop playing? Hell no even today

they are still playing soccer. You don't stop living because of a few lost games away from home. You train hard and make sure the next match you win on your home ground."

Lara: "For someone who doesn't love sports you sure know so much."

Gail: "I do not love sports here in prison because it's too girly."

Lara: "You don't say."

We both laughed.

Gail: "Whatever; on a serious note live a little and see where this is leading you to."

Lara: "I will try, but for now let me concentrate on the documentary and case."

Gail: "You do your thing and I will be planning the wedding in the meantime."

I just laughed and let it be because I knew I was never going to stop her.

After a week he came back to see me about the finalised documentary.

Bukho: "Have you started with the wedding preparations?"

Lara: "I am not going to answer you."

Bukho: "But baby I...."

Lara: "Not if you want me to murder you."

Bukho: "I take it anything will go so don't worry I have started for the both of us."

Lara: "What?"

Bukho: "Now from today my love; life as you know it will cease then you will be in the spotlight. Some will judge you and some will even persecute you. Some will be by your side."

His words cut deeper. I didn't know how to react because this was scaring me more than him planning 'our' wedding. I swallowed hard and deep.

Bukho: “Hay; hay do not even think about it because I am not going anywhere and you have people who care about you. Look upon them and them only.”

Lara: “I guess you are right but I am scared, really scared more than the day I was sent to this place.”

Bukho: “Sshhhhh.”

He came to my side made me stand up and hugged me tightly. When the guard wanted to come closer he gave him the scary look. He let us be. I felt safe in his arms and wished all that was a nightmare. I fitted perfectly in his arms. God, he smelt so fine and for the first time, I felt sexually attracted to him. I found myself wishing we were married and I was.....

Okay

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hold your horses Lara before you get into trouble.

Bukho: “God I wish this was over already. The things I will do to you on our wedding night?”

Lara: “I can’t wait.”

Well did I say it loud; hell no because I was shy?

Lara: “Thank you very much for being you and for being there for me.”

Bukho: "I love you; I really do and I will do anything for you. I never loved anyone. I had never loved anyone before; I was never in a serious relationship. I will make mistakes I know so will you but I would want us to make them together. I would love us to explore your freedom hand in glove."

My heart was already in my hands; I felt tears coming through uninvited.

Bukho: "I will never leave you. Now Mrs. Radebe; toughen up because we are going to do this together."

Lara: "Okay let's do this."

He said his goodbyes and on that particular day, I was reluctant to say goodbye. I knew that once the documentary was out I

was never going to be a private person. I went back to my cell with mixed emotions that seemed to be my daily bread.

Gail: "Should I even ask?"

Lara: "Nope."

We laughed but she managed to squeeze the information out of me.

Gail: "Your life might change and you might not like it but at least you might be free again."

Lara: "Well I guess."

Gail: "No negativity."

Lara: "Yes no negativity at all."

I was freaking out I even wanted to pee. Well, I was going to toughen up. I still smelt his perfume all over me. I was probably never going to bath again; just kidding.

After two days the documentary was being aired on the national television channels. It was at different times and different radio stations as promised. I never even wanted to watch it so I was just curled up in a fetus position on my bed. All those emotions came flooding and I was just back to my scary days.

I might have slept while crying because I woke up when some arms circled me. It was Gail, she just enclosed me in the warm embrace.

Gail: "You poor thing I now understand why you don't trust anyone again." I just sniffed. "The documentary is very touching and painful I bet those who were watching if they have sense they will make a plan for a retrial."

Lara: "You see why I am sceptic about this because there is no justice in this world. Bukhosi made me hope but now I doubt if there is ever a chance of me getting out."

Gail: "I would slap you now. People here believe you and I bet tomorrow if we go to the library you will see their responses. This boy is a genius I tell you what he did is beyond words he will make a good president in the future."

I just laughed I knew what she was trying to do.

Lara: "I know what you are trying to do and it's working."

Gail: "Is it? Well, I am glad I am not rusty in all the departments."

We laughed and never talked about anything. On that particular night, we cuddled in the small bed and for once I felt loved and wished my mother were that loving too. I would never have ended up in that place in the first place. Then I

would never have met Bukhosi. He was all I thought about of late.

The following day we went to the library. Some inmates looked at me with pitiful eyes but some looked at me like I asked for attention.

Lara: "You see what I meant?"

Gail: "I didn't say it was going to be a smooth sail either."

I smiled

Lara: "Some think I am asking for attention."

Gail: "It is their baby to nurse; some of us have a wedding to plan."

Trust her to break the ice; I just shook my head and went to the computer we normally used.

I checked my inbox first and a few messages from Bukhosi telling me that he was only counting days before our wedding. I just blushed and left my emails going to the local online news. The documentary was making waves.

"This justice system is a joke. We need to investigate the prosecuting office and the legal aid office. Maybe there are so many people who are not supposed to be behind bars because of these useless people. I"

It went on and on but I was glad it was a positive outburst.

Then there were some nasty and rude comments too.

Gail: "We are concentrating on the positive comments only Goldie."

I smiled; with so many people rallying behind me I think it was time I had only positive thoughts.

Lara: "You are right."

Gail: "Look at this. Mostly the positives in almost every site outweigh the negative."

I was happy I even forgot about the negative comments and did my own things. I replied to Bukho's emails and then submitted my assignments. Afterward I played around with the idea of planning my wedding.

Yes, I know what you are thinking but I had to keep my mind occupied with something different. My head was even buzzing with ideas that I couldn't place in my small head. Was I ready for this? Well, I guess I was going to see when the time came.

"If it isn't Miss Attention seeker?"

Well, you know how some people will always be mean even if you are down and low.

Gail: "Get a life douche."

Her: "Well I was just saying because she has money now she thinks she is innocent."

Well if only she knew that I didn't even have a single dime and the PS Productions was going to get every cent the documentary was going to make. I was planning on suing the state if ever I was found innocent. That was the only angle I was thinking of making money after this. I wasn't even listening to them when they were busy exchanging words I only got aware that they had stopped when sis Moo stood in front of me.

Moo: "You have a visitor."

Lara: "Don't want to see anyone."

It was the honest truth.

Moo: "Well she said you might say that."

"She" that's what caught my attention as my heart started to palpate. I followed her then asked her when we were on the corridor.

Lara: "Did she say what her name was?"

Moo: "I never asked. Why are you on the edge? No one is going to harm you. Even the warden was saying we have to be extra careful because our prison will be in the spotlight too. Not that I would have thrown you under the bus because I love you. So just relax no harm will befall you. I am sorry about the

documentary but I am glad you made it. My son and my daughter were even surprised that I know you. They were like we need the autograph."

I just laughed

Lara: "I will visit them one day if I get out of here."

Moo: "They would love that. Please think positive from what the warden said you might win the retrial."

Lara: "Really?"

I was ecstatic; this was my time.

Moo: "Yes; now cheer up and go see your visitor."

Oh, the visitor. When I got there my jars just dropped; what the.....

22

Bukhosi

The documentary was making waves and it was well-received. The international and human rights commission were then involved.

Some people do not react up until it goes public and then they pretend as if they care.

Mom: "How are you feeling son?"

It was after two weeks since the documentary was aired to our surprise there was pressure from different departments which led to the prosecutor's office to re-open the case. The way it was fast-tracked I was even surprised.

Bukho: "I do not know how to feel but the lawyer told us that it would never be easy and it might take months and even years to complete the case but as long as there is a re-trial there is hope."

Dad: "You did well; soon we will be laughing and talking about it freely because it will be in the past."

Bukho: "It was difficult for me to choose the lawyer you know."

Mom: "I always preferred Mr. Klaas because he has been and always will be our good lawyer and I never trust anyone."

Dad: "So are you sure that once she is out she will give you a chance?"

Bukho: "She hasn't changed her mind I am ready to fight if she changes her mind."

Mom: "We will cross that bridge when we get there. I do not think she is that type of a person through"

Dad: "I wish we were meeting in different circumstances."

Mom: "All people have their ways mapped differently. If we all had the same love stories then it was never going to be life; it was going to be fiction."

Bukho: "I know I never fell in love before but this is it I feel like I am even ready to settle down no matter what it takes."

Dad: "So you are telling me that you are still a virgin."

Bukho: "Dad; come on."

I wasn't about to tell my parents that I was naughty and it was between me and God. Mom was going to make a big deal about it.

Mom: "Leave my son alone."

Dad: "Mama's boy."

He mumbled going away but we heard him."

Mom: "Kay what did you just say?"

Dad: "Nothing my love, I said I love you too. So are we driving together to court?"

Bukho: "I need to see her first before she is transported to the trial. She doesn't have decent clothes so I bought a suit for her."

Dad: "Young love. My baby lets go back to our young days."

Mom: "Then have you run away from me and leave me with Eric no ways."

Dad: "No my love I want to go back to when we got married and you became mine and the night of our wedding when....."

Bukho: "Wowowowo too much info I don't want to hear it. Can you just imagine the nightmares I will have; eew, double eew; no triple eew, no, no, no infinity eew."

They laughed as I acted as if I felt the chill right through my body. I just said my goodbyes and left.

Dad: "You are not a child you know."

Bukho: "Bye naughty parents."

I got into my car still laughing. No one had such parents. I just laughed loud again.

"I have some parents. I wouldn't mind for me and Nolo to have such a relationship."

I just shook my head and left. I was agitated to go to work because of the case. I was going to take a week break because my documentary was doing well and putting my name up there as I wanted. Most of all it brought the love of my life to me.

The alarm woke me up and I jumped from the bed with a panic; okay I was still early. I took a bath and wore my suit which was the same make and colour as Nolo's but hers was a tailor-made skirt. Thanks to Moo and Gail for the measurements. I wanted her to feel confident. When I arrived I gave sis Moo the suite. She left for some time and came back with her. God, I was frozen.

Lara: "Hello earth to Mr. Cheese boy."

She looked good in the suit no good is an understatement she looked like she was going to a business meeting and I didn't regret choosing that suit design and colour for her.

Bukho: "You look.....you....."

Lara: "Close your mouth Mr. Cheese boy before flies feast on your mouth."

I chuckled and looked at her again. It was my first time to see her without a headscarf she was just beautiful with her well-combed afro. She didn't make it too big but she made sure it looked clean and professional. She was going to rock the

cooperate world and I couldn't wait to take her to those business meetings; dinners and lunches with her.

Lara: "Mr. Cheese boy are you okay?"

Bukho: "No Bonolo I am not okay."

Lara: "Why what's wrong?"

Bukho: "You are what's wrong."

Lara: "Huh?"

Bukho: "I wish this was over already. I love you woman and you don't know what your look made me feel and think like."

She giggled and I felt like ripping the suit off.

Bukho: "I am recording all the times you are laughing at me and I will make you pay soon."

Lara: "I can't wait too, Mr. Cheese boy."

Bukho: "I will remove that rudeness from you."

We both laughed and sis Moo had to ruin the moment.

Moo: "I know I am a party popper but you have to go Bonolo."

Bukho: "Yes indeed you are. See you in court

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my love."

I kissed her cheeks even if I knew it was not allowed but I had to.

When I arrived in court I saw my parents and went to them. I was a nervous wreck as if I was the one on trial.

Dad: "Relax son we prayed and fasted now it's time we trusted the Alpha and Omega to do the rest."

Bukho: "Thank you for being here with me."

Mom: "We wouldn't be anywhere else son."

"All rise."

We were interrupted by the court marshal. It means I arrived in the nick of time. There were so many people and the media it was even scary. The judge came in and I was shaking seeing a very scary man who didn't even have a trace of a smile in his face.

I was in a trance when I sat down. They did their formalities when I was already in the world of my own. I woke up when mom whispered to me.

Mom: "She is beautiful."

That's when I looked up as I saw her scared also. She really looked beautiful and I wondered how she was going to look in her wedding gown.

They did their introductions and the trial started.

Judge: "The expectation of this case of Miss Lara Bonolo Rhodes is predicted to be based on insufficient evidence and what could have been done to avoid a mistrial. So in light of that, we may proceed."

Prosecutor: "May I approach your honour as we have the evidence that was recently found."

Judge: "Yes you may."

Prosecutor: "We would also like to submit exhibit A which is the witness list, your honour."

Judge: "Thank you"

Prosecutor: "The people are ready your honour."

I was not even aware of these proceedings this was my first time in a courthouse and it felt like those people were speaking Spanish.

Judge: "Okay I will formally call the case of people versus Miss Rhodes once again. Miss Rhodes is charged with first-degree murder and premeditated murder. She has pleaded not guilty in both counts. If the people are ready now we may proceed."

Prosecutor: "Yes your honour."

He was also very scary I even doubted that Mr. Klaas was a match for him but then a saying popped into my mind. "Do not judge a book by its cover" I relaxed a little.

Prosecutor: "She saw her chance and she took it. On July the 15th 20... to the true form, Miss Rhodes fought with Mr. Buthelezi at his workplace and the fight was interrupted as there were standby lookers. The defendant saw that she was not going to succeed with so many witnesses then she took her chance and put her plans into motion. She took her chance and never looked back. The defendant went to Mr. Buthelezi's house and caught him unprepared as he was in his home

relaxing. This time the defendant used the weapon she was carrying to strike him at the back of the head.

When she was done she sat on top of him and stabbed him countless times in the chest. The stab wounds showed that it was done by someone who had no knowledge of holding a knife as she kept stabbing him even in the areas with a bone. The crime scene showed that it was a crime of passion as Miss Rhodes was scorned.

The first blow made Mr. Buthelezi weak hence he fell on the ground semi-paralysed. It made him unable to move thereby giving the defendant power over the victim. The prosecution charges the defendant with a violation of section 179 of the law of 2000. To meet our burden we must prove without

reasonable doubt that Miss Rhodes murdered Mr. Buthelezi in cold blood; willingly merciless and with premeditation.

A witness will testify that Miss Rhodes made up stories when she was let go gentle by Mr. Buthelezi. A pattern of lies will be also part of the issue that will lead to this fateful day where Miss Rhodes lied about being violated by the victim's brother."

When he said that my blood boiled and I wished to go and punch him in that stupid face.

Prosecutor: “The court will also go through the investigation officers’ statements who describe the reaction of Miss Rhode and the murder scene. They will testify that they discovered the clothing that she was wearing when confronting the victim and also DNA that was all over the murder scene.

Finally Mr. Smith the medical examiner will testify to the state the body was found and the immature and inexperienced nature of the defendant’s approach to the killing. He will tell the court about the weapon used in the murder case. He will all testify to the DNA evidence found at the scene. On July 15th Miss Rhodes saw the chance to kill Mr. Buthelezi and took it. I thank you.”

When he sat down my heart just sank. This was going to be a long and emotional trial for me. I looked at Lara and she looked relaxed and my baby made me fall in love with her more as she was so strong.

When I was still looking down Mr. Klaas stood up and just commanded the attention without even saying a word. I unsaid the statement I made before about hiring a different lawyer.

Klaas: “Chaos, that’s what I will say about the day in question. There are just too many suspects too many unanswered questions too much reasonable doubt about who killed Mr. Buthelezi. When with whose knife and why. At his workplace,

the police took a CCTV of Miss Rhodes verbally attacking Mr. Buthelezi but tell me who wouldn't after all the strings of abuse and then when she finally grew a pair and moved on with her life. When she got a chance then she is stalked and threatened her life.

Mr. Buthelezi has a history of violating women and a string of unsolved and unreported cases which leaves a reasonable doubt about the laws and the law keepers we have in this country. We will have four witnesses in this case.

Mr. Sipho Buthelezi who claims Miss Rhodes killed his brother in cold blood while we know he could have been covering his tracks as he once violated Miss Rhodes.

Next Miss Simo, who can testify that the defendant had been emotionally physically, and mentally abused by the deceased

but instead of choosing revenge she took her time to plan her future without Mr. Buthelezi. She even found a place to stay which was far away from her abuser and she was happy.

The neighbour Mrs. Evans will explain that yes the defendant was distorted but she was there at home as she borrowed sugar from the neighbour to make coffee so that she could sleep well without nightmares.

Lastly the Lab technician Dr. Miles; who will testify that the DNA found in the scene was planted thereby causing inconsistency of the movement of the killer and the assumed killer who is assumed to be the killer. He is also a biologist so he will prove that the statue of Miss Rhodes and the statue of the victim will never allow her to hit him at the head and knock him down making him semi-paralysed as she is short and not masculine enough. For him to be knocked that hard it needed a statue of 6-7 metres tall person and stronger in built.

Finally, my client will testify that she has been through any sort of abuse but never even once wished ill of the deceased because she was scared of what he might do as he has connections everywhere. She chose to run and start a new life without bothering the victim. This will prove that this case is too chaotic to be pinned onto my client.

The case will show beyond a reasonable doubt that my client Miss Rhodes is innocent and the prosecutors are trying to pin

this on an innocent victim of circumstances. Yes she was abused and she exchanged words with the victim but that doesn't make her a murderer. He could have been killed by any of his victims or any of his scorned lovers or better yet a scorned wife. Just because there is reasonable doubt therefore the court must find my client Miss Lara Bonolo Rhodes not guilty. Thank you."

Judge: "Right after the small break if the first witness is ready we will go ahead"

When he slammed his gavel I didn't feel defeated because Mr. Klaas was just hitting the tip of the iceberg I was happy. I looked at my fiancée and locked eyes with her and there was hope at last.....

23

Lara (Bonolo)

Were my eyes deceiving me? I rubbed them several times hoping to see clearly but it was her.

Lara: "Where have you been? You have lost weight."

"Simo said you would not care about your situation but care about me and my well being. I guess she was right."

I just laughed and looked at her.

"Am I not going to get even a hug even after all these months?"

I hugged her even if it was not allowed. I last saw her after our exams and she disappeared.

Lara: "Zoe; please tell me what is going on?"

Zoe: "My dad had TB because he had been working in the mines and as you know that my mom is disabled she couldn't care for him."

Lara: "I am so sorry about that; how is he now?"

Zoe: "He left us Lara; one minute he was fine and we were joking about him being well and glowing then the following morning he was gone just like that.

I had plans to take him to at least Cape Town because it was his dream but it never happened. Can you imagine just after he

was buried I received a job offer when all along no one wanted to hire me."

Lara: "I am so sorry."

I didn't even know what to do or say she was crying.

Zoe: "I paused the job offer because when I was taking care of him no matter how careful I was I was also diagnosed with it but mine was not severe I had to take treatment."

Lara: "What!"

My eyes were almost popping out.

Zoe: "Worry not I am okay now you will be surprised what people think about TB and what I have learnt. I am not even scared of it anymore."

Lara: "As long as you are fine you know I have....."

Zoe: "I know Lara and it's not like you will die soon also. We still have years together. So; Simo tells me we have a wedding to plan."

I laughed hard covering my face.

Lara: "She is a blabbermouth; how did she tell you because you didn't have a phone?"

Zoe: "My mom gave me my dad's phone to use so when I got here I looked for both of you because I knew you were not going to let me suffer."

Lara: "You need not suffer my love. Get my address and talk to my roommate. Use my room it's paid for every month but as for food my love you see I am stuck here."

Zoe: "Thank you very much I am grateful and you do not know how I needed this. I am starting at work next month after my final check-up. My aunt is also struggling so it will remove the burden from their shoulders."

Lara: "Well you helped me too when I was desperate so I have to make sure I return the favour."

We spoke about a few things then she left. She left me with the edge to get out of the hell hole. There were people out there

suffering sis Moo was right there was no time for pity party I needed to make sure I fought to the very end.

*

*

The day finally came for my re-trial I was a nervous wreck. I was only happy that the outcry of people after the documentary forced them to re-open the case.

Moo: "You look wow."

I was wearing a suit that was brought by Bukhosi. He had a taste and I was starting to doubt I would fit in his life. I just pushed that thought at the back of my head because it was time to focus on the case.

Lara: "I am grateful for this."

Moo: "That's not enthusiastic. You should be happy. Well, good luck I wish I was going to be there."

Lara: "Thank you very much."

She hugged me.

When I got to the courtroom I was surprised to see his parents. I knew his mom from the internet and his dad was his spitting image. They were private people so I found nothing more there.

The opening was more than what I expected and it was a great start. When we were on a break Bukho came to the chambers but he came alone.

Bukho: "Mr. Klaas I am happy with the opening statement."

Klaas: "I am glad but this is just the beginning and there is nothing to celebrate yet; that son of a gun is gunning for my blood I tell you."

Lara: "If I may ask; how did you make his brother testify for the defence?"

Klaas: "It wasn't easy I had to supenna him. You are going to be the last to testify if need be. From my initial plan, I want to close this case without you being bothered. So now we have to make sure we get our big guns out. We are not taking prisoners we are here to work."

I could feel it in my blood that this guy was a force to be reckoned with. After a few discussions, he gave us some privacy and went out. It was my first time to be in an enclosed place with him.

He came closer and encircled me in his broad arms. I fitted in there perfectly. After some time without any words exchanged he lowered his head and I met him halfway involuntarily and we kissed.

This time around I was ready and it felt good. He moved back before I could absorb the kiss.

Bukho: "That will give you the motivation to fight for us with everything you got."

I just flushed and looked at him. No, he didn't

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Lara: "You are so mean Mr. Radebe."

Bukho: "And I love you too Mrs. Radebe."

Lara: "Copy cat. Why are you wearing the same suit as mine?"

Bukho: "Because you are my better half."

I smiled before I could answer we were summoned back to court.

*

*

"All rise."

Now it was the moment we have all been waiting for the beginning of the end.

"I call Mr. Lois to the stand."

I felt my blood boiling as I knew he was Mlulami's best friend. I watched him place his hand on top of the bible.

"Do you vow to tell the truth and nothing but the truth."

Him: "Yes I do."

"Please state your full names."

Him: "I am Steve Lois"

"Please take a seat."

Prosecutor: "Good afternoon Mr. Lois. What do you do for a living?"

Him: "I am a Chartered Accountant."

Prosecutor: "Mmm I see a man of prestige. Did you know the deceased?"

Him: "Yes he and I were good friends and we grew up together."

Prosecutor: "Do you know Miss Rhodes. If so would you identify her in the courtroom today?"

Him: "Yes I know her and she is wearing a navy blue suit sitting there on the right. She was with my friend since three years back."

Prosecutor: "Did you see anything wrong in their relationship?"

Him: "They were so in love and inseparable. We were even surprised that she would say she is being beaten because Mlulami would never even hurt a fly. He always told me that he will never breathe without her which showed his love for her. So I will never believe that she abused. She might have made up the story."

Klaas: "Objection your honor speculation."

Judge: "Sustained."

Prosecutor: "No further questions your worship."

Was that all? He just crushed me like that for what? I knew he was Mlulami's friend so what did I expect then?

Judge: "Cross examination."

Klaas: "Yes your honor. Good afternoon Mr. Lois."

Him: "Good afternoon sir."

Klaas: "Mr. Lois you were friends with Mr. Buthelezi correct?"

Him: "Yes we were."

Klaas: "In fact, you even shared several secrets that none of the crew members knew about even your parents. You also have a house where you go there to 'bond' as a brotherhood."

Him: "That is correct."

It came as a whisper and I was surprised. Mr. Klaas was good; how did he find out this information.

Klaas: "Pardon me."

Him: "That is correct sir."

Klaas: "So Mr. Lois is it a possibility that you might be lying under oath now? As it is you were the one who took one of the bruised lovers to your brother's establishment for medical attention."

Him: "She had fallen from the stairs after fighting with the deceased's wife."

Klaas: "If I may ask were you there when the incident happened?"

Him: "No but I"

Klaas: "So there is a possibility that Mr. Buthelezi told you what he wanted you to know at the time."

Prosecutor: "Objection."

Judge: "Objection is overruled answer the question, Mr. Lois."

Him: "May you please repeat the question?"

Klaas: "So there is a possibility that Mr. Buthelezi told you what he wanted you to know at the time."

Him: "He never lied to me so no."

Klaas: "So he never, not even once lied to you like he never lied that he slept with your fiancé?"

Him: "That was different."

Klaas: "How if I may ask? An honourable man would never have even looked at your fiancé with a lustful eye."

Him: "She went to him."

Klaas: "Would you have gone for him fiancé if she threw herself at you."

Him: "No I wouldn't."

Klaas: "So this disputes the fact that he was a good friend; an honourable man and a trustworthy friend."

Him: "....."

Klaas: "Mr. Lois: "

Him: "Yes it does."

Klaas: "In the process, it will also dispute the fact that he was a good man who treated Miss Rhodes with respect. This doesn't also prove that as your friend he will tell you everything and that he abused his partners."

Him: "Yes sir."

Klaas: "In your opinion was he hiding it or you were also involved in his shady dealings. Is it because you are also heartless that the bastard who chose to torture women as his hobby and not care about their feelings. Is it the fact that; you also found pleasure in watching him chose his victims with you by his side?"

Prosecutor: "Objection your honor badgering the witness."

Judge: "Sustained."

Klaas: "No further questions your honor."

He had turned red and I was even scared of him. Remind me not to break the law and be on his receiving side.....

24

Bukhosi

Mr. Klaas was on fire I just never once thought I would be at the edge like I was. He had even turned red.

Mom: "He is good." She was whispering.

Bukho: "I am speechless too."

Judge: "Do you need to re-direct?"

Prosecutor: "No your honor may this witness be excused."

Judge: "You may be excused."

Prosecutor: "Thank you."

Judge: "The next witness; please."

Prosecutor: "The people call Mr. Senzo Ntuli."

"Raise your right hand."

He did and said his oath then stated his names in full. When he sat down I saw Lara shaking her head looking down. This time around the cross-examiner was a female prosecutor.

Prosecutor: "Good afternoon. What do you do for a living?"

Him: "Good afternoon ma'am. I am a detective in the SAPS based in Germiston. I took the lead on the Buthelezi murder investigation."

Prosecutor: "What's your training and specialty at the police force?"

Him: "After my training and further special training I worked for the SAPS as a special detective and technical analyst for twelve years."

Prosecutor: "You just said you took the lead on the Buthelezi investigation; when did that begin?"

Him: "I started on the 15th of July 20... When a body of Mr. Buthelezi was found at his home"

Prosecutor: "Was there anything of significance found near the body?"

Him: "Yes ma'am. I discovered a hair strand and two drops of blood splatter one belonging to the victim and the other from the accused."

Prosecutor: "Detective what did you do with this evidence?"

Him: "I turned the evidence in, to the analysis."

Prosecutor: "Why?"

Him: "They were found next to the deceased's body."

Prosecutor: "What was the next step in your investigation?"

Him: "I conducted DNA and several interviews ma'am."

Prosecutor: "Did you ever identify a person of interest?"

Him: "Yes; the DNA collected from the scene matched the deceased and the accused's DNA."

Prosecutor: "After identifying Miss Rhodes as the person of interest what did you do?"

Him: "I review the defendant's movements from months before he murder."

Prosecutor: "Did you find anything?"

Him: "Yes ma'am I did. I found out she sent a message to him a day before the murder and even went to his workplace."

Prosecutor: "What then did you conclude?"

Klaas: "Objection your honor this question calls for hearsay."

Judge: "Counter to that?"

Prosecutor: "Oh yes your honor; both of these questions are part of the scene which witnesses saw taking place."

Klaas: "Your honor if I may argue my case later on the defendant will testify that she only went there once to confront her abuser. The camera angles were also altered making it impossible to take this in as valid evidence."

Judge: "I will allow it this time maybe the defence will prove beyond a reasonable doubt that this is not admissible evidence."

Klaas: "Thank you, your honour."

Prosecutor: "Detective; what did you conclude when you saw the results of the investigation?"

Him: "The DNA was a match to the defendant and the neighbour identified the height and same built as the defendant."

Prosecutor: "Were you able to identify when the person made it out of that house where the victim was?"

Him: "Of course; she was wearing the same hoodie as the defendant was wearing when she attacked the victim."

Prosecutor: "No further questions your honor."

Judge: "Cross examination."

Klaas: "Thank you, your honour. At this time I would like the time check."

Clerk: "The defence has exactly 7minutes and 30 seconds remaining and the people have 5 minutes and 20 seconds."

Klaas: "Thank you. Good afternoon Mr. Ntuli."

Him: "Good afternoon sir."

Klaas: "There were so many people who witness the exchange of words at the foyer that day; correct."

Him: "Yes correct."

Klaas: "There are so many people who hated the deceased correct."

Him: "According to the investigation the top in our suspect list was Miss Rhodes."

Klaas: "Correct me if I am wrong but as an English student as your first language you said at the top of the list. To my understanding

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a list doesn't have one name. It should at least have two or more correct?"

Him: "Correct."

Klaas: "So from my understanding, the list could be long or it could be short but it can never have one name."

Him: "Yes sir."

Klaas: "Then why according to my knowledge only one person in that list was interviewed including your Mr. Ntuli."

There was mayhem in the court as people wondered where this was going.

Prosecutor: "Objection lack of foundation."

Judge: "May the lack of foundation be clarified in this case."

Prosecutor: "Your honour the defence is implicating the officer of the law."

Judge: "I will allow it."

She sat down with her tail between her legs as I waited for them to continue.

Klaas: "Were your superiors aware of the fact that you and Mr. Buthelezi came way back in your personal relationship?"

Bukho: "What?"

I wanted to whisper but it came out.

Him: "Pardon me."

Klaas: "Let me rephrase the question. Why were you not on the lists of suspects because a few months before the victim was killed; you had a fallout with his family because they no longer wanted your services as they made a deal with your boss to take care of their dirty business."

Him: "I was not involved in their family affair I....."

Klaas: "Did you or did you not call him and threaten to end his career and expose him?"

Him: "....."

Klaas: "Your honour I would like to play exhibit A and B that were submitted as evidence."

Judge: "You may go ahead."

Klaas: "Is this your cellphone number Mr. Ntuli?"

Him: "I believe so."

Klaas: "You believe so or you know so? Is it or is it not your number?"

Him: "It is my number."

Klaas: "These are the phone records of the deceased and tell me how many highlighted number of times did you call him just

a. month before his death." Him: "More than ten times."

Klaas: "So tell me now; why was your name not on the list of the suspects?"

Him: "....."

Klaas: "Moving on Mr. Ntuli. You said there was DNA at the crime scene correct."

Him: "That's correct sir."

Klaas: "In your line of duty from the time you graduated till now have you ever met a case with planted evidence on the scene?"

Him: "Yes I have."

Klaas: "In this case didn't it cross your mind that the blood at the scene was planted?"

Him: "After the witnesses testified that they saw the same person who fit the description with the same hoodie that our accused was wearing."

Klaas: "Looking at exhibit B. Do you recognise the hoodie?"

Him: "Yes sir it was the same hoodie that we took from Miss Rhodes' home."

Klaas: "From your knowledge is it the only hoodie that is available in this country."

Him: "Pardon."

Klaas: "Was Miss Rhodes the only person who had this type of hoodie the whole of this country?"

Him: "No sir but....."

Klaas: "One of the suspects in the list that I compiled bought the same hoodie just the same afternoon when Miss Rhodes confronted her abuser."

What the... I was now confused and I was now certain that Mr.

Klaas was the devil's advocate. I was going to give him a bonus.

Klaas: "Isn't it that too much of a coincidence? I never believed in coincidence myself. From my investigations, there are several suspects which you never bothered to investigate yourself. Also

buying a hoodie doesn't make the person a murderer so that is why I will do my research and homework as a good student."

Sarcasm was written all over his voice.

Klaas: "So Mr. Ntuli why did you not investigate the other suspects?"

Prosecutor: "Objection your honor badgering the witness."

Judge: "I will allow it."

Him: "When we found the DNA evidence we didn't think of looking for other suspects?"

Klaas: "You didn't think or you knew that my client was going to be a scapegoat because she couldn't fight?"

Klaas: "No need to answer because this is just the tip of an iceberg. No further question your honor."

Judge: "Do you need to re-direct?"

Prosecutor: "No your honor may this witness be excused."

Judge: "You may be excused."

Prosecutor: "Thank you."

Judge: "The next witness; please."

Prosecutor: "The people call Mrs. Azania Buthelezi to the stand."

“Please raise your right hand.”

They did all the nitty gritty while we anticipated what she will say as she was the wife.

Prosecutor: “Thank you, your honour. At this time I would like the time check.”

Clerk: “The people have exactly 5 minutes and 20 seconds remaining and the defence has 0 minutes and 40 seconds.”

Prosecutor: “Tell the court your relationship with the deceased please.”

Her: “He was my husband and best friend.”

Prosecutor: “When did the two of you meet?”

Her: “We were still young and innocent. He was staying in the city and I was staying in the village. They visited every holiday. We used to take walks. We became friends and when years peeled by I fell in love with him and he proposed. When I was done with my studies he paid for my bride price and we got married under customary law because his father and mother were married under that law too.”

Bukho: “Show off.”

Prosecutor: “So you knew he might take another wife?”

Her: "Yes and it was not a problem for me because I loved him for him even when people thought I was unrealistic."

Prosecutor: "Did he tell you about Miss Rhodes."

Her: "Yes he did and she was making him happy. I was waiting for the day he would introduce her to the family and our child."

What the.....

I had heard enough I just went outside for some air.....

25

Lara (Bonolo)

When I saw Bukhosi leave a lot of things were running through my mind. What if he thought I knew that he had a wife? Then I remember telling him everything. I just tried to concentrate because this was my time and I knew I was going to be happy once it was over.

The prosecutor was busy with the wife. She was not that bad; she was not as sophisticated as the husband. She was well-spoken and I wondered why she would have even considered polygamy in this day and age.

Prosecutor: "Mrs. Buthelezi some will argue that in this day and age it is not a possibility."

Her: "I knew my husband became lonely sometimes and I didn't want to move to the city as I was managing the store back home. I knew he was going to find someone but it was going to be okay if it was official. He loved her so much so I knew if I made things difficult he was going to force things on me or go out with multiple women."

Prosecutor: "Some will also argue that it is never possible to be in such a marriage. Were you happy with this decision?"

Her: "My father died, then my mother got married again to a polygamist. It was not easy at first because I was used to being

alone. My stepfather was a different man he never had favourites at first his second wife hated us but as time went by we became one big family. Sometimes I will see my mother laugh and joke what he never did often since my father died. They lived in different homesteads so it became easy. I vowed to be like them when my husband told me he was in love and he wanted to take a second wife."

Prosecutor: "Miss Rhodes was never a treat to you."

Her: "She was never going to be a treat as I was getting all the love and attention. He supported us financially without fail."

Prosecutor: "No further questions your honor."

I looked at her and she was genuine. I was getting confused because the more this went on the more witnesses and suspects came up. I was really confused but with Klaas, I learnt that nothing will be left unhidden. For the moment I didn't care about my innocence. I just wanted to know who killed the stupid man so I could give them half of the money I was going to sue the government for.

I just covered my face when I thought about that. Was I really that wicked? The more the witnesses were grilled and some information surfaced the more I realised that I never knew him at all.

Judge: "Does the defence have enough time on the clock?"

Klaas: "No your honor we would request a lunch break if possible."

Judge: "Granted."

"All rise"

We rose and the judge left. Mr. Klaas took me to the chambers again. Bukhosi came with his parents this time around. I didn't see them at first because I just commented when he got in.

Lara: "Well Mr. Cheese boy you couldn't even stay till the end I saw you run like a scared chicken."

"Mr. Cheese boy."

I turned around and his parents were standing there and they had smiles on their faces. I wished the earth could open and swallow me alive.

Dad: "I like her already."

Mom: "Mr. Cheese boy huh."

They looked at each other and laughed.

Bukho: "We are not getting to that now. We need to eat I know Miss Rude is hungry."

No, he didn't and I knew he did it deliberately.

Lara: "Ah....."

Dad: "You have names for each other already. The rest of the family is going to love this."

Bukho: "Dad; don't even think about it."

They just laughed.

Bukho: "Let me do the formal introductions then. Lara these are my parents Mr. and Mrs. Radebe. Dad and mom this is my partner and fiancé Bonolo Lara Rhodes."

Mom: "You are really beautiful that's why my son can't even hold back. Can you imagine; he has never dated and now we just hear wedding bells. You really made an impression."

Dad: "I taught him well."

Bukho: "You don't want me to disappoint you there."

Dad: "Look at my wife and you will see what I am talking about."

Mom: "Girls; girls you will compare your makeup tips later I think Lara here is hungry."

I just giggled and looked down. Klaas came back and sat there eating his lunch while on this laptop.

Dad: "Klaas; I can see nothing has changed. You are never going to change; once a workaholic always one."

Klaas: "Kay; you know me and I do not want these small boys to think I am losing my touch."

We sat on the other side and ate while they had their 'men' talk. Bukhosi was holding my other hand under the table while he ate with his left hand. This felt good and I wished it will never end.

Klaas: "We will leave you ladies there is something we need to discuss."

I looked at Bukho who squeezed my hand with assurance and I just nodded assuring him.

Mom: "We will be fine."

They left and I was a little bit shaky. She looked at me and smiled.

Mom: "I do not know what you believe in but I know my God is able. Let us pray."

I wanted to refuse because I didn't know whether I believed too but I just obeyed and then we joined hands and she prayed. She poured her heart in the prayer I just felt tears come involuntarily. She was the mother I needed and more but her God gave me the opposite.

Mom: "Please take note that this won't be an easy road. Even if there is pressure to close this case but it might take longer.

Some days you will wake up and feel like you are giving up or you are a nobody. When you feel like that just pick up the phone and call me. I know you are given those privileges often than in the past. I know you might think you are alone but you became family the moment you accepted my son to be in your life."

Lara: "Thank you for accepting me. I am not good with family and trusting but I will try to do that."

Mom: "You will meet my daughters and daughter in law. You will fit in perfectly. We are also a diverse family who just cares about each other."

Lara: "Thank you very much."

We hugged because I didn't know what to say. They came back when we were just hugging.

Bukho: "Would you look at that bonding session already."

Dad: "I told you they won't kill each other."

Bukho: "She is lucky because I was almost killed on the first day. The rudeness, I wouldn't even talk about it."

Mom: "Leave my daughter in law alone."

Bukho: "Oh she is your daughter in law already?"

Dad: "I will say nothing because I still want to be married till death."

Bukho: "Traitor."

Dad: "With a good reason."

They laughed and looked happy. I was just looking at them admiring and wondering if dad were still alive where I would be. When I was still admiring Mr. Klaas came back telling us it was time to go back. The guard was a different one who escorted us but I had seen him sometime back.

“All rise.”

We were back in the courtroom. There was quite when the judge came then he called the councillors to approach his bench. They talked for some time and then went back to their respective places.

Judge: “We will have only the cross-examination then we will adjourn for next week Tuesday.”

Prosecutor: “Yes your honor.”

Judge: “May the defence begin.”

Klaas: “Thank you

your honour. We would like the recall, Mrs Azania Buthelezi, to the stand.”

They once again did the formalities of making her swear which was time-consuming if you may ask me but what could I do it was the courtroom rule.

Klaas: “Good afternoon Mrs. Buthelezi.”

Her: “Afternoon.”

Klaas: “Please tell the court again how you met the deceased?”

She told her story again.

Klaas: "Was it after or before your stepfather made a business deal with his father so that you can marry his son?"

Her: "I didn't know about the deal until years later."

Klaas: "Mrs. Buthelezi I asked the question was it after or before the business transactions between the families?"

Her: "After."

Klaas: "So there is a possibility that it was never love at first sight as you claim it to be with Mr. Buthelezi."

Her: "He said he loved me as a friend then later on he said he had developed feelings for me."

Klaas: "Could it be the fact that he wanted to impress his father that's why he acted in love?"

Prosecutor: "Objection relevance."

Klaas: "Your honor we need proof that Mr. Buthelezi was good at pretending because pretending to be a good lover and protector to Miss Rhodes was not the only thing he could fake."

Judge: "I will allow it. Please answer the question, Mrs. Buthelezi."

Her: "It could be."

Klaas: "So Mr. Buthelezi was so good in pretending and acting out that he couldn't even show you that he was there when the business deal was signed by the parents to make sure you became his wife."

Her: "....."

Klaas: "How did it make you feel when you realise that you were just part of a business translation, not a love at first sight fairy tale you have hoped for?"

Her: "I was hurt at first but when he explained the situation and that he loved me still I accepted his apology."

Klaas: "Was it before or after you fought two of his floozies he was cheating with?"

Prosecutor: "Objection your honor language."

Judge: "Mr. Klaas need I remind you this is a court of law."

Klaas: "No your honor. I apologise. Mrs. Buthelezi was it before or after you fought two of the lovers he had at the time."

Her: "Before."

Klaas: "So Mr. Buthelezi told you that at first, he went into this marriage because he was forced to then he apologised and said he loved you. After confessing his love he then went out of his way to find comfort in not one but two women."

Her: "He made a mistake."

Klaas: "A mistake that you paid for as you attacked them then you got a criminal record for assault."

Her: "I was young and stupid."

Klaas: "So let me guess after this incident you had an epiphany and decided to accept his second wife into your home?"

Her: "I had accepted that he would want another person to make him happy also. Fighting him was going to cause a drift. I accepted my mother's decision to marry a man with many wives. I had accepted my destiny too."

Klaas: "Was it accepting your destiny or was it the fact that you had also found solace in another man's arms; a man who was willing to give it all up to make you happy and protected."

There was commotion and I knew my suspicions were right. No married woman can stay for months away from their partner and not feel the need to have affection.

Klaas: "Mrs. Buthelezi."

Her: "He was just a friend."

Klaas: "A friend with benefits who even paid a hotel room out of town two days a week. The same days you were frequenting your aunt's place in town."

Her: “....”

Judge: “Mrs. Buthelezi need I remind you that you are under oath.” Her: “No your honor.”

Klaas: “Should I rephrase.”

Her: “No sir. I was just having fun as he was also having his fun.”

Klaas: “So then all was not rosy in the Buthelezi homestead as you portrayed it to be.” Her: “No sir.”

Klaas: “No further questions your honor.”

Klaas was the devil incarnated I tell you. How did he get all this information? I was left like a confused cockroach because the list of suspects kept getting bigger and hard to phrase out.....

26

Bukhosi

“I think I am more confused now.”

I said getting into the car with dad. Mom was going to drop her roommate and friend who came later on during the case.

Dad: “Klaas did his homework and he is now exposing the weakness within the Legal Aid offices. Now, one would

question how her lawyer couldn't even find one witness who could discredit their witnesses."

Bukho: "Somehow I feel like even the judge didn't do his job properly."

Dad: "Why do you think I always say there is no justice on this earth? If we go to the core of this maybe you will see that the judge was overworked or bribed. Even the lawyer might have been bribed or he simply didn't care."

Bukho: "They will pay dearly because now there is a probe and some might not survive, their licences might be revoked."

Dad: "This is what they will get for being lazy. Sometimes I feel like some people are being paid to do nothing. Our taxpayers' money is being misused."

Bukho: "Klaas is getting a bonus I tell you. How come he could find such information in which they couldn't and they were given a lot of time?"

Dad: "He has always been a hard worker but today he has proven to me beyond a reasonable doubt that no matter what he will always be top."

Bukho: "How could he not have made partner sooner?"

Dad: "Sometimes people doubt your capabilities and think little of you until they see you do unthinkable things or when you are

everyone's favourite then they see your worth. He was telling me that he is opening his own practice if he wins this case."

Bukho: "I bet the ones who rejected him are green with envy now."

Dad: "They will remain green while he is rising. This case is making waves and already he is making a name for himself now they will regret pushing him over."

Bukho: "I am only happy that this is taking a better direction now."

Dad: "I am only happy that my son is not going to die lonely and he has taste when it comes to women." I laughed.

Bukho: "I have only introduced one woman so what is the plural for?"

Dad: "Whatever." I smiled as I drove off. Those vultures were at the gate waiting for a story. We had to wait to be signed out.

"Mr. Radebe, please tell us what is your take about this case as you are the one who produced the documentary."

I just closed the window looking at dad.

Dad: "Vultures. You are going to be avoiding them till the end of the trial when they find fresh meat. This is how this world works."

Bukho: "I hope they won't do that to Nolo."

Dad: "You do love her don't you?"

Bukho: "Come on dad, would I have proposed if I didn't?"

Dad: "Well if I may say; she is good for you and she is strong enough to be your partner."

We laughed as I drove off after we got access to drive out. My drive home was not long we talked about several things. Dad was already prepared to go to her family just after the first meeting. I was not complaining. When I dropped him off I went to the office to finish up my paperwork. I knew I was not going to rest at home.

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I was standing there looking like a love-struck teenager and the truth was I couldn't stay away. I just wanted to see her and check if she was okay.

Lara: "We will be in court in two days' time couldn't you have waited?"

Bukho: "No I couldn't. You have become my drug and I miss the days we were doing the documentary." She just giggled.

Lara: "You are such a baby."

Bukho: "I am your baby."

Lara: "I won't have a cheese boy for a baby."

Bukho: "Well tough because a cheese boy will produce kids who will become cheese babies."

Lara: "We will see about that."

Bukho: "I am the man in this relationship so I know how many babies I am going to put there and when." She just shook her head. "So how are you feeling?"

Lara: "Truth or dare."

Bukho: "Truth my love. Nothing but the truth."

Lara: "I am scared because if we don't win this case then I will only dream of life outside. I am scared that if I let my gut down I will be hurt again. I want to love you like I never loved before

but I am scared. Your family accepted me with my flaws and I am scared it might be too good to be true. I am scared that you might get tired of me because I might not be able to give you kids naturally. I am scared that if your family finds out about this they might think you are better off without me. All in all, I am ish scared."

She even had tears that were forming in her eyes, I wanted to assure her but I was scared too. Not scared about the rest

of the things she said but only scared about the case. If we lost I was going to be more hurt. The rest of her scares didn't even move me because I knew I was going to assure her that it was us against the world and nothing else.

Bukho: "To be honest in your list I am only scared about the case. I am scared that you might lose hope and give up on us. The rest don't scare me at all. I know you don't trust me now but I can assure you that all your scares are nothing but just silhouettes and the pigment of your imaginations. I love you the way you are and my family has never pretended no matter what."

I saw a little smile forming and I knew we were going to be fine. Klaas had to perform his miracles because I was not ready to lose the only person who made me this happy and I was willing to make her happy.

I didn't spend much time there I went home to rethink our strategy with Klaas. His plan was solid and I rested knowing I was in good hands. On Tuesday I was the first one to arrive my sisters and parents came shortly after.

"I thought you would be flying across the world."

Beli: "Then miss the chance to see the girl who got you on your knees begging her for mercy."

We laughed as I hugged her.

Busi: “Mom hasn’t stopped talking about her so we wanted to see for ourselves.”

Bukho: “You too Wani have joined the club. I thought you were an angel.”

Wani: “If you can’t beat them you…….”

Busi & Beli: “Join them.”

They laughed. My sisters were crazy but I loved them still. Beli was glowing but I didn’t want to ask her because I knew how happy she was as a single mother so no time for speculation.

Busi: “We want to see her.”

Bukho: “Please do not even scare her because you will have me to answer to.”

Beli: “Yes sir.”

I just shook my head and went inside leaving them to their giggles. Women, at least I had sent another suit for her and she wanted to complain but I was having none of it.

“All rise.”

We rose then the judge came through. That man was always serious as if he had just eaten a chilli burrito.

He called the counsellors to his bench and they talked for quite some time. After that

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they were ready to start.

Judge: "Are we ready to begin?"

Prosecutor: "Yes your honour. I call Dr. Emily Sangweni to the stand."

She stood up and walked to the witness stand. There were so many witnesses and I was even beginning to think this was never going to end. After she was sworn to witness she sat down and we began.

Prosecutor: "Good morning Doctor Sangweni"

Dr: "Good morning sir."

Prosecutor: "What do you do for a living?"

Dr: "I am the medical examiner for the Johannesburg General Hospital."

Prosecutor: "What qualifies you to be a medical examiner?"

Dr: "I earned my medical degree from Wits Medical School and further studied in Cuba. I have performed over a hundred autopsies and have been practicing for a total of about 10 years."

Prosecutor: "Did you perform an autopsy on Mr. Buthelezi?"

Dr: "Yes sir I did."

Prosecutor: "Based on the autopsy did you determine the cause of death?"

Dr: "Yes the cause of death for Mr. Buthelezi was head trauma caused by the fractured skull and a vital stab wound. It means Mr. Buthelezi was struck once in the head with a heavy object then stabbed several times."

Prosecutor: "Did you determine what Mr. Buthelezi was struck with or stabbed with?"

Dr: "Yes; it was a blunt object that struck him and a kitchen knife that stabbed him."

Prosecutor: "How did you determine that those were the murder weapons?"

Dr: "The blunt object was never brought for analysis but the knife had the skin cells and blood from the victim."

Prosecutor: "Did you find any fingerprints in the knife?"

Dr: "Yes I did. A few of those were identified to the defendant but a few were unidentified."

Prosecutor: "Did you identify the manner in which Mr. Buthelezi was killed?"

Dr: "Yes sir. He was struck from the back and when he fell then he was stabbed several times. The attacker was right-handed and an amateur with the knife."

Prosecutor: "How did you come to that conclusion?"

Dr: "An experienced knife man/woman would have identified the vital organs. The wounds showed that some stabbed wounds were inflicted in the bone, this is premature if you ask me."

Prosecutor: "Thank you nothing further your worship."

Judge: "Cross examination."

Klaas: "Yes your honour."

Judge: "You may proceed."

Klaas: "Thank you. Good morning Doctor Sangweni."

Dr: "Morning."

Klaas: "Let's discuss something you just said that, there were a set of fingerprints on the kitchen knife found on the scene. They belonged to the defendant correct."

Dr: "Yes sir."

Klaas: "Then there were also a set of prints that were unidentified correct."

Dr: "There was one set yes."

Klaas: "So someone might have touched the murder weapon or even be the one who murdered the deceased?"

Dr: "At some point in time yes."

Klaas: "You also ran the analysis on the time of death and the scene correct."

Dr: "Yes correct."

Klaas: "Did you find any other set of prints there?"

Dr: "Yes although they were partial."

Klaas: "You couldn't identify whose fingerprints were they?"

Dr: "Partial fingerprints cannot be identified."

Klaas: "So this cannot be certain that the defendant is the killer and the time of death is exactly what was written on the autopsy report?"

Dr: "It could be a minute after or the exact time."

Klaas: "Are you aware of the "Mr. Morris' trial" Mrs. Sangweni?"

Prosecutor: "Objection your honour relevance."

Judge: "May the defence identify the relevance please."

Klaas: "Thank you, your honour. This was also the same mistake made regarding the prints identified at the scene and there was evidence planted which led to her testimony being irrelevant."

Judge: "In that case, I will allow it."

Klaas: "Thank you, your honour."

I saw the prosecutor sit down with a sad face then I knew Klaas was at it again.

Judge: "The witness may answer the questions."

Dr: "Yes I am aware of it sir."

Klaas: "Weren't the prints for the defendant on that case planted?"

Dr: "They were planted, sir."

Klaas: "So there is a possibility that these ones were planted too?"

Dr: "Yes but if they were partial prints I would have concluded that but the defendant's prints were the consistent ones."

Klaas: "Did it not cross your mind to re-examine the murder scene as you have done with other cases after you were almost sued during the Morris trial."

Dr: "I did my best with this one."

Klaas: "But your best wasn't good enough was it now because when we retested the DNA the defendant's prints were the partial ones, in fact, they were close to none existent at the scene."

What the.....

27

Lara (Bonolo)

Was I dreaming or was this nightmare going to end?
Everyone was just so caught up in the web of this evil guy.
Who was really behind the killing and why?

Klaas: "Should I rephrase the question, Ma'am?"

Dr: "No sir. The results that came to the lab showed the strong DNA which belonged to the defendant."

Klaas: "So which one is which? You didn't take the DNA yourself from the scene but you relied on the DNA that was provided to you by the SAPS forensic team?"

Dr: "Yes sir."

Klaas: "Are you admitting that you slackened and provided false information because you couldn't do your job properly hence sending an innocent person to prison in the process?"

Prosecutor: "Objection your honour speculation."

Judge: "I will allow it. I would like to find out how this mistake took place."

He sat down as all eyes were on the witness.

Dr: "We had a backlog and our deadline was approaching so we missed this one aspect."

Klaas: "The one aspect that cost a young lady her bright future. In your line of work whether you have a backlog or not one cannot afford to miss a single step as lives are involved am I right."

Dr: "Yes sir."

Klaas: "So then tell me Mrs Sangweni how did such details surpass you and cause a catastrophic event unless you were told to somehow look aside?"

Prosecutor: "Objection your honour....."

Klaas: "No further questions your worship."

Klaas was one cunning human being. From the start of his cross-examinations, I realised that he leaves everyone hanging. He was building up the curiosity of the people. Everyone who was speculating at the beginning of the case was left wondering who the killer could be.

Judge: "Any redirect?"

Prosecutor: "No your honour. May this witness be excused?"

Judge: "You may be excused. Do the people have any evidence?"

Prosecutor: "No your honour at this time we rest. Mr Smith is out of town but Mrs Sangweni's testimony will stand. Mr Smith will come later on."

Judge: "Alright and the defence are you ready with your first witness?"

Klaas: "The defence calls Mr Miles to the stand. He is our DNA expert; since we are still on the issue. Our witnesses will be re-arranged according to the urgency and their availability."

Judge: "Okay."

Klaas: "The defence calls Mr Miles to the stand."

I was agitated as they were doing their formalities. Why did they have to swear in people at different times? They should have just said everyone swears to tell the truth and we would have said we do and end of story. I just laughed at my immature comment.

Klaas: "Your honour before we begin I am going to ask the witness about exhibit A so do I have permission to present the evidence."

Judge: "Yes. You may approach."

He went to place the evidence in front of the witness and the judge then came back.

Klaas: "May I proceed; your honour?"

Judge: "Yes you may."

Klaas: "Good Morning Mr Miles."

Miles: "Good afternoon."

Klaas: "Could you please tell us a bit about yourself."

Miles: "My name is Arch Miles I work as a lab technician. I have worked in the labs for the past 18years. I have worked on several cases for over 10 years. My job is to analyse and reanalyse DNA. I also make sure that the old way of comparing DNA is matched to the new technological way of conducting DNA tests."

Klaas: "According to your credentials you trained a long time ago before the technology era how did you manage to keep up with modern ways?"

Miles: "When the advanced way of DNA testing was introduced I was the first one from the lab to take classes and advance my knowledge."

Klaas: "So In other words you know how to conduct DNA using both ancient and advanced methods?"

Miles: "Yes sir."

Klaas: "According to your knowledge which one of the two methods are convenient or accurate?"

Miles: "They both have their pros and cons because they do not work the same. So to get accurate results we always use both methods to get better results."

Prosecutor: "Objection your honour relevance."

Judge: "May the relevance be clarified."

Klaas: "Your honour his testimony will prove beyond a reasonable doubt that there was a possibility of getting accurate results if there was precession with the way DNA was conducted."

Judge: "I will allow it."

Klaas: "Thank you your honour; Mr Miles."

Miles: "As I said before; these methods will have to work hand in hand for one to obtain better and accurate results."

Klaas: “When you were given the samples for DNA what was your final analysis?”

Miles: “At first glance sample one and two looked like they originated from the scene but when analysed further there was one sample that did not have the originality which means it was splashed deliberately.”

Klaas: “What brought that conclusion from your side?”

Miles: “When I looked at exhibit A and tested the evidence given it showed that the blood that was from the victim was not only on the knife but also on the carpet and clothes. The smeared DNA was only on a certain portion of the scene. If the

accused had cut himself/herself then there was supposed to be a mixture within the blood found on the scene.”

Klaas: “You said exhibit A helped you analyse the DNA. Now tell us do you recognise the objects in Exhibit A?”

Miles: “Yes it is the kitchen knife that was brought for analysis from the murder scene.”

Klaas: “How did you know it was from the murder scene not planted?”

Miles: “The sizes of the wounds and the depth matched the knife. The skin tissues also found in the knife proved to belong to the victim.”

Klaas: "No further questions your honour."

Judge: "Cross-examination."

Prosecutor: "Yes your honour."

Judge: "You may proceed."

Prosecutor: "Good afternoon Mr Miles."

Miles: "Good afternoon."

Prosecutor: "I want to talk about the wounds you talked about and the knife. How did you conclude that the defendant's blood was not on the knife?"

Miles: "As I have indicated before the roots of the DNA was not visible in both the modern and ancient DNA testing methods."

Prosecutor: "Faint prints and DNA proved to be impossible to be analysed so how did you analyse?"

Miles: "Hence we use two methods at our labs. Before I even go further we do not analyse prints we analyse DNA prints are done by our sister lab. Our DNA system is always 99.9% accurate hence I am certain about the results."

Prosecutor: "How did you conclude then that the defendant wasn't the one holding the knife?"

Miles: "First of all to swing the knife to the exactly 120degrees it needs someone who is of certain masculinity regardless the gender and then the person should have been sitting diagonally across the victim which gives the person height of 6.5 to 8 feet tall."

Prosecutor: "You are telling the court that you measured all these in the scene of the crime?"

Miles: "We measured the wounds and the knife's precession which gave us those results."

Prosecutor: "Is there a possibility that the defendant was not alone at the time?"

Miles: "Yes there is that possibility but then it will have to dispute the evidence because then there would be more than two prints at the scene."

Klaas had trained him well. His body posture and his confidence won the courtroom over I even wished the judge could just close the case after his testimony. Klaas didn't even object to anything because he seemed to be enjoying every moment.

Prosecutor: "No further questions your honour."

Just like that, he was done.

Judge: "Would the defence like to redirect?"

Klaas: "No your honour the witness may be excused."

Judge: "The witness is excused. Do you need to continue?"

Klaas: "We ask for a recess before we call the next witness your honour."

Judge: "What is the prosecution say?"

Prosecutor: "We are in agreement

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your honour."

Judge: "Recess granted. We will resume after an hour."

Klaas: "Thank you, your honour."

"All rise."

We rose and I looked back to see Bukhosi and there he was looking good as usual but he was sitting with several ladies including his mom. What if he brought his girlfriend also? Stop it, Lara, he wouldn't have introduced you if he had a girlfriend. I reprimanded the silly inner me.

Klaas: "I am driving to the office and coming back in a minute. Will you be okay with my partner here?"

Lara: "Yes I will be."

His partner was always with him but he took notes only and never even asked questions. The prosecutor had several people in the panel and once I saw a lady cross-examining the witness.

Klaas: "Your family is here at least."

He said looking at Bukho who was smiling. They accompanied me to the chambers and I just sat looking down.

Bukho: "This is not the face of a winning lady."

Lara: "Mr Cheese boy leave me alone."

"Mr Cheese boy."

I looked up and a white lady was looking at me laughing.

"Mrs Fanta and now Mrs Cheese boy."

Another lady said that. I looked at them confused.

Mom: "Do not mind my daughters they are always forward."

I looked down and smiled. So these beautiful ladies are the sisters? Wait a minute why do they not look alike?

Bukho: "Baby; these are my sisters. Busi the firstborn in the family; Belinda the third born. W....."

Belinda: "Do not even think about it child. I am older than Bran."

Bukho: “Okay Beli and Brandon are twins so he and Beli would be number two and I am number four.”

They laughed.

Bukho: “This beautiful lady here is Brandon’s wife; Wani.”

Mom: “Let him hear you say that.”

Wani: “He has a death wish I see.”

I was looking at them confused. They were really a diverse family.

Bukho: “Do not crack your head Miss rude you will get to know them well when the time comes.”

Busi: “Miss rude.”

Wani: “Well she didn’t know that names last forever in this family. You should have warned her.”

Mom: “I am enjoying them so I am good to go.”

They laughed. I envied them in a good way because that was the relationship I wanted with my mother and brother.

Lara: “It’s a pleasure meeting you all.”

Bukho: “Okay; okay, I want to bond with my wife now would you excuse us.”

Lara: “What?”

Busi: "Welcome to the family my love."

They laughed and left while I looked at Bukhosi with murderous eyes

Bukho: "What?"

He just laughed the moron.....

28

Bukhosi

I just looked at this wonderful woman. I thought my sisters were going to intimidate her but they proved me wrong.

Lara: "You should take that back."

Bukho: "Take what back?"

I acted obliviously. I knew she wanted me to take back my words about her being my wife.

Lara: "What you said to your sisters."

Bukho: "I am not taking anything back, my love. You are my wife we only need to sign and then you will be mine."

I took her into my arms.

Lara: "We have company."

Bukho: "He also has his wife. I only get to see you in this close proximity when we are here in court. Please do not deny me this moment."

Lara: "Okay."

I looked down at her lips and they were inviting I just smashed my lips into hers.

Bukho: "God I love you this woman."

I realised I thought that one loud when it was already too late.

Lara: "I think I love you too."

I was glad I said that aloud.

Bukho: "Then fight hard with everything you got to get out of here."

Lara: "I am doing my best you are the one who should do more as you are out there and Klaas is your friend."

Bukho: "He is not my friend but a family lawyer. You see how scary he is I am even afraid of him myself."

His colleague just laughed I looked at Lara who was just giggling. Klaas just budged in I was scared and worried but for the first time he smiled and I was filled with emotion.

Bukho: "What is the smile all about?"

Klaas: "Let's say I hit the jackpot and this case is as good as over. You know I can't drop the bomb today but I will file after today's session."

Bukho: "You know I never did law and I never understand the language now please say it in plain English."

Klaas: "All in good time but I just won the case the piece of evidence that I needed my buddy worked overtime and you will be surprised who the killer is."

Lara: "Okay I am curious now."

Bukho: "Not as curious as I am."

Klaas: "Okay our time is up let us go back to the courtroom. I am questioning your neighbour and your friend Simo doesn't need to fly this side at all. I am cutting this case short I need a holiday after this because I worked hard and cracked my head open in this case."

Bukho: "Consider the holiday all expenses paid for because you really saved the day."

Klaas: "Let's save the celebrations for later but I hope you won't withdraw the offer for a holiday because I already have the holiday destination in mind for my beautiful wife."

Bukho: "Never. Whatever the outcome I will take you two to that holiday before you get old from these stupid cases."

Klaas: "Now you are speaking my language."

He left and I just hugged Nolo without saying a word our hearts just communicated without words said.

Bukho: "Let's do this."

Lara: "Thank you for being in my life."

Bukho: "No need to thank me because I am grateful for your presence in mine. I love you."

Lara: "I love you more."

Bukho: "That's wrong because you can't love me more than I do."

She just giggled and we left for the second session. I knew it was going to end then have lunch. I was already starving as I couldn't eat in the morning. It always happened that I lost my appetite when agitated.

When we got in there Mr Klaas and his partner were busy talking. The guard led her towards them. I sat next to my family.

Busi: "She is beautiful."

Wani: "I like her already."

Beli: "I feel like you have found your match. She might look all innocent but I doubt it's a woman you will mess with."

Mom: "Why would you say that?"

Beli: "I have travelled far and wide and I know she is a good woman but don't mess with her because you will never survive."

Before I could answer or respond we were interrupted.

"All rise"

Judge: "Would the counsellors approach the bench please."

They did and talked for some time. I hated the fact that they were wasting time. After what seemed like a lifetime they started.

Judge: "Is the defence ready to call the next witness?"

Klaas: "Yes your honour. The defence calls Mrs Evans to the stand."

The middle-aged lady looked like those women who loved to know about everyone in her neighbourhood. Those women who will even know the colour of underwear the neighbour's husband will be wearing each and every morning. I just laughed at the thought.

When they were done with the proceedings she sat down.

Klaas: "Good afternoon Mrs Evans."

Her: "Good afternoon."

Klaas: "Would you tell us a little about yourself."

Mrs Evans: "I am a housewife who has been a housewife for more than 10 years. My husband is in the army so he comes home twice a year since he has been deployed. Some of his leave days are extended to two months."

Klaas: "How long have you been staying in that place?"

Mrs Evans: "We moved in there since we got married I used to envy life in the townhouses but we never could afford at that time so the more we stayed in the flat the more I fell in love with it. I never wanted to move."

Klaas: "Do you know Miss Rhodes?"

Mrs Evans: "I practically know everyone in the flat because it is kind of my full-time job."

People laughed some just shook their heads.

Judge: "Order."

Klaas: "For how long have you known her?"

Mrs Evans: "Since she moved in. She and the other girl; I can't pronounce her name but I saw them move in. Their faces were lit when they moved in and they were not that loud but they loved listening to music in the morning which always woke me

up. They always spent time at home on weekends except when her friend will go with her boyfriend. They usually came to ask me if I was okay when they didn't see me for some days."

Prosecutor: "Objection storytelling."

Judge: "I will allow it."

Klaas: "Mrs Evans where were you the day in question?"

Mrs Evans: "I was at home; as usual she came home at exactly 18:45hrs then she started pacing in her room which is next to my living room. She was cursing then screaming after some time she was calm. Her friend didn't come home because I heard her on the phone telling her she wishes she was home. There was quiet for sometime then she went out. I was about to look through the window when I heard her knock softly through my door. She was a wreck when I opened. I hugged her and she asked for sugar. I gave it to her but we drank tea because I hate coffee. She told me she was going to take coffee before she slept. I heard her making coffee then there was quiet for some time and I slept. I woke up when those police officers knocked at her door."

Klaas: "Did you hear what they were knocking about?"

Mrs Evans: "I heard everything I even told the lady that they are making a mistake and she just looked at me."

Klaas: "No further questions your honour."

Judge: "Would the people like to cross-examine the witness?"

Prosecutor: "Yes your honour."

Judge: "You may go ahead."

Prosecutor: "Good afternoon Mrs Evans."

Mrs Evans: "Good afternoon sir."

Prosecutor: "According to your testimony you described everything that happened next door how is that possible."

Mrs Evans: "Very simple. I have stayed there I think before you were even born. I have fought with other people for the landlord to change the walling system but all they worry about is their money every month. You see the only side with thick and proper walls are the main bedrooms and the bathrooms. The rest is just rubbish. So instead of whining about horny neighbours who always made noise for me

I used it to my advantage."

Prosecutor: "Which is if I may ask ma'am?"

Mrs Evans: "I self-trained to be an investigator."

This time I couldn't even hold myself I laughed again. This woman had a much-skewed sense of humour.

Judge: "Order, Mrs Evans need I remind you this is a court of law?"

She just looked at him with a serious face without even blinking.

Prosecutor: "Mrs Evans; how sure are you that the defendant didn't wake up at night while you were asleep to go out there?"

Mrs Evans: "Young man nothing passes me by; not even a slick mosquito can pass me by without my notice. Like yesterday

there were five different mosquitoes in my house and the slick one passed my face 6 times. So no I would have heard her leave the house."

This woman was not normal at all.

Prosecutor: "How so when you just confirmed that the bedroom has soundproof walls."

Mrs Evans: "Who said I use my main bedroom? When my husband is not home I usually use the sitting room because my son is always away most of the times. Besides their door makes a squawky sound that we as neighbours always complain about. We are lucky that they are always indoors when they are at home and that most of the times they are at work."

Prosecutor: "So you are sure that she never left the building?"

Mrs Evans: "I bet with my life she never left."

Prosecutor: "No further questions your honour."

Judge: "Does the defence want to redirect?"

Klaas: "No your honour we have exhausted our questioning. The witness may be excused."

Judge: "The witness is excused."

She left the stand and I looked at Klaas. That man was very slick he did it deliberately to leave all the questioning to the

prosecutor the ones that proved their incompetency. Can you imagine how he even knew Mrs Evans' character was a mystery?

Judge: "Do we have another witness for today?"

Klaas: "No your honour we would like to present the final piece of the evidence that will close this case."

Prosecutor: "Objection your honour the submissions were done already."

Judge: "Why would you submit late this evidence?"

Klaas: "Your honour I am submitting it now because the witness was threatened and shipped out of the country but

now I managed to bring her back and she is at a location where she can't be harmed for her testimony."

What the.....

29

Lara (Bonolo)

I think I was going insane. Since the case began I even started questioning my sanity. Who was this guy really and why was he killed then I framed in the process? This witness can't be the lover that I knew who moved to Swaziland because I once saw her during the first day of the trial. She even told Mr Klaas to add her on the witness list if it came to such a point when my innocence was hard to prove. She had been around and no one had shipped her out of the country unwillingly.

Everyone in the courtroom was just unresponsive. Who wouldn't when Klaas could reveal such information?

Judge: "How did the prosecution miss this piece of evidence?"

Prosecutor: "Your honour we don't even know how relevant this witness is to the case and why the witness is appearing at this time."

Judge: "Would the defence care to respond."

Klaas: "Yes you honour. Thank you very much. This witness is the one that was sent to buy the same hoodie like the one the

defendant was wearing and the same witness who was there at the murder scene. Her prints were taken and they matched the set of prints that were also partial at the murder scene.”

Okay, I was more than curious. What was actually going on?

Judge: “What is the prosecution saying about this in light of the evidence?”

Prosecutor: “Thank you, your honour. The people would like to have time to also analyse and question the witness.”

I wanted to be a judge because the respect this man was given was making me envious. I was going to finish my law degree and become a judge.

Judge: “This is a re-trial aren’t you supposed to leave no stones unturned in the first place.”

Prosecutor: “Your honour as Mr Klaas said that she was shipped out of the country.”

Judge: “I see this as an excuse how did he manage to find out about the witness to an extent of tracking them down when you failed to even know about the witness.”

Prosecutor: “Your honour we are asking for time only to get to the witness.”

Judge: “What is the defence saying?”

Klaas: "Thank you, your honour. The defence would like to decline their request because we are not sure if the witness will be safe. After all, she was told never to come back."

Judge: "Understandable; what is the prosecutor saying?"

Prosecutor: "We would like to revisit other avenues then if we cannot be given a chance with the witness."

Klaas: "Your honour I object to this because of time wasted. My client has already spent an amount of time in prison for the crime she did not commit. Will it be fair for her to continue because of the chaos that was caused by the prosecution office and their unreliable investigations? We request that your worship should also consider the human rights of the defendant."

There was a lot of noise in the courtroom as people were in agreement with Mr Klaas. I was just praying for my freedom and also thinking about filing my complaint for false arrests.

Judge: "Order."

When he hit his gavel he was about to explode because of anger; people kept quiet and looked at him.

Judge: "I will only grant a two days break from there we will come and close this case. The people are not allowed to make any excuses from then. Anything else on this matter?"

Klaas: "Yes your honour we would like to have the protection from the state and assurance that nothing will happen to our witness within the two days we are given."

Judge: "What is the prosecution saying?"

Prosecutor: "We do not have any objection, your honour."

Judge: "Permission granted."

Klaas: "Thank you very much."

Judge: "If we do not have anything court adjourned."

Klaas: "Thank you, your honour."

Prosecutor: "Thank you, your honour."

They said it in unison then he hit his gavel. We stood up and I watched him as he went out. I could smell freedom not so far as I saw the tunnel getting closer to the end as I saw the light drawing closer to me.

Klaas: "We are getting a verdict on our next session and you will find out who the killers are?"

Lara: "Killers?"

Klaas: "I do not want to be a spoiler alert."

He just smiled something that he hardly did. I just shook my head and wondered what he was up to. This case on its own

taught me several things but above all never to judge a book by its cover.

I always looked at prisoners with another eye wondering what they were thinking about committing crimes but then I was

wrongfully accused. I also learnt that not all the people work when they go inside their offices every morning. Some just push the time and wait for paycheques.

I also realised that the statement 'the love of money is the root of all evil' was not just a statement. I betted with my broke behind that most of those people involved were all given money. Some of them even had daughters my age but all they cared about was the money they were paid to send an innocent me to prison. The world will never be a peaceful place as long as people still love money. I was thinking to myself. That's why there were human traffickers and drug dealers because they all wanted easy, quick and plenty of money.

Lara: "Thank you very much for taking this case."

Klaas: "I did it for the money."

He was laughing.

Klaas: "Just kidding. I think your case gave me an idea for my next pro-bono case. This prosecutor's office needs to know that

I will be different and fight corruption alone. I will never stop until most of those corrupt lawyers are also put behind bars.”

He was serious and I knew he was going to do it with determination.

Klaas: “Now let’s get you out of here.”

I was escorted to the van immediately. On that particular day, my mind was working overtime. I had a lot in my mind but I knew that reality was near then I had to face my fears heads on. Like confronting my so called mother and then deal with the wedding thing. When I was thinking about the wedding I had mixed emotions.

Gail: “Today we were watching the case and I was emotional.”

Somehow the case was being broadcast on one of the local channels. I just let her hug me tight.

Gail: “I am shocked beyond words too. I think those who never believed in your innocence now are believers.”

We both laughed.

Lara: “I met the sisters today.”

Gail: “You what?”

Lara: “I am sure you heard me clearly

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you are just being a dramatic mother.”

Gail: “How was it anywhere? I know some people can be intimidating.”

Lara: “To my surprise, it wasn’t at all. Apparently, he has white siblings and I don’t know why. All in all, it felt like a dream I

don’t even think it’s real. How can they just accept me like that?”

Gail: “What do you mean?”

Lara: “I have never been accepted by anyone including my mother so this is foreign to me.”

Gail: “That’s a lie. I accepted you from the first day. You have Simo, the roommate and Zoe what more do you want?”

Lara: “I am overwhelmed that’s the problem. I was expecting to have a monster in law and sisters in law from hell.”

Gail: “Not all is lost. Some people are always good out there.”

Lara: “I think it will take some time I guess. I fell in love with the white one and the dark one they said she is married to the white one’s twin.”

Gail just laughed without even taking a breather.

Lara: "What?"

Gail: "You need to know their names because they are your sisters in law now. The fact that you fell in love with them sounds a little weird to me."

Lara: "I remember the beautiful and uptight one Busi. She has a beautiful smile but she is one of the serious types. The only thing I liked more is the protective side."

Gail: "You saw that all in one meeting?"

Lara: "I became cautious of people when I was not well received and welcomed in high school."

Gail: "If you say so. So how do you feel about the case?"

Lara: "I have Bukhosi to thank."

Gail: "Do not give him all the credit you also initiated it. You are one of the most intelligent kids I have met and you will go far if you start believing in yourself and stop undermining you as your mother does."

Lara: "I have gathered the courage to go and see her after all is settled."

Gail: "Good I support you all the way. If you want to have a good future you have to make sure that your past is clear. I would love to see you happy without baggage."

Lara: "I am having positive thinking from today onwards. Klaas gave me hope for the future."

Gail: "I thought it was your Mr Cheese man."

I laughed looking at this woman who had become my mother.

Lara: "Not that way."

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"Today is the moment of truth I can't wait for you to be out of here. I hope you packed your things already."

I laughed at him. He had brought a dress and a formal jacket for me.

Lara: "Why do you always bring skirts and dresses not even pants?"

Bukho: "I will tell you but you see even my mom and sister always wear like that."

Okay, I was not in the mood to ask further because I had a pit in my stomach as I wasn't sure about the day. We had an afternoon session I wished it was in the morning.

Lara: "You say I should pack hay."

We both laughed

Bukho: "Yes today you are going home."

Lara: "I hope so I will make a party with Mrs Evans."

Bukho: "That woman is a legend but I don't want you becoming her. She will teach you how to become a self-made detective and then you will investigate me."

Lara: "Do you have anything worth destroying?"

Bukho: "Not at all."

Lara: "So tell me. You are the one who is in control of the company and the shares are in your name?"

Bukho: "Yes but not all because I also work and I invested also."

Lara: "So you are rich and when we get married I will get half."

Bukho: "What is this all about?"

Moo: "Time is up please be ready."

I wished I had finished my conversation with him. He was going to think I am.....

Moo: "Please I don't want to be in trouble."

Lara: "Sorry sis Moo."

*

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“All rise”

My heart was almost in my mouth. This was the moment of truth.

The judge came in. Wait a minute where was the witness.

Lara: “Where is she?”

Klaas: “All in good time.”

Judge: “I hope the witness is safe and ready to testify.”

Klaas: “Thank you, your honour. Yes, the witness is so much safe and we are ready to close our case.”

Judge: “Is the prosecutor ready?”

Prosecutor: “Thank you, your honour. Yes, we are ready.”

He was not happy I could tell and Klaas was as smiley as a child given candy.

Judge: “We can proceed then.”

Klaas: “Thank you, your honour. We may call Miss Nobuhle Moloji to the stand.”

I knew that name from somewhere. Where did I know that name from? The guard opened the door and she walked in. What the.

Bukhosi

I was shocked by her questioning. What was going on? I just looked at her then pushed the thought out of my mind. I looked at Sis Moo walking away with her. My drive to court was filled with unanswered questions but I didn't want to entertain them much.

I was anxious looking at Klaas at work. My only interest was with the last piece of evidence. I was looking at everyone looking at this Nobuhle Moloji person. Well, when I looked at Nolo she was as if she has seen a ghost. Which meant that she knew her; I then looked at Mlulami's brother he was also as white as if he was the ghost itself. The father just coughed and everyone looked at him. Okay, this was interesting.

Judge: "We may proceed."

Klaas: "Thank you, your honour."

They took a few exhibitions to the judge while they were preparing her for the stand. I looked at her and tried to place the name. I wanted to check if the name appeared in the names from the documentary. I was cracking my head when they started the proceedings.

Klaas: "May we proceed?"

Judge: "Yes we may."

Klaas: "Good morning Miss Nobuhle Moloji."

Nobuhle: "Good morning sir."

Klaas: "Miss Moloji; please tell us about yourself and how you came to know the victim."

Nobuhle: "I am Nobuhle Moloji and I was a pharmacist before I was shipped out of the country involuntarily. I knew the victim because he was my friend before we became friends our parents were friends and associates. We used to plan our future together talking about opening our own emperor with our partners."

Klaas: "Was there more to your friendship?"

Nobuhle: "Never; I grew up taking them as my brothers so no, I never felt anything for him other than the brother-sister relationship we had."

Klaas: "Miss Moloji; please elaborate to us what you meant by 'shipped' out of the country?"

Nobuhle: "Yes I was shipped out of the country because of the piece of evidence that will exonerate the defendant."

Klaas: "Please Miss Moloji; clarify."

Nobuhle: "I am almost the same height as Miss Rhodes. It was a last minute arrangement because she just came to his office which disturbed their plans."

Prosecutor: "Objection; narration."

Judge: "Mr Klaas stop wasting time and get to the point."

Klaas: "Your honour there was an injustice that took place. An innocent young woman was sent to prison for a crime she didn't commit. Forgive me for being thoroughly in this case but we need to do it some little justice as we didn't have people who took care of that the first time."

He was breathing fire and I saw the judge change his face to scary and I was scared a little too.

Judge: "Mr Klaas; do you want to be held in contempt of court."

Klaas: "Forgive me, your honour, it will never happen again. May we proceed?"

Judge: "Yes we may."

From what I realised from their arguments in contempt of court was not a good thing. I was praying that it not going to mess up the case.

Klaas: "Thank you, your honour."

The prosecutor sat down but I could tell he was about to be fried. The way he has been walking like an empty shell made me not regret hiring Klaas at all.

Klaas: "Miss Moloji before we were r...interrupted....."

I knew he was going to say before we were rudely interrupted.

Klaas: "Please clarify about the plans."

Nobuhle: "They didn't go much into detail but I heard them talking about the scapegoat. When I was in Mozambique I managed to put two and two together. They promised me no one will get hurt."

Klaas: "Now tell the court who hired you and why didn't you question them about leaving the country?"

Nobuhle: "I was hired by Mr Buthelezi senior. He came with Mlulami's wife. They said I will be helping my father and sister because my sister was in the hospital and needed more money. They promised to give me a better life as I was going to live the life I dreamt about. It has been months and I heard nothing from them. I helped them but they let me suffer."

Klaas: "So you are telling this court that you came for revenge?"

Nobuhle: "No I didn't come for revenge. I was offline all along I only saw the documentary from a hotel I was now working at. I ran out of cash so I had to take any job to sustain me. When I

saw the documentary I put two and two together. The phone they gave me didn't even have the internet promising me that it was for my protection."

Klaas: "So when you called them what did they say?"

Nobuhle: "I was threatened to go to jail and join Lara or Mlulami. I told them I was recording the call. They thought I was bluffing Mr Buthelezi told me to go ahead no one was going to believe me."

Klaas: "Your honour we would like to bring exhibit J5,2 to evidence. The recording is not illegal because they knew they were being recorded and they made those threats."

Judge: "Okay I will allow it."

Klaas: "Thank you, your honour."

I saw the prosecutor running his hand over his hair and the other members of his team looking down I just knew then that Klaas was done with the case.

They played the recording and I just looked at Nolo she looked at me with mixed emotions. I was happy this was going to be over soon.

Judge: "Does the prosecutors have questions for our witness."

Prosecutor: "No your honour we will have our closing argument."

Judge: "Any redirect questions Mr Klaas?"

Klaas: "No your honour we will also have our closing arguments."

Judge: "I would have asked for a break but we need to wrap this once and for all. May we have the final arguments?"

Klaas: "Thank you, your worship, we would like to let the prosecutor have the final argument first."

Judge: "Are we in agreement?"

Prosecutor: "Thank you, your honour

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we will now present our final argument."

Judge: "Go go ahead."

Prosecutor: "A man was killed in cold blood. One would rule out a crime of passion but well executed. This was premeditated because all the steps were calculated. Your honour for the premeditated not only did the defendant attack the victim in front of an audience but she also made threats that she will end his life. We also know that the defendant was

angry. You heard from the detective in the scene of the murder Miss Rhodes' fingerprints were discovered there also."

Hell no, if they won this then there was no justice in this country. I was only waiting for Klaas to nail them into their crucifixion crosses.

Prosecutor: "Miss Rhodes made sure that her victim was never left alive to tell the tale. The defence presented evidence about the victim's father and wife being involved. I fail to get their motive to kill their own but the defendant has several motives to kill the victim.

The defendant was planning this murder and when she found the opportunity she seized it and took his life. If the defence is trying to prove there was another killer but your honour, in this case, there was never another killer but a well-planned murder.

Your honour, we ask that you find Miss Lara Bonolo Rhodes guilty as charged. Thank you, your worship."

Judge: "May we hear the defence arguments."

Klaas: "Yes your honour. May we proceed?"

Judge: "Yes you may."

Klaas: "Thank you. Chaos as I said in the opening statement. Miss Rhodes was in the wrong family at the wrong time because she became their scapegoat. These charges brought

to my client are surely baseless and show a witch-hunt towards my client. The prosecution solemnly depends on the hoodie

that was worn by Miss Rhodes and the partial fingerprints found on the scene of the crime.

The prosecution let us believe that Miss Rhodes was the only person who had the type of hoodie that was seen on the footage whereas the defence has established that Miss Moloi bought the same hoodie that was used the day of the murder.

Their first witness did not only prove his theory wrong he also showed us that he was also capable of murdering his friend as he had a vendetta against him too. The second witness did not prove any different as an investigating officer who proved to have been involved with the victim and his family at a more personal level.

The next witness who claimed to be a medical examiner also proved that not only did she not mess up before prior to this case but she also didn't thoroughly investigate from her part and the office lacked advanced technology to prove otherwise.

As for Miss Rhodes' fingerprints being found on the scene; it proved beyond a reasonable doubt that they might have been planted at the scene of the murder. Not only were they planted but they were close to invisible at the scene and her

skin cells were next to non-existent than what was portrayed on the given report.

All the evidence that the prosecution gathered seems to be proving beyond a reasonable doubt that there was no thorough investigation conducted from the beginning. As I introduced my witnesses although some were never called because we have a key witness to end this case. Mrs Evans proved not only that Miss Rhodes was not our killer but also that she was at home the whole time.

Miss Moloji our last witness testify to have been threatened to leave the country after being used to orchestrate the unthinkable that led us to the real killers who will tell you why they did what they did or who killed our victim. That will be the case for another day. For now, I would like to prove that my client is innocent of all the charges accused of.

Your honour; all we are left with are endless loopholes which don't even place my client anywhere near the murder scene.

No tangible evidence and motive to murder except for the chaos caused by the Buthelezi family. This is the reasonable doubt the prosecution would like you to ignore. The prosecution's case also bases on the word exchange that my client engaged on, but well who wouldn't when traumatised

and terrorised in a democratic country like ours. However, they ignore the fact that my client is neither the right size nor the right physic to have single-handedly murdered a giant of a man.

Your honour one cannot be convicted based on nonexistent evidence and planted proof. Unreliable witnesses and unsure circumstances will prove to you that this case never existed from the start therefore I move for you to find my client not guilty of all the counts that she is accused of. Thank you.”

Judge: “The people have something to add on?”

Prosecutor: “No your honour.”

Judge: “Alright this is a very difficult case there is a lot of evidence in which some of the evidence just surfaced and some resurfaced. Both ways they have direct evidence specifically on the victim and defendant. There is also a lot of circumstantial evidence it has too reasonable doubted. The law says we must adopt the interpretation that points to her innocence yet that points to her guilt. Each piece needs to be evaluated to determine which reasonableness; I would say after looking at all the evidence one could fairly conclude that maybe that the defendant is guilty.

But likely isn't beyond a reasonable doubt. Proof must be beyond a reasonable doubt. With the law mandating the

circumstantial evidence courts must take note of the interpretation of guilty and interpretation of reasonable doubt. Then the court must find answers and I am left with reasonable doubt based on the evidence provided. I find the defendant NOT GUILTY.”

There was commotion I just placed my face on my hands and cried. This was over and I was going to start my life with the woman I loved.

Klaas: “Thank you, your honour, we would like to file two complaints at the court.”

He was also emotional, I wished my family were there but they were busy on that particular day.

Judge: “Do not push it Mr Klaas I am not in the mood today.”

Klaas just laughed and the prosecutor was just sweating. Mind you the case was being broadcast live and this was going to prove that this was not properly investigated in the first place.

Klaas: “I will file them later your honour but I would love for my client to be released immediately as she doesn’t need to spend another day in a place that she is not supposed to be.”

Judge: “Granted. Both councillors should submit their findings and complaints. The release form will be signed in an hour after the final submissions.”

I looked at Nolo who was just an emotional wreck. I was happy because those were tears of joy. I hated those formalities I wished to just take her home immediately.

Klaas: "Thank you, your honour."

Judge: "Does the prosecutor have anything regarding this matter."

Prosecutor: "No your honour."

Judge: "Well in that case court adjourned."

He hit the gavel one last time and I knew this was the last time coming to that God-forsaken place. No offence but we needed a break.

"All rise."

He left as they took Bonolo to the chambers. I followed them as other people filed out too. This was a feeling of sweet sorrow for me.

Bukho: "Thank you very much."

I said to Klaas when I got there. He smiled coming to me.

Klaas: "I believe you owe my wife and I a holiday."

Bukho: "Sorted."

Klaas: "Good, let's do this."

When I was about to hug Nolo my phone vibrated. I took it out and saw more than 10 missed calls. I called the number.

“Hello”

What the....

31

Lara (Bonolo)

I thought maybe I was in a dream. Never in this lifetime did I think I was going to walk free. I looked at Klaas he was as cool as a cucumber. I couldn't help it but fall into his arms. He was surprised at my act at first he didn't react then he hugged me back when he realised that I was crying.

Klaas: “This is over now and I wanted to file my complaint today but you saw the judge.”

Lara: “I am grateful for all the time and resources you used in this case without fail.”

Klaas: “I was doing my job.”

Lara: “You are good at your job and I will be your first client at your own company. I would like you to file my next case as an independent lawyer.”

He let go of me and looked at me. He smiled and I blushed. It was the first time I saw him genuinely smiling without any stress.

Klaas: "I would really love to represent you. So for how much should we sue them for?"

We both laughed. I was sitting opposite him. We were waiting for the one hour that the judge said we should.

Lara: "Then you will think I love money."

Klaas: "Never; I know you have to get something for the trauma that you went through and it will be my first case alone so I need money."

Lara: "Don't worry you will get paid handsomely."

We both laughed.

Klaas: "You said what happened to your fiancée?"

I didn't even know how to reply to that because I thought he knew where he went. He received the call and then left in a hurry promising to come back as soon as possible.

Lara: "I don't know. I thought you knew he is your friend."

Klaas: "He will come soon. I am happy this is over."

Lara: "I have a feeling that you know who the killer is."

Klaas: "Yes I know but I will never tell you. All in good time you will know and I hope you will have the courage to stomach the truth."

Lara: "I am curious now more than ever."

Klaas: "I am not involved there."

He laughed and went out probably to smoke. I was left alone trying to compose myself. I didn't even know what to do with myself. Happy was an understatement. I was over the moon

but scared at the same time as I was not sure about what the future was going to bring.

Moo: "I am going home now Goldie; do you want to go with me?"

I had been sitting there for quite some time I didn't even know who to call because I didn't have a phone or money. Bukhosi had just disappeared and I didn't know what to make of that.

After court when we finished filling the forms Klaas left as I was transported back to prison. I was going there to take my stuff and leave but then I thought of waiting for Bukhosi hoping he was going to remember the fiancé that he had. Then I thought wrong because here I was all alone.

Lara: "No sis Moo I will wait a few minutes only."

Moo: "Okay then. Do not be a stranger I am always here and you have my home address."

Lara: "Yes I do and thank you for the kindness that you have shown me."

I hugged her as I watched her leave. I was at the front desk there where people could see me as they walked in. I had talked to Gail and she gave me her home address so I was going to go and try to talk to her daughter. I looked at the clock as it kept making noise. I could even hear my heartbeat because of the silence.

This is what happens when one lives in a fairytale world. I had planned my release in my head and this didn't include me sitting waiting for a fiancé I didn't know where he was. Maybe it was in my head that I had a fiancé.

"Hay I am leaving too can I take you home?"

It was that guy who once took me to court. I was even ashamed that I had forgotten his name. I think he realised that because he introduced himself again.

Ben: "Ben, Benjamin. My name is Benjamin and I wouldn't mind dropping you off at your place."

I think it was time to accept reality and accept help from people who wanted to help.

Lara: "Thank you very much Ben yes I will accept your help."

Ben: "Okay then let me go and take my car."

He left me and I looked at the guard on duty he just felt sorry for me. I took my plastic and herded to the parking lot. It was time I faced reality. Come to think of it the enthusiasm I had when I won the case was gone. I was back to reality and I didn't know what the future held for Bukhosi and I. At least I had my job with Mr. Nails.

Ben: "You have to direct me."

I was lost in my own world.

Lara: "Or I forgot."

I gave him my address and continued to look out of the window.

Ben: "I liked you too but he loves you. Whatever is going on he will tell you but I know he loves you."

Lara: "He is your friend so it's expected to defend him."

Ben: "No he....."

Lara: "May we please not go to the topic I just need a bath and my bed."

Ben: "No problemo."

I just smiled and looked through the window again. Before I knew it he was parked outside my flat. I thanked him and went inside.

I was praying there was someone because I didn't have the key.

To my luck, Hlengi was there. She screamed her lungs out.

Hlengi: "Why didn't you tell me you will be out?"

Lara: "I thought you watched the case."

Hlengi: "With a boss like mine and shifts like crazy I couldn't today. I just got home I was about to watch it now because I recorded it."

Lara: "Well no need I am here now."

She screamed again and hugged me tightly. The door opened and Zoe came in shouting.

Zoe: "Hlengi did you hear the good news? I just heard it now from my friend....."

She trailed when she saw me and came closer. We group hugged and cried. All the tears of joy and disappointment came at one.

Zoe: "You are really here. I am so happy."

Lara: "You gained your weight back and you looking good. I am happy to be here. I have dreamt of this and the reality of it surpasses the dream. I couldn't have asked for better friends."

Hlengi: "We wish we could have done more."

Lara: "You being my true friends count a lot. Now let us eat I am hungry. I need a bath first."

Zoe: "Wowowowo wait where is Mr. Cheese what what when you are here? Aren't you supposed to be celebrating?"

My heart sank and I told them everything. They were hurt they tried to comfort me but I was just numb to pain as it was.

Zoe: "While you bath we will go and buy some food. No cooking today and we will bring a few essentials for you."

Lara: "Thank you very much let me take a bath."

I took my things to my room, well the room I was going to be sharing with Zoe from that day onwards. I heard them leave while I sank on the bathroom floor crying. After some time I bathed and finished. I was channel hopping wearing my gown when there was a knock. I knew it wasn't the girls because they had the keys. When I opened Bukhosi was there looking all yummy. I would have jumped into him but I was hurt I just looked at him.

Bukho: "I am so sorry about today."

Lara: "Okay."

Bukho: "Please Nolo, don't do this."

Lara: "Do what? Where were you?"

He looked at me as if I had horns. I knew I was never going to get the answer. I composed myself and couldn't believe I was going to say those words.

Lara: "Well Bukhosi I will make things easy for you. It was good living in a fairytale but now we are back to reality. It was good while it lasted. Well

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the arrangement worked for you the most. You get to be the youngest to produce a documentary and you are now famous. At least I got my freedom.

Let's face it. Girls like me do not end up with guys like you. It was all good while I was dreaming about the future that will never happen. Thank you for being in my life though because I would never have tasted my freedom had I not met you."

He looked at me as if I was speaking Spanish.

Lara: "Goodbye Bukhosi."

I was about to close the door when he realised that I was serious I was not bluffing.

Bukho: “No, I am coming back. I will explain everything to you. Please you have to hear me out.”

Lara: “Are you going to tell me where you were?”

Bukho: “Please Nolo let us not do this here.”

His hesitation told me a lot and I just wanted him gone so that I could breathe.

Lara: “Okay.”

I was dismissing him and hoped he never realised that. To my advantage he never did.

Bukho: “I am coming.”

He didn't even hug me or come any closer. I was left with so many questions. This was like the whole Mlulami thing all over

again. I was not going to allow myself to be in that position again.

While I was still thinking the girls came in all happy and bubbly.

Zoe: “Simo wants to talk to you.”

Lara: “She heard the news already?”

Hlengi: “She couldn’t wait. Anyway, this is from the three of us. We couldn’t think of a better welcome present.”

She said giving me a brand new phone. I cried because I never expected that.

Zoe: “I took the liberty of setting up your WhatsApp and all the apps.”

She knew my email and passwords because she usually helped me with my assignments while I was locked up. Thinking about the assignments I needed to know what was going to happen to my degree as I was not under correctional services anymore.

Well, I need to focus on that moment. Simo called while I was still admiring the phone.

Zoe: “Well, answer it. I hope you still know how it works.”

We laughed as I excused myself going to the bedroom. They were my friends but Simo was my bestie so I needed some privacy.

We spoke about everything but the most important thing was the fact that she was going to book a flight for the following day. Thank God my passport was still in good condition. I think I needed that break before starting over. I called Mr. Nails and he agreed to let me start after a month.

Then I had an idea there on the spot.

Zoe: "So what did she say?"

Lara: "We talked about several things."

Hlengi: "Then."

Lara: "I am leaving."

Both: "Huh?"

Lara: "Not for good"

Zoe: "Okay I was about to strangle you. So when?"

Lara: "Right now"

Hlengi: "What?"

I told them about Bukhosi's visit.

Zoe: "Don't you want to hear him out?"

Lara: "I was with Mlulami for a long time and I know he was going to lie. I saw it in his eyes."

Hlengi: "But...."

Lara: "No girls I need this break, please. Help me pack quickly my ride will be here soon."

Zoe: "I thought your flight was tomorrow?"

Lara: "It is I am not sleeping here today."

Hlengi: "Where then."

Lara: "You don't want to know."

Zoe: "Don't tell me....."

Hlengi: "No.....no...no"

I just looked at them.

32

Bukhosi

To say I was disappointed at myself would not justify how I felt at the moment. I looked at my phone and my heart beat fast.

"I have to go and please stop calling me. Next time learn to solve your problem the way you created them."

I just stormed out of the place with a heart that almost beat out of my mouth. It was already late I didn't know whether to go to prison or what. I called but no one was answering the office phone. I bet the warden had gone home already.

When I got there I found a different guard.

Bukho: "Hay; how are you?"

Him: "I am good and you. Are you here for the lady who had been waiting for you the whole day?"

The way he was so blunt made me look aside. I wished I could turn back the hands of time. What was I thinking? Why did I have to answer the call?

Bukho: "I am; did she leave to the cell already?"

Him: "NO she left going home. Her release forms were signed in the afternoon."

Bukho: "Who took her home?"

Him: "She left with Benjamin an hour ago."

Bukho: "Thank you very much."

I left dialing Ben's number and he was not answering. I cursed throwing the phone at the back as it rang. I rushed to it without looking at the caller.

Bukho: "Ben; please tell me Nolo is okay."

Mom: "Why wouldn't she be? Why were you not answering your phone?"

Oh God, take me now. I was not in the mood for the lecture.

Bukho: "Mom can I call you back later."

Mom: "Don't you dare hang up on me Bukhosi."

She was fuming but I was going to have to face her later. She hated it when we hung up on her but it had to be done. I was not in the right state of mind to answer her questions.

Bukho: "I love you mom and I am coming home soon."

Mom: "Your sisters are here. No point of correction the whole family is here waiting for you and Bonolo."

What have I done? When she said the whole family I knew what she meant; she meant the whole clan including our extended family. I couldn't take it I just dropped the call I was going to deal with her anger later.

I was hoping I was not going to get lost driving to her flat. I never went there but I had the address. I was praying Ben never tried his luck as he also wanted her. What if she was with him as we speak? Why was he not answering his phone? All those questions made me scared. I was never going to lose Lara because of one stupid mistake. I was not lost that was a good thing. I just looked at her and she was beautiful. She looked better than when she was in prison.

Bukho: "I am so sorry about today."

Lara: "Okay."

Bukho: "Please Nolo, don't do this."

Lara: "Do what? Where were you?"

How was I even going to begin? I couldn't answer her I just looked at her.

Lara: “Well Bukhosi I will make things easy for you. It was good living in a fairytale but now we are back to reality. It was good while it lasted. Well, the arrangement worked for you the most. You get to be the youngest to produce a documentary and you are now famous. At least I got my freedom.

Let’s face it. Girls like me do not end up with guys like you. It was all good while I was dreaming about the future that will never happen. Thank you for being in my life though because I would never have tasted my freedom had I not met you.”

Well, those words cut real deep. How was I going to go on without her? No this was not happening; the first woman to ever love genuinely was about to leave me.

Bukho: “No, I am coming back. I will explain everything to you. Please you have to hear me out.”

She was not going to leave me. I drove to my place took a shower quickly and drove to the mall. I knew it was a little late but there were several shops still open.

I bought a phone for her in her favourite colour. Then bought some flowers and a welcome gift. My phone had a flat battery so I had to leave it on the charger at home. I was not going to let her go. If it meant telling the truth so be it. I was going to tell her the truth. When I got back to her flat her friend opened the door.

Bukho: "May I please come in. I need to speak to Lara."

Her: "You are too late."

Bukho: "May I."

She let me in as I followed her. I couldn't remember who she was but I knew her roommate started with H.

Her: "I am Zoe and this is Hlengi."

Okay, Zoe her friend from college. I sat down from her instructions.

Hlengi: "Nice to meet you

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cheese boy. Do you need anything to drink for now?"

Bukho: "I am good may I please speak to Nolo."

Hlengi left for the kitchen. I looked at Zoe.

Zoe: "I am afraid she left. Her flight is leaving tomorrow early in the morning."

Bukho: "What?"

I felt like the air was leaving my body. Just one mistake that I never wanted to repeat I was left alone.

Zoe: "She needs a break I think you can agree with me. When she comes back she will be refreshed and she can make sound decisions then."

Bukho: "Oh so she is coming back?"

Zoe: "Yes did you think she was going forever?"

Hlengi: "You really do not know her. She might be impulsive but she doesn't run away no matter what."

I was lost for words. I was conflicted about what to do and the girls saw that.

Zoe: "She is only hurt and overwhelmed for now. When she comes back she will be okay. I think she deserves this break. If I may ask where were you?"

Bukho: "I do not want to talk about it. What time is her flight and where is she right now?"

Hlengi: "Her flight is at 06:30 she said she needed to clear her head hence she refused to even tell us where she went."

Bukho: "Okay thank you ladies I will go see her before her flight."

Zoe: "For what is worth she loves you. She is just hurt and conflicted she will come around. You know the story about her ex so she is trying to protect her heart."

Hlengi: "She is right. Give her time and she will be okay when she comes back."

Bukho: "Thank you, ladies."

I said my goodbyes and went home. I decided otherwise because I knew my parents were expecting me.

Mom: "So you decide to show up after being rude to me."

Bukho: "Sorry mom."

Dad: "Sorry won't cut it. Where were you and where is your fiancée?"

Bukho: "I messed up."

Mom: "That doesn't answer our question Bukhosi"

She was breathing fire.

Bukho: "I am beating myself up, please I came to apologise for keeping everyone waiting. The truth is I never knew that you were going to want us to come here to the family."

Dad: "Well that was the reason they never came to court. They were busy running up and down to make a welcome party for your fiancée. Now tell us where is she?"

Bukho: "The truth is I don't know where she is and I only know here flight to Australia leaves in the morning."

Mom: "What have you done?"

Dad: "Baby; please calm down."

Mom: "No Kay I will not calm down. Your son needs to tell me what he did. This has been an emotional journey for this girl and you saw it when you watched the documentary. Today was supposed to be a happy day for her."

Bukho: "I am sorry mom okay."

I was on the verge of tears. This was not happening to me. She was right it was supposed to be her happy moment.

Dad: "Let us calm down and talk rationally."

Mom: "I will not be rational about some spoilt brat. I am going to bed."

She was angry and I knew it was going to take a lot for her to forgive me. When she left dad looked at me sighed and sat down.

Dad: "Tell me you will fix this."

Bukho: "I will dad. Even if it means I have to book a flight and follow her I will."

Dad: "Okay let me go and comfort your mom."

Bukho: “Eew dad no child is supposed to see that picture in their mind.”

Dad: “You are too forward and if you didn’t screw things up you were going to be talking about different issues right now. Your sisters are leaving.”

Bukho: “I am leaving too and sorry about today.”

Dad: “Where were you if I may ask?”

Bukho: “I was.....”

Busi: “Do not even say anything because you are the most ungrateful son of

Dad: “Do not even finish that because it’s my wife you are talking about.”

Busi: “Dad I was going to say, son of a gun.”

They laughed and I just stared at them as I was not in the mood for jokes.

Dad: “I am going to my wife.”

Bukho: “I am leaving too.”

Busi: “Bukhosi you wil.....”

Bukho: “Not today Busi please you may lecture me tomorrow or some other time.”

Busi: "Suite yourself."

I left going to my empty flat which looked and felt emptier than ever. I set the alarm as I was going to see her off in the morning. If it's space she needed I was going to give her but I was never going to let her go.

"No, no, no damn."

I had snoozed the alarm when it went off and realised I was running late. I didn't bath I just did a few brushes and left. I was praying the flight will be delayed or something.

"No, this is not happening."

I placed my head on both my hands as I heard them announcing the flight that took off.

"You were late."

I looked behind me and saw mom. She was standing there with dad looking calmer than the day before.

Bukho: "I snoozed the alarm by mistake."

Mom: "Well at least we saw her off. She is not angry she is just hurt although she didn't want to tell us what went on."

Bukho: "I am glad if she is okay."

Dad: "Your mouth and body language tell a different story. Did you even bath?"

Bukho: "Well I will see you later."

I didn't wait for their reply but just turned at the speed of lightning as I rushed to my car.....

33

Lara (Bonolo)

"Don't look at me like that I haven't even told you where I am going."

Hlengi: "Do not even think about going to your mother's place."

Zoe: "Are you going there? She will set you back. Don't even think about her now."

Lara: "You are all mistaken. I will see her after my holiday. You are not going to stop me then because I need to face my ghosts before I turn on the new leaf. I had time to think deeply when I was in that cell. I do not want to be a bitter person."

Hlengi: "But you are bitter now because you still not talking to cheese boy."

I just laughed

Lara: "Mr. Cheese boy can wait I will deal with him when I come back."

Zoe: "How long are you going to stay there?"

Lara: "They gave me one month I am thinking I will use it all up."

Hlengi: "What?"

Lara: "Don't you think I deserve it after all I have been through?"

Zoe: "She is right but we need a girls' trip when you come back."

Hlengi: "Before you become Mrs. Cheese boy."

Lara: "Do not even go there. I am in on the trip and that will be after I get paid for now I am broke with a capital letter B."

Zoe: "The capital letter B has money."

Hlengi: "Yes boo."

Lara: "What are you talking about?"

Zoe: "B(ukhosi) is not broke."

I just laughed looking at those retarded friends of mine. I hugged them then took my bag.

Lara: "I love you and I will keep in touch. I asked Simo to roam my number for me she agreed so I will be online all the time."

Hlengi: "That's good please take care of yourself we need you fresh and well."

Zoe: "We need to pick up bride maids' dresses soon."

I laughed going to my ride. I saw Mrs. Evans from the window and made a mental note to see her first thing when I came back. I opened the back door and sat.

"Thank you for your help, Mr. Nails."

He smiled at me. He had aged the few months I had been away.

Lara: "You have aged."

Nails: "Do not even mock me, child. I work hard."

Lara: "I wonder why. Why don't you have a family?"

Nails: "I was in love once and making money became more important and she left me for a guy who didn't have money but worshiped the ground she walks on. I watch her everyday being happy and money doesn't even change how she feels about her husband."

Lara: "I am sorry."

Nails: "Don't be. If you get a chance to love regardless of what you have been through my child, grab it with both

hands, and never let go because those opportunities come once in a lifetime.”

It was like he knew I was running away. I just looked at him as the driver drove us to his house. He was like a father to me. I always missed my dad dearly when I was with him.

Nails: “Enough about me so how much do you need?”

Lara: “I only need my one month advance.”

Nails: “I will give you a little present too. Go and relax, then from next month I want you back at work without fail.”

Lara: “Yes boss.”

The driver parked in front of his big house. It was my first time there. I just followed him behind. He looked at the driver.

“Wait for me I will only show her inside.”

Lara: “Will I be alone?”

Nails: “No MaKhanye is home too. She only goes home some weekends. Please feel free I am going for my poker night with the boys.”

Good life problems hay. We met MaKhanye in the sitting room.

Nails: “Is the room ready?”

Her: “Yes sir.”

She was blushing and it was going to take a dumb person not to realise that she was in love with him. I looked aside and smiled. He left as I was being taken to my room.

Her: "A young girl like you should be ashamed to run after older men."

Wowowowo what was going on?

Lara: "No ma he is just my boss and a father figure to me. I would never even dream about him that way. Then on the

other hand I see the way you look at him. Just tell him how you feel maybe he won't be harsh."

She looked down and I swear she blushed.

Her: "I don't know what you are talking about."

Lara: "Love has no boundaries. He might love you back. He is lonely you love him just tell him if he lets you go he will be a fool."

Her: "You think so."

Lara: "I know so. Now come let us remove that tamed girl."

She laughed I just smiled feeling good that I was going to corrupt her. We spent half of the evening with me corrupting her. I made her promise she was going to tell me good news

when I came back. For once in my life, I felt good corrupting the elderly in a good way.

The following morning she woke me up to a warm bath and warm food. I had not rested but I guess I was going to rest in my flight.

Nails: "Take care and come back in one piece."

Lara: "You only want me in one piece so that I can make money for you."

Nails: "Hell yeah."

Lara: "You would have fooled me."

Nails: "Now go before you miss your flight."

I hugged him and left. When I was in the queue I was surprised to see Bukhosi's parents and wondered who told them. I looked around hoping to see him but he was not there. I really wished he could come but well I guess I had to go on my holiday and rethink. Maybe the fairytale was just a dream not reality. When my flight was called I looked again hoping he would come just to stop me but hay I hope movies were a lie. You know in the movies it just happens that the guy comes and stops the girl and they kiss and make up and live happily ever after. Movies lie people. I pushed my bag after my goodbyes and left. I was going to enjoy my holiday no matter what.

“Look at you. You lost weight, yes but you still look hot.”

She was waiting for me at the terminal.

Lara: “I missed you and I can’t believe that you are here.”

Simo: “I missed you more. You even missed our wedding.”

Lara: “Sorry life happened.”

I hugged her

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then her husband. They looked happy and I felt jealous.

Lara: “I am jealous of you two.”

Him: “Don’t be I am in the process of divorcing her for invading my life.”

Simo: “Baby; what kind of a husband are you. The husbands we marry.”

They laughed as I shook my head. I was picturing myself with Bukhosi. Well, it was never happening because I was never his happy ever after as I had dreamt about.

Lara: “Now love birds will we go I need to see this place and get wasted.

Simo: “You don’t drink.”

Lara: "Exactly and where did it land me. I want to live once then be a good girl when I go back home."

Him: "I think she deserves it, my love."

Simo: "Yes you have our blessing love."

Lara: "Not that I needed your blessing anyway."

We laughed as we went to the car. The drive to their place was too long but we managed to talk about several things we have missed in each other's lives.

Him: "This here is our humble aboard."

Lara: "So cosy I love the place."

I took a shower and rested the time zone and the flight dazzled me so I slept 24hours flat.

Simo: "I was about to call the emergency service."

Lara: "I was really tired physically and emotionally now I am rested."

Simo: "Good because I want to show you around. You said you want to go wild. Hubby is working night shift so I will show you some good clubs."

Lara: "Yes that's my girl."

I hugged her then sat down as she gave me food.

Lara: "This is the second proper meal I am eating since I came out."

Simo: "I am happy you are out."

Lara: "Not what I pictured though."

Simo: "You owe it to yourself to hear him out."

Lara: "When I get back home for now I need a good time."

Simo: "I am not going to babysit you though because I need to go to class tomorrow."

Lara: "Students. Let me just enjoy it while it lasts. So today you are buying isn't it?"

Simo: "Yes I am taking care of you while you are here."

Lara: "No boo, I will drink like there is no tomorrow so worry not because you will be left broke. I will take care of other days. Nails paid me for this month already so I am covered."

Simo: "Okay let's hit the road."

Lara: "This place suits you well don't you ever come back to Africa."

We laughed as she drove to the club. They had one car and the husband used a company truck. We were enjoying when she told me she was going back home. I was left alone. I was

feeling like vomiting as it was my first time drinking ever. I went home early but the following night I was like an expert.

“May I sit?”

I looked at the handsome guy and just smiled raising my glass.

Lara: “As long as you are not going to talk about your problems I will never tell you about mine.”

Him: “Let’s drink to that.”

Lara: “I love him you know.”

Him: “We said no problems.”

Lara: “I want to tell you so that you won’t fall in love too.”

Him: “Why didn’t you tell him?”

Lara: “You are a genius you know that. I can kiss you right now but you are too cute I love my Bukho more than your cute face.”

Him: “Let’s call him.”

I dialed his number and placed the call on the loudspeaker.

Bukho: “Hello.”

I giggled and the stranger laughed too.

Lara: "He is sleeping. You know I swear he sounds sexy when he is asleep."

Him: "Let us go and visit him."

Lara: "Are you mad; he is in Africa."

Bukho: "Hello, Nolo is....."

I giggled.

Lara: "He still knows my name. Let us go and visit him."

Him: "I have money let's book a flight."

Lara: "I could kiss you right now. Let's go, you know I can kiss you right now handsome stranger."

When I stood up I almost fell. I laughed hard.

Bukho: "Lara damn it talk to me."

Lara: "Oh, oh he is still there, my bad."

We laughed as I dropped the call.

Him: "Let me call a cab for you."

Lara: "Party pooper; no wonder you are handsome and single like me. Call the cab before I vomit."

I was too late I vomited on the floor and it was lights out. When I woke up I was at the apartment with a splitting

headache. There was banging on the door when I looked at the clock it was the evening of the following day. What the...

I went to open the door cursing Simo for leaving me alone in her apartment. When I opened the door I got the shock of my life.

34

Bukhosi

When I got home I just closed the world outside and switched off my phone. Where did I go wrong?

I was happy I got to the top. I was recognised as the youngest producer and director in the entertainment industry what I initially wanted to make a difference like my mom. I did get what I wanted and I even got the girl; wait a minute I was about to lose that girl. I was not going to take that lying down. I needed to give her space then get my girl back.

As lazy I was I had to go to work but I called my secretary as I was going to be working at home. She sent the documents I wanted and then I slept. Don't look at me like that I needed to cry myself to sleep. I think I had forgotten to switch off my phone again when I called my secretary. It woke me up from my beautiful dream with my beautiful person.

"This better be good."

Ben: "Why so grumpy this early."

Yes, I was just grumpy and I didn't care.

Bukho: "Are you not at work disturbing my peace?"

Ben: "I am off today. I was just worried about Lara."

Bukho: "What about her?"

He was irritating me because I knew he had a crush on my wife.

I smiled at the thought of my wife.

Ben: "Do not bite my head off I care as a friend and she deserves better after you dished her the whole day after receiving the greatest news of her life. Shoot me for caring; by the way, you are welcome for thanking me for bringing her home yesterday."

He hung up on me I felt like a douche afterward. I tried calling and he was not answering. I felt bad. I think it was time I woke up from whatever dream I was in. I woke up and took a bath because I didn't have an appetite I just left. I wanted to make things right with Benjamin. He was the only person who befriended me without ulterior motives and he never judged me.

I was nervous as if I was on my way to see my girlfriend. When I knocked for a while I thought I was at the wrong place but eventually, he opened.

“I was beginning to think I was in the wrong place.”

Ben: “You are disturbing my peace you know?”

Bukho: “I am so sorry I never meant what I said earlier on please forgive me.”

Ben: “I am not mad I just wanted to know if Lara is okay.”

Bukho: “To tell the truth I hope that she is.”

Ben: “What is going on?”

Bukho: “She left today going to Australia; Simo booked a flight for her. I woke up late when I got to the airport she had already left. My parents saw her off though.”

Ben: “Well I think she needs this holiday to remove all the bad luck.”

Bukho: “So am I the bad luck that she needs to get away from?”

Ben: “Yes, in a way.”

Bukho: “What?”

Ben: “You should have seen your face. No man; not like that but she needs a change of scenario for her to find herself. Prison is not a good place. I have worked there for quite some time and I have seen women leave that place and come back not because they want but because they felt left out. When

they are locked in there; life goes on for the people out there and they feel left out. You know how sad it is to go to a community that even never cared to let you in on the changes. Like right now her friends are still here but they have moved on in life. Like her friend in Australia got married while she was in the jail cell. She has to find her footing and it might be

overwhelming out here she might find herself missing the life in prison. So as the fiancé, you have to make sure she is not depressed at all.”

He was telling the truth and I felt like I just added depressing on her already depressed life.

Bukho: “I will try to change and make her feel comfortable.”

Ben: “I don’t even want to ask were you where because it’s none of my business. What I can tell you is; do not hurt that girl because this time around she will go to jail for something she did.”

Bukho: “No need to scare me like that thanks for your time. Let me stop sulking and try to get my life back.”

Ben: “Good luck”

I drove to my sister’s workplace. She was also a doctor like dad and uncle Muzi.

Busi: "Today it's going to rain Australian Yuan. You, coming to see me here."

I just laughed at her.

Bukho: "It's Australian dollar silly."

Busi: "What do I know because I only know how patients are and the amount of medications I am supposed to give patients?"

Bukho: "I should investigate a number of mortality here because I don't trust you as a doctor at all."

Busi: "My patients trust me with their lives. Why are you here anyway?"

Bukho: "I want to plan a welcome home party for my fiancé. I need you to help me because Belinda is not coming home anytime soon as she took more leave days during the trial."

Busi: "You had to ruin the surprise party she planned for her. She went with a broken heart you know. She might not even come home for a while because of you."

Then I felt like a cow. Why did I have to be such a cow?

Bukho: "I am so sorry I wish I could turn back the hands of time."

Busi: "You are talking to the wrong person. I don't even want to hear about your shenanigans."

At least no one was asking me because I was even ashamed to think about it.

Bukho: "Will you help me?"

Busi: "You are still my little brother but do not think I won't take Lara's side if she decides to be mad at you."

Bukho: "What happened to blood is thicker than water?"

Busi: "It still applied but this time around it means I am voting for female blood as I am a female too."

Bukho: "Not nice at all."

Busi: "Take it or leave it, brother."

Bukho: "I will take it for now. Okay

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so will you help me? I wanted to plan a wedding but I do not want to be pessimistic so I will give that to her she deserves it."

Busi: "I wouldn't want anyone to plan my wedding either."

Bukho: "Okay I will hear from you."

Busi: "When will this be?"

Bukho: “When she comes back. I would like it to be a welcome/engagement party.”

Busi: “Yes she deserves it but engagement, what if she finds a fine white man there in Australia you know how fine white species are.”

I felt my blood boiling she was joking but it was a stupid one as I was already in the panic mode.

Bukho: “Not all women love white species like you.”

Busi: “Well you can’t deny the fact that my specie is so fine.”

I just laughed. She was just so in love with Kian even after all those years. They were married while they were in college which seemed like once upon a time. I just laughed at her and left shortly after emailing the details to her.

The next two days were hell to me I was like a walking zombie at work. I was just picturing her next to me and us planning our wedding. The following night I woke up to a call. I was surprised because no one ever called me at night. I answered it anyway.

Bukho: “Hello.”

She giggled and someone from the background laughed too. It was her, my Nolo. I smiled a little but it faded the next seconds when she spoke.

Lara: "He is sleeping. You know I swear he sounds sexy when he is asleep."

"Let us go and visit him."

It was a male voice. Where was she that late and with whom? Was Busi right when she said she might find a white dude? I saw sweating even in strange places.

Lara: "Are you mad; he is in Africa."

They were debating and I was there clinging to my phone and it was about to break my fingers any second.

Bukho: "Hello, Nolo is....."

She giggled again making my blood boil to the maximum level.

Lara: "He still knows my name. Let us go and visit him."

Him: "I have money let's book a flight."

Lara: "I could kiss you right now. Let's go, you know I can kiss you right now handsome stranger."

There was shuffling and they laughed hard.

Bukho: "Lara damn it talk to me."

Lara: "Oh, oh he is still there, my bad."

They laughed as I dropped the call. I couldn't sleep and there was no way I was going to sleep. I called the number it was

unanswered. I cross-checked it and it was a South African number. Was it her number or did she go to Australia with him?

I took my laptop. It was time I took control and stopped running away. Yes, I messed up but I was never going to let her go. When I looked at the flight there was one available for

Wait let me go see her roommates. I checked the time and it was before 4 am. I was agitated I just changed and drove to her

flat. I was banging at the door without mercy when the neighbour opened the door. Oh, I forgot in court she had said that she won't even let mosquitoes pass her by.

Her: "Do you know what time it is?"

Bukho: "I am sorry ma'am."

"I am coming hay stop or you will wake the whole flat."

It was from inside when I realised I was still knocking but it was softly then.

Her: "Next time I will call the police on you Mr. Documentary and who let you in any way."

Before I could answer Hlengi opened the door rubbing her eyes.

Bukho: "Sorry to disturb you but I need your help."

Hlengi: "Come on in before Mrs. Evans calls the neighbourhood watch. What brings you here this hour and do you have any idea what will happen if I sleep at work?"

Bukho: "I am sorry I wish I had other options."

I told her about the call and she laughed.

Bukho: "Why are you laughing? Did she go with someone else?"

Hlengi: "Nope and Lara is not like that. I don't know her that much but the little I know is enough to tell me that she is not a

petty person. Let me give you Simo's number if she is not answering hers."

Bukho: "That will be better."

I thanked her and apologised as I left calling Simo. She was not answering I bet she was asleep. I went home and worked because sleep had deserted me. Simo finally got back to me.

Simo: "We will wait for you at the airport then."

Bukho: "Thank you very much it means a lot to me."

I had to get my woman before it was late. When I got to the airport they were indeed waiting for me although I had hoped for her to be there too.

There was too much tension on our drive back to their place. I didn't want to engage in any conversation. We got there and I was amazed their place was beautiful.

Simo: "This is our....."

She trailed and I followed eyes as we were still in the hallway.

Bukho: "Oh noooooooooooooo."

35

Lara (Bonolo)

"What are you doing here? Who showed you where I live and are you stalking me?"

Him: "One question at a time princess you are grumpy when you are not drunk."

Lara: "Go away."

Him: "Is this the "thank you" I get for bringing you home after you were wasted?"

Lara: "You brought me home? How did you....."

Him: "Your phone still had a battery so I looked at it. You had only five numbers saved so I took a chance and called the Australian number that was there."

Lara: "So you invaded my privacy?"

Him: "Aren't we rude?"

Lara: "Yah that's why I am called Miss Rude."

Oh, oh what was wrong with me? I felt dizzy and I just sat down. He had followed me to the lounge.

Him: "Are you okay?"

Lara: "Can I be honest with you?"

Him: "Yes please and don't tell me you fell in love with me because I kind of fixed things with my wife yesterday."

I just laughed at his stupid remark.

Lara: "I was going to tell you I want you and I am pregnant with your child."

We both laughed.

Lara: "Okay let's be serious. I want to tell you that it is my first time drinking and I don't even feel too good right now."

Him: "So you were a virgin?"

Trust this stranger to mess up my mind but in a good way. He had a sense of humour and he was kind.

Lara: "You are stupid. So yesterday you were drowning your sorrows because of wifely?"

Him: "We fought a minor one but yes and we fixed things. She is the one who drove us here yesterday when we were both wasted."

Lara: "I am hungry."

Him: "I have a solution to your problem but after you eat you have to drink again so that your system won't shut down."

Lara: "How would you know that?"

Him: "I watch booze traveller every season so I am an expert."

Lara: "Amen."

I said going to the bathroom. He just made himself comfortable and was calling who so ever.

Lara: "Are you not working when some husbands are working at this hour for their families?"

Him: "Did you check the time? I knocked off. So I called for food and more booze."

Lara: "What?"

Him: "Not for me I am treating you and that's a thank you for being a friend that day. It will be delivered here is the money for the tip I already paid for the food and goodies."

Lara: "So you are trying to make me a drunkard?"

Him: "Nope you will never drink again after this. You were running away from problems so next time; never drink as an escape."

Lara: "Says the man who was drinking away his sorrows."

Him: "I was not a virgin remember."

We laughed

Lara: "Whatever."

Him: "I am Wayne by the way. Let me go my wife is waiting and good to meet you again stranger. Please don't be a stranger I

saved my number there. Please next time drink responsible because you will never meet a perfect stranger again."

He flashed a handsome smile kissed my forehead and left me smiling like a retard. The food came and my booze. I just laughed thinking about the reason I drunk in the first place. Bukhosi was the reason and I wanted to drown my sorrows for the last time; enjoy my stay in Australia and go back home to start afresh.

"I will make sure I put my life in order because these men think I am a toy."

I was getting drunk by the minute. I was playing music. Thank God the rooms were soundproof. I never understood why houses in other continents were never built with bricks.

“I was a damn good girl and that animal had to come and mess up my life. Now I can’t have a normal relationship. Maybe that’s why Mr Cheese boy ran. Run boy, run coward.”

I was laughing and crying, I was even beginning to look crazy. Maybe I was crazy. I took my phone as I wanted to call my mom and shout or even Bukhosi but it was flat.

“Stupid phone. Nothing is ever on my side. I think I am cursed. What do you think man?”

I was talking to the handsome man on the TV scene that I had paused. I was seeing double then I just fell crying and I think I

had passed out because the next thing I felt was hands on both sides of my face.

“Go away.”

I closed my eyes and felt like sleeping forever.

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“She will be okay. She was just drowning her sorrows. It was bound to happen you know it was a stressful journey for her since her father passed away.”

Okay, that was Simo. When did I get into the couch and when did they get home?

“I am to blame I should have been sensitive. I shouldn’t even have let her leave the country in the first place.”

Okay was I dead already or was I dreaming? That was Mr Cheese boy but wait a minute when did he.....

“Honey, have you prepared the spare room?”

Okay

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that was Simo’s husband. So I was really still in Australia.

Bukho: “No need; I will make sure I book a hotel I think we need some privacy and sort out our lives before we fly back home.”

Simo: “I think you really need time but this time around you hurt her then you will have to fly home as a corpse. You are a foreigner here some of us are now citizens so no one will take your case seriously.”

I didn’t mean to laugh but I was still intoxicated I just burst out.

“She is awake.”

It was Simo’s husband. They were all quiet but I didn’t have the energy to open my eyes.

Lara: “Please go away and bring my alcohol.”

Bukho: “Since when do you drink Nolo?”

Lara: “You do know that there is always a first time for everything?”

Simo: “Lara please I know you wanted to drown your sorrows but you have to be careful you might lose yourself or become sick.”

Lara: “Yes mom may I go to sleep.”

I just burped and felt disgusted then I ran to the bathroom. I took quite a while when I came out Bukhosi was standing by the door with mixed emotions.

Bukho: “Baby, please let's talk about this.”

Lara: “I need to sleep and forget this.”

Bukho: “Okay good you will sleep at our hotel room.”

Lara: “Wowowowo Mr Cheese boy you cannot come here and.....”

Bukho: “Nolo this is not a debate you chose whether you want us to do this the easy way or the hard way.”

I rolled my eyes although he was calm I knew he was only calm because we were not alone.

Bukho: “Okay I take it the hard way.”

I was still trying to make sense of the situation when he had already scooped me up. What the.....

Bukho: “Simo please drive us to the hotel. That’s the last favour I am asking from you.”

Simo: “No need to ask. Baby I am coming do not cook I will bring food.”

Him: “I will finish tidying up here.”

I felt so bad but there was nothing I could do because I was still intoxicated. I just buried my head into his chest and he smelt great. I missed that smell. I only heard a few bits and pieces of their conversation as I drifted to and fro consciousness.

I think I might have slept because I woke up with the edge to pee and I hit my knee on something.

“What is happening? Did Simo move her furniture when I was asleep?”

I heard a laugh and I screamed my lungs out I tried running but I fell. Was I dreaming or what? The lights went on while I was down and groaning from pain.

“Baby; are you okay?”

Okay, I seriously needed to quit this alcohol business. Why did I hear Mr Cheese boy while I was in Australia?

“Please tell me it’s not hallucination?”

My eyes were closed as I was praying that I wasn’t getting insane because of alcohol.

“It’s me, my love, open your eyes.”

I opened them hoping I was dreaming but it was not a dream.

Lara: “Where am I?” Bukho: “So you don’t remember?”

Lara: “Remember what?”

Bukho: “Nolo this is not funny. You called me two days back with some strange guy and you were not making sense.”

Okay, the part he was mentioning I remembered clearly. The unclear part was where he came and took me to some..... wait I couldn’t even remember where we were.

Lara: “So am I still in Australia?”

Bukho: "You know; you told me that you never tasted alcohol but now what is going on?"

Lara: "Oups you made me do it."

I just laughed because it was funny how his face suddenly changed.

Bukho: "I am so sorry for this I never meant to hurt you. Yes you are still in Australia I came last evening you passed out while Simo was driving us here. I booked this while I was home."

Some of the events came flooding. Okay, I remember Wayne the perfect stranger. Did he find me with him at the time because I remembered that he was the one who bought alcohol? Lara: "Was I alone when you found me?"

Bukho: "What do you mean? Are you okay?"

Lara: "I need the bathroom"

I didn't wait for his response because I had mastered the surroundings so I knew where the bathroom was.

"What is wrong with you?"

I said banging my head on the mirror in the bathroom. I stayed there for a while after I felt a little better I looked at him

sitting at the edge of the bed. This was the man I fell in love with and he looked so handsome I could munch on him.

“Please come and sit down.”

He brought me to mother earth. I obeyed because I didn’t want to fight. There was no fighting bone left in me. I was going to fight when I was sober and strong enough.

Bukho: “I know I have wronged you and I do not know where to begin to apologise. I know you had planned a warm welcome in your mind but I was a cow and I gave you less than that. Will you forgive me?”

Lara: “Bukhosi; all I have been doing since my father dies was fight for everything. I never even had a chance to mourn him. My brother and I were deprived of a chance to bond. Then my relationship let me to this. I do not think I have any fighting bone left in me.” Bukho: “So what are you saying?”

Lara: “I.....”

36

Bukhosi

Okay, all my life I had never been scared the way I was scared when she just paused and looked at me like I was a horned

beast. I almost peed on my pants; I excused myself going to the loo. I was not going to lose this woman.

“God I know I have sinned against you knowingly and unknowingly please do not take her away from me. I will do anything.”

I kept praying in the bathroom after a while I got out she was still sitting where I had left her. I was ready for the verdict. I actually sounded stupid to myself. She looked at me when I was about to say something.

Lara: “Like I was saying that, I have never had it easy since my dad died. I do not want to live in the past. I have suffered enough prison changed me but at least for the better. I do not want to fight with you anymore. I am not mad at you anymore. No, I am lying I was never mad at you I was just hurt. I do not want to live in what-ifs world so I chose to move on but I have conditions.”

I almost punched the air but I waited for the conditions before celebrating.

Bukho: “Anything; I am ready for anything and any punishment you have for me.”

Lara: “Who said I want to punish you?”

I laughed because I was ready for my punishment.

Bukho: "Okay I am listening Nolo."

Lara: "The other thing I hate it when you call me that because it reminds me of ...you know who."

Bukho: "I love it or should I go back to Miss Rude."

Lara: "I think Nolo it is then."

We looked at each other and laughed. I had really missed her laugh and smile. Boy was I not the luckiest man alive. My woman was beautiful.

Lara: "Firstly you have to promise to always be honest with me. I hate lies and deception I won't be responsible for what I will do to you next time."

Bukho: "Okay can I tell you what happened then?"

Lara: "I would have loved to hear it then but now I don't want to hear it as long as it won't happen again."

Bukho: "Never I promise you my love it will never happen."

Lara: "Okay now that this is out of the way my other condition is we finish this holiday together so that we get to know each

other if we are happy with where our relationship will be when we leave this place then we will get married next month."

Bukho: "Are you serious?"

Lara: "Do I look like I am pulling your leg to you?"

Bukho: "Come here, you have made me the happiest man alive."

I stood up and scooped her into my arms. She fitted perfectly there. I lowered my head to kiss her then I was welcomed by an unpleasant breath.

Bukho: "Baby you do not smell so good. So tell me if I stay you will expect us to go on a drinking spree also."

She looked down embarrassed and I didn't want that.

Lara: "I will never drink again. Yesterday was my last day. You see I don't even know what the date today is and I last ate yesterday."

Bukho: "Do not worry I understand but let us brush your teeth."

Lara: "After my food, right now I can even eat a cow."

I laughed

Bukho: "The food is cold and we can't order at this wee hour."

Lara: "I will eat it like that. I am starving."

Bukho: "Okay come let us feed you. Were you taking your medication?"

Lara: "Yes although I feel guilty that maybe alcohol messed it up."

Bukho: "Do not crucify yourself too much. Come sit."

She sat across me on the table I just looked at her eating. She was truly hungry. I had never been so turned on by someone eating. But then this was not just someone it was the woman I loved.

Bukho: "Come here."

I opened my chair and arms. I let her sit on my lap.

Bukho: "You are such a turn on and I am afraid I do not want to do this."

Before she could answer I smashed my lips onto hers. I didn't care about her breath as her lips were so inviting.

Bukho: "Have I told you how much I love you?"

Lara: "Nope, never."

She giggled and I laughed tickling her in the process.

Lara: "Do not be a bully because you know I am right and you just assume that I am aware that you love me. What if I get you wrong?"

Bukho: "Okay Mrs. Radebe I love you yesterday

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today, and tomorrow.”

Lara: “That’s debatable.”

Bukho: “Which part?”

Lara: “The tomorrow part because I know about yesterday and today but the other is always debatable.”

I stood up scooping her in the process and threw her on top of the bed as she giggled as I joined her. I cupped her face and kissed her. She felt so tiny under me.

Bukho: “You are so tiny.”

Lara: “You are my giant husband.”

We both laughed as I flipped us over.

Bukho: “Do not get shy on me.”

Lara: “I am not shy. I am not feeling so good.”

Bukho: “Come.”

I pulled her to the bathroom and opened cold water. I didn’t know what I was doing but I hoped it was going to help. I went under the shower with her.

Lara: “You really want to kill me.”

Bukho: “No my love; I am hoping this will help.”

We stayed under there for a while I felt her shiver when I decided to let her out. She was looking better although not fully recovered.

Bukho: “Come I will take you to bed.”

I held her until she slept. She looked so peaceful when she was sleeping. I couldn't sleep after that I just watched the boring television. I was never a television person. I was thinking about what type of wedding Nolo might want. I still was puzzled about the third-degree questions she had about me being the major shareholder and the money that I possessed. I sent an email to Klaas.

*

*

“What time is it?”

Bukho: “Well thank God she is finally up.”

Lara: “Hay; what happened last night?”

Bukho: “Do not tell me you forgot everything you did and said. I am not about to go down that sobby road if there is ever such a word.”

She just laughed at me.

Lara: “I am asking about after the shower.”

Bukho: "Oh thank God because I was never going to take your little episodes of amnesia this time around."

Lara: "You are silly I know we talked last night and I am happy I even had pleasant dreams after that."

Bukho: "Well please do share."

Lara: "My dreams only no intruders are allowed. But I will let you know that you were not in those dreams because I was dreaming about a handsome hunk who swept me....."

Bukho: "Not cool at all I do not want to go to jail."

Lara: "You are so cute when you are jealous. Come, let's go and bath."

Bukho: "I already did. I also ordered breakfast and called Simo. They will be coming after work to see you."

Lara: "Thank you very much. I was hoping you could scrub my back."

Bukho: "Do not tempt me, woman."

She laughed going to the bathroom butt naked. I wanted to follow her and ravish her but I wanted our first time to be special. She wanted to explore Australia and our relationship so I was going to give her that then when she is happy with our

relationship I was going to get what was mine. I made a call quickly because I didn't want her to hear me.

Lara: "All done."

I was in the balcony when she came looking all sorts of gorgeousness. I looked at her and pulled a chair for her. We ate engaging in light conversation. My phone rang and I answered looking at her if she was going to pick up something. She was just enjoying herself.

Bukho: "Okay my love lets go?"

Lara: "Where to?"

Bukho: "No questions asked, please. Our ride is here."

When we got inside the cab with her whining I blindfolded her.

Lara: "What is going on?"

Bukho: "I have a surprise for you. Please do not ruin it for me because I have been planning it since morning. I had to make several phone calls.

Lara: "Okay let's hope I am not being kidnapped."

The driver laughed.

Bukho: "That will be a good idea, you will be my slave and I will never buy clothes for you so that I see my beautiful slave every day with her beautiful caved body."

She slightly pushed me.

Bukho: "I have all day and evening planned, we will only come back to the hotel to freshen up and wait for Simo before going on a date."

Lara: "You don't waste time Mr. Cheese boy do you?"

Bukho: "Nope; we said we will explore this relationship isn't it. So why wait when we have everything at our fingertips."

Lara: "I love you."

Bukho: "Let's wait for the holiday fairytale to end if you still sing the same song then we won't wait longer we will get married what do you say?"

Lara: "Deal."

I smiled and kissed her lightly. The cab came to a halt and I thanked the driver as I got out.

Driver: "I will be here at the stipulated time."

Bukho: "Yes sir and thank you."

I was hoping their package didn't cost me an arm and a leg for nothing. I was broke already. Just kidding, do not tell my wife because I was going to be in trouble. I carried her all the way up. We were on time and it was not full. I placed her on the seat and removed the blind folder.

Bukho: “There we go.”

She screamed startling other passengers. She apologised as she jumped up and hugged me. I knew she wanted a ride on the bus not any bus but a double-decker hop-on hop-off bus. We were going for sight seeing then our evening was going to be formal as I had bought tickets to go to the Opera house in Sydney. That’s why I was saying it had cost me an arm and a leg.

Lara: “Thank you very much this is awesome.”

She had tears in her eyes and some people were taking our pictures. The bus took off.

Bukho: “Well Mrs. Radebe here we begin our journey.”

Lara: “Thank you very much.”

I wiped her tears as she leaned on my shoulder. We were seated and she was busy taking pictures with the other hand. I had bought a portable camera for her. She needed to keep the memories safe. I was hoping this was going to be our fresh start...

37

Lara (Bonolo)

I never regretted my decision to go to Australia getting drunk because Bukhosi might not have joined me if I had never made that drunken call. Our first day together was not what I expected at all. If I were alone I was not going to afford some of the things.

“Look at that my love.”

I was brought back to life by Bukho who kissed my cheeks. I looked at the direction he was talking about. The city was not beautiful but exquisite.

Lara: “Can we come and stay here.”

I was just pulling his leg because some places were good for visits. I loved home with or without a problem.

Bukho: “Are you sure you want to live here?”

Lara: “Why not you can afford it.”

There I go again with my blubber mouth. It came out wrong.

Lara: “I am just kidding I love home and I would only love to visit such places once in a while.”

Bukho: “How about twice international and thrice local. It will be also good to bring our kids here.”

Lara: “What if we don’t have kids?”

Bukho: “That will never happen; my love. Our firstborn will be a son and the rest I don’t care. I want the one who will look like me then 10 girls like you.”

I slightly pushed him laughing he was mad; what were we going to do with 11 kids.

Lara: “If you want a crèche then I will build one for you from the money they will give me from my case. You will get to see your other kids there I will give you a son.”

Bukho: “Not fair. I am starving let's go downstairs for food.”

Lara: “So we have everything on board?”

Bukho: “Yes my love we have to make the most in the tour so why have unnecessary stops.”

Lara: “Thank you very much this is more than what I expected.”

Bukho: “Wait till you see what is in store for you later on.”

Lara: “I even have goosebumps thinking about that.”

We both laughed. Before we knew it we were in a cab going back to the hotel room. When we got there Simo and her husband were there waiting for us in the lobby. The boys went out to buy a few things.

Simo: “So how are things?”

Lara: "I am glad I went on that drinking spree because if I didn't he wouldn't have joined me. We had a great day he is promising me that it's going to get better so I can't wait. We are starting afresh and I hope this will work."

Simo: "It will; as long as you won't keep comparing him to ...you know who."

Lara: "I will not compare him because he is different and what I feel for him is totally different from what I felt for ...you know who."

We both laughed at the 'you know who' part.

Simo: "I know you are still hurt but please try to live again. You are a free woman now so a new start will do."

Lara: "You know at first it was like I love him out of obligation but now that we are out here by ourselves I love him for him. He is not what I thought he is. I call him Mr Cheese boy because at first glance I saw him wearing expensive things and I concluded that he was this rich spoilt brat."

Simo: "One will conclude that especially if you know which family he is coming from."

Lara: "I didn't even know him or his family I only emailed them when I needed help. I googled them after he took the documentary."

Simo: "You are a lost cause."

I laughed going to the bathroom.

Simo: "You still have a habit of bathing while you have a guest."

Lara: "You are not a guest and I do not want to take much time. I am curious because we are going to the Opera house."

Simo: "As in Sydney?"

Lara: "I believe so."

Simo: "Wow, now that's a man after my dreams. You know I love my husband to death but he doesn't take travelling seriously he says it's a hobby. I have been saving to go there. You are one lucky lady."

Lara: "Thank the alcohol because if I haven't drunken called him he was not going to come."

Simo: "You are right on that one. Even though I want to go there one day and you are lucky to have him. He is way better than Mlulami and you know I never approved of that stupid fool. God bless his resting soul. Now this man loves you and I will never disapprove of him."

Lara: "I think I love him too."

When I was done bathing I wore a gown as I was told our outfits were coming before we leave for the event. He came

back with the food. We ate over light conversation and Simo left with her hubby while we got ready. Our outfits arrived when he was done bathing,

Bukho: "Do you love your outfit?"

I was in tears when he asked. I had never in my life worn such a beautiful gown. My matric dance was something I had bought from some Nigerian shop, although it was beautiful but it wasn't as elegant as the dress/gown that was in front of my eyes

Lara: "I love it and who told you about my favourite colour."

Bukho: "I think it is kind of my job to know that."

I smiled thinking of how this man could go out of his way to make sure he knew about me and make me happy in the process.

Lara: "Thank you and I love you Mr Cheese boy."

Bukho: "Not as much as I love you Mrs Cheese boy." We both laughed "Now let us get you ready. I know you would want a perfect view."

Lara: "You bet I would. This is my first time to watch it live. I always watched it online or television."

Bukho: "I know that. At first, I was like what kind of a black young woman would like such a white old people's music show."

I laughed hard because of the way he said it.

Lara: "You are so messed up. Love is love; I loved that since I was two years old. I watched this little girl perform on the junior awards I then fell in love with it. My dad was the only one who thought I was normal when the rest of the people thought I was not normal to love opera."

Bukho: "You will always be normal but different to me. I might love it too who knows?"

Lara: "I hope you fall in love like I did."

Bukho: "Let's not push it

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my love. Now come; let us get you into the gown."

He helped me out. He had bought some matching lingerie. He helped me zip it up. He was still breathing down my neck and the fact that he was naked underneath the gown didn't help me.

Bukho: "I wish I can take you right now. I am even hot."

Lara: "Why can't you?"

It came as a whisper.

Bukho: “Not now we need to get to know each other because jumping to the next stage will mean we skipped other stages and this will come to bite us in future.”

God; how can one not fall for such a man? I breathed out and opened my eyes.

Lara; “I love you.”

This time around I was facing him. I didn't wait for his response I tiptoed and kissed him.

Bukho: “What was that for?”

He was also out of breath.

Lara: “Thank you very much for loving me. Now let us not be late. Dress up I don't want to be late.”

Bukho: “Yes ma'am.”

I shook my head as I watched him disappear again to the bathroom. He was avoiding showing his boner I knew it. He came back all dressed up. He was wearing a jacket matching my dress colour and it lit his eyes. I wanted to just postpone and tear those apart but this was a once in a lifetime offer and I was never going to get it again but he was not going anywhere.

Bukho: "I know I am handsome my dear you may take a picture it will last longer."

Lara: "Hello motto."

We laughed and the knock interrupted us. Our ride was ready for us. We were flying to Sydney which was a few minutes the package had included the jet money there. I wondered how much it cost him. We got there on time and managed to get the seat I wanted.

They started with "Ave Maria" my favourite song which reminded me of my dad. I found my tears running down my cheeks uninvited. Bukho wiped them as I continued listening to her beautiful voice as she sang. To say I was happy would be an understatement because I was over the moon.

After our opera, we were transported to the dinner venue on a curt the evening was cool and the white horses pulling the curt looked extra-ordinary. It was like I was in a movie.

Lara: "This is not dinner because it's late already."

Bukho: "They call it nightcap this side."

Lara: "Oh, my bad."

We laughed as I rested my head on his shoulder allowing the night breeze to cool my flushed face. If it was a dream I never wanted to wake up at all. When we got to our hotel room it

was already in the early hours of the morning. I was surprised that people in some countries never slept at all. Some places opened 24 hours a day 365 days a year. Who was I to judge I just let them be and threw myself onto the bed and let sleep control me?

I woke up to the running shower and looked at my side I was alone. Let me say the following couple of days were a dream. We visited the harbour and beaches there were so appetising I never wanted the dream to end at all. Anyway, life had to go on. I realised when we were standing at the airport with Simo. Her husband was out of town for two days on business.

Simo: "Even if you never spent much time with me I miss you already."

Bukho: "She will visit soon after the wedding if she promises never to drink."

Lara: "Come on baby; I promised a long time ago that I will never drink."

Simo: "I can't wait and it will be girls only."

Bukho: "Yes but I can only afford for three days vacation."

Simo: "Even if it's one day."

Bukho: "Thank you for taking care of my wife."

Lara: "You know we are a weird couple we started with our honeymoon although we never.... you know then on our honeymoon it's a girls trip."

Simo: "So you tell me you never even you know...."

Lara: "Out of all the things I said you only heard that."

Simo: "Do you blame me."

We laughed. After a few minutes our flight was announced then we said our goodbyes. I was always tired from the trips we took daily so when we took off I slept till we landed home.

Bukho: "You are a bad companion I tell you. I was talking alone for the whole flight."

I giggled covering my face.

Lara: "There was a lady across us you should have made conversation with her."

Bukho: "She was flirting and I hate such ladies. My wife was going to kill me anyway so let me not comment. So what is the verdict Mrs Radebe should I start choosing my wedding suit."

Lara: "I already picked my dress it was delivered at home already you are late."

Bukho: "Yes!!"

He said throwing the bag down jumping up punching the air then he scooped me and spanned me in the air.

Bukho: "I am the happiest. This woman wants to marry me!"

He was shouting and everyone clapped their hand. I saw one of the sisters rushing to us. It was a white one. No offence; but I never got her name clearly.

Her: "What an entrance."

Boy: "Uncle B."

Okay, he was handsome but I guessed he was with the mother who didn't have a ring on her finger.

Bukho: "Lolo; I missed you."

Lolo: "Not as much as I missed you. Who is this?"

Her: "Lolo do not be rude my boy."

Lolo: "Sorry."

Bukho: "This is my wife to be. Baby; you still remember my sister Belinda and her son Lolo."

Lolo: "Not in front of the beautiful lady. Uncle B, I am Lawrence ma'am."

He said taking my hand and kissing its back I just blushed.

Beli: "It seems you have competition man."

They laughed Lolo just looked at his mother and looked at his Uncle. He was a lovely boy.

Bukho: "Lolo; this is my wife Lara Bonolo."

Lolo: "So its B&B."

Us: "What?!"

Lolo: "Oh you slow. If you are B and she is B then together you are B&B."

I couldn't contain myself I just burst out laughing. This boy was just with added extras. She drove us home with them chatting none stop I even felt left out but not in a bad way. She was driving to my flat they all came out. I was surprised. I never questioned them. When I opened the door using my spare key with them behind me I got the shock of my life.

What the.

38

Bukhosi

"Surprise!!"

I was also surprised I had forgotten about the surprise party that was planned for her. I looked at her she was happy and had tears of joy.

Lara: "Baby you did this?"

I looked at her as she threw herself into my arms. It was a Sunday so almost everyone was there.

Beli: "Come on party girl don't just stand there."

I looked around my parents were there too. The place was not that big but it accommodated us well. The elders approached us.

Dad: "Welcome home kids. Lara, I hope you enjoyed your holiday."

Lara: "Yes we did."

She looked at me and smiled.

Muzi: "I hope you didn't make a baby there because we need a wedding first."

Bukho: "Come on Uncle Muzi you are making my fiancé shy."

Mom: "You deprived us of making this party when she came out. Lara baby I hope this one didn't mess up your holiday."

Bukho: "Mom; whose side are you on?"

Mom: "The truth baby."

Bukho: "That's why I want to adopt new parents."

Beli: "That makes the two of us."

Dad: "We need bonding time so it will help us."

Mom: "Tell them, my love."

Lara was looking at them and I saw hurt in her eyes. I remembered that her parents never had a normal relationship.

Bukho: "Let us mingle then."

Dad: "We are not staying long we just wanted to welcome our daughter in law and please don't let these people stay long she has to rest."

Beli: "Party pooper."

She said leaving us going to the kitchen. I laughed pulling Nolo to my side.

Bukho: "Thank you very much. We will come and visit when we have settled in."

Mom: "Okay then I will be waiting."

They said their goodbyes and left.

Kian: "So this is the famous lady who made you straight."

They all laughed as my Nolo blushed.

Bukho: "I was always straight."

Busi: "Debatable."

Bran came in with Wani pushing his chair. He could be lazy sometimes but I just loved him the way he was.

Bran: "Introductions please."

Lolo: "Did you know that uncle and aunty are B&B?"

That was my nephew for you. Everyone laughed. He then told them why we were B&B they just laughed.

Beli: "Kids out of here."

Kian: "I am taking them for ice cream after the introductions. So we are waiting Mr. Bukhosi."

Wani: "It's Mr. Cheese boy."

Lara: "Oh no, that is mine alone."

Busi: "Oh honey, then be prepared to be called B&B."

I did the introductions; she introduced her roommates. When I looked at them and my observation of Simo her friends were good friends. I was hoping they were not fake friends. My sisters were preparing something to snack on.

Busi: "You are really in love."

Bukho: "Yes I love her. For the first time, I think of someone else other than myself. The moment I met her I stopped being selfish I think about her always and I think about making her happy always."

Busi: "It's called love. I remember Kian and I. Do you know he drove all the way from Mooi River to just come and kiss me and assure me that he loves me."

Bukho: "What?"

Busi: "You will get to a point of going to her workplace just to see her face while you just saw her in the morning."

Bukho: "That is madness I will never do that."

Busi: "Oh yes you have started already. Flying all the way to Australia was my first proof. Welcome to the world of the living brother."

She laughed I looked at her and missed my woman. If I was madly in love so be it she had her fair share of hell she still had it so it was my time too.

"Hay you."

I said hugging her from the back. She was shaking a little I just tightened my grip.

Lara: "Hay you too."

Bukho: "I miss you."

Lara: "But I am here."

Bukho: "You know what I mean my love."

Lara: "I am tired I just want this to be over so that I can rest."

Bukho: "I know my love let me chess these people away."

Lara: "They will hate me."

Bukho: "I have a better idea. Say you are going to call Mrs. Evans for the snacks then wait outside I will call the cab and we will go to our place."

Lara: "Our place?"

Bukho: "We are getting married so my place is your place baby. Now go."

Lara: "What if Mrs. Evans goes in there and tell them I never asked her."

Bukho: "I am trying to help and you don't want."

Lara: "Okay I will call her for real and then leave."

Bukho: "Good idea I will see you now, now."

I was so excited because I had a lot of things going in my mind. She left after talking to her friends I then followed her after Mrs. Evans came in.

Lara: "We are such bad people."

Bukho: "Mrs. Party running away from her party."

Lara: "You are making me feel bad I am leaving you and going back."

Bukho: "Sorry baby but the things I planned for us are better than the party."

Lara: "I am curious though. I am glad your family accepted me. I am overwhelmed and you seem like a much closed neat family. I would kill to have a family like yours."

Bukho: "We also fight sometimes

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you know only God is keeping us together."

Lara: "I admire your sister in law. What is her name again? Was your brother ...you know... from birth."

Bukho: "You mean disabled. You can say it because we never sheltered him so he is good with it. Yes, he was born like that with brittle bones but that never stopped him as he defied all

odds. I also admire Wani. At first, I thought she married him for his money but as years went by I saw how they love each other. She loves him unconditionally. Can you believe she was

disowned by her dad? He only accepted Brandon after Emmanuel was born.”

Lara: “That was sad.”

Bukho: “The things we go through for love. Do you think your dad would have accepted me if he was still alive?”

She had a sad face on but I knew we had to talk about him sometimes.

Lara: “My dad was a lovely and lovable person he accepted everyone so yes I know he would have loved and accepted you with open arms.”

We arrived at my place at the same time as the guy who was delivering my things.

Bukho: “We are here.”

Lara: “This place is cosy. This looks nice.”

Bukho: “Thank you so will you make it home?”

Lara: “I would love to help with your help of course.”

Bukho: “Now let us make memories starting now. I have been meaning to do some of the things while in Australia but I was afraid.”

Lara: “Afraid of what?”

Bukho: "I wasn't afraid as such I was waiting for us to be officially back on board with the engagement."

Lara: "I am now curious."

Bukho: "Now Mrs. B&B shall we."

We both laughed at Lolo's name and I kind of loved how he was thinking. I had left my bags at her flat because we ran away so I made sure my guy bought toiletries for her and a few things for me. I prepared a bath for us I was even sweating from anticipation.

Bukho: "Come I want to soak you in a hot bath you deserve it."

Lara: "I think I deserve a massage too."

Bukho: "That and more. Now come."

I stripped her and me in the process. I looked into her eyes and I fell in love again. Her heart was beating faster by the minute.

Lara: "Love did you"

Bukho: "Ssshhhh I have waited for too long to do this. I know what you wanted to say, baby, I got all that covered relax."

She nodded as I carried her to the bathtub.

Bukho: "You know I love you right."

Lara: "Why do I sense a 'but' coming."

Bukho: “Never; there is no but. I love you and I want you to be happy always now let us bath you.”

Lara: “Why did you remove your clothes when you were not going to come inside the water?”

Bukho: “To make sure that you make the right decision after this.”

Lara: “Are you seducing me so that I agree to whatever you want me to do?” Bukho: “Is it working my love?”

Lara: “I bet it is.”

Let me say what I did to her and with her got the results I wanted because the date for the wedding was set for two weeks and I was a happy man. Well until she came into my office one-morning breathing fire like a dragon.

Bukho: “Baby; are you okay?” Lara: “You tell me. What is this?”

She said throwing the envelope on my desk. I opened it with curiosity looming over me. oh, oh, how was I going to explain?

Bukho: “Ah.....”

39

Lara (Bonolo)

When Klaas called me I was eager to meet him because I thought it was about my case with him about suing the state. I thought it was time I moved on but well I had thought wrong.

Lara: "Baby, I will come to see you later after work because during lunch I am meeting Mr. Klaas."

Bukho: "Oh."

I should have sensed but I thought he was sulking as he was used to us eating together during lunch. I was back at work and Mr. Nails let me say he was always on the phone smiling. If I didn't know better I would say he was love-struck but I was waiting for the right moment to ask him.

Lara: "Okay I will see you later."

Bukho: "Okay."

Lara: "I love you please do not sulk."

Bukho: "I love you, baby."

I hung up packing my things then took my handbag. I met Hlengi downstairs because we were working at the same building that's why we became roommates in the first place.

Hlengi: "Meeting Mr. Cheese Boy."

Lara: "Are you monitoring me?"

We both laughed. I knew she was fishing.

Hlengi: "What? You two are like a belt and pants always attached to the hip."

Lara: "You are mad, do you know that? Wait till you are in love you will be singing a different tune of the same song."

Hlengi: "Do you even make sense to yourself?"

Lara: "Let me go. I might be late today so don't wait up."

Hlengi: "I might as well be staying alone. Zoe has recently been working double shifts."

Lara: "Soon it will just be the two of you because after the wedding I am moving to his flat."

Hlengi: "I am sad and happy at the same time. I think we need to start dating seriously Zoe and I before we lose our touch."

Lara: "I can create the online dating profiles for you two."

We both laughed as I left her going to her office. Those two were my family and good sisters to me. They even offered to go with me to my aunt's place to see them and my little brother. My aunt was eagerly waiting to see me I could say I was eagerly waiting to see them.

Lara: "I hope you are paying for this business lunch of yours because I haven't been paid you know that I am going to get paid next month."

He grinned. This man never laughed frequently.

Klaas: "Thank God your husband to be will be paying for this and more."

Okay, he knew about this beforehand.

Lara: "Okay Mr Klaas shall we. I hope you will tell me that our case is already underway."

Klaas: "I am afraid today I am representing your husband to be. Our case will come later."

Then reality came flooding. This was not a fairytale so what have I done? I only managed one word.

Lara: "Okay."

Klaas: "This is what your fiancée wants you to sign."

He gave me the envelope. I opened with shaking hands because I knew it was not good news at all. Okay, I didn't expect this. I read through the papers my mind was not even there anymore. So he thought I was in the marriage for money? Well, I had to come back to reality because this was not a movie.

Lara: "So if I want to contest?"

Klaas: "You don't want to subject your lawyer to that."

He was right and what lawyer because I didn't have money. I loved him so much but why was he doing this to me? I just took my pen from my handbag and signed it.

Klaas: "You need to read and understand it."

Lara: "I am doing law remember I know what a prenup is so I am good. Where is my copy please?"

Klaas: "You need to"

Lara: "Mr. Klaas don't sweat

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I am cool. Thank you for this I will see you around."

I was standing up. He stood up too.

Klaas: "We are not done here. I wanted us to talk about the case. As in, I need to file the papers so we need to discuss that."

Lara: "The wedding is near I don't have much time can we discuss it after the wedding."

Klaas: "No problem."

I knew I was never going to afford him so I would have to serve the money then do that. I didn't want to dismiss him because he would think I am ungrateful I was going to send an email

asking him to stop the case. I was tired of this fighting I just wanted to live a normal life.

Lara: "Thank you very much. I will take a take away."

Klaas: "Me too."

He wasn't showing any emotion so I just left with my food although I didn't have any appetite. I couldn't concentrate at all I had to talk to Mr. Nails. He was not at the office so I had to talk to the manager who gave me a hard time before permitting me to go. I took a taxi to town then took another one to his office. I got into his office breathing fire

Bukho: "Baby; are you okay?"

Lara: "You tell me. What is this?"

I said throwing the envelope on his desk. I was waiting patiently or rather impatiently for his response.

Bukho: "Ah....."

Lara: "That's all you are going to say?"

Bukho: "Look I am sorry I had to do it because I...."

He trailed and I just saved him the trouble.

Lara: "I thought we were a team. I am doing law remember and I know why you did it. I am hurt because you couldn't face me first so that I can get this from you. It was going to be better if you told me yourself. I am not marrying you for your money or family fortune I never thought I will love again but you changed that. I signed this but next time I would love to hear it not from a lawyer because I do not have money for a lawyer myself."

I took the envelope and headed to the door.

Bukho: "Nolo; wait."

Lara: "No it's fine I will see you tomorrow at lunch."

Bukho: "What about dinner."

Lara: "Can we skip that I have somewhere to be. Love you."

I closed the door and rushed. I wanted to make sure my past was all sorted. I took a taxi to my mother's place. I couldn't call it home because it was never home to me. The place looked the same but it looked as if I never grew up there. It was strange to me at the time. I knocked for a while I was about to leave when she opened the door. It seemed she was sleeping.

Mom: "Lara what are you....."

Lara: "May we please talk."

Mom: "I don't think this is the right time."

She opened for me reluctantly. I followed her. Our home had an open plan for the kitchen, lounge, and dining room. So I was surprised to see that all her belonging in that space. She looked uncomfortable. I found a space to sit.

Mom: "I rented out the rest of the rooms and the garages because I need the money."

Lara: "Why don't you go back to work mom?"

Mom: "Say what you want and stop judging me."

Okay, she was still rude.

Lara: "I do not know why you hate me and I do not care because you are the one who brought me to this earth. My time in prison and when I found a mother figure in Gail taught me to forgive and forget because life is too short. I do not hate you; I never hated you to begin with. I will love for you so get your life together and make sure you are there for my negotiations because you are my mother. After that you will clean up your acts and walk me down the aisle I will not let an uncle who never raised me do that when I have a mother. Don't get me wrong I love my uncle I think more than you but I love you more in my life when this day is happening as it is important. We can't mend our fences because I have made

peace with the fact that you hate me but I love you. So get your ish together please.”

Mom: “So prison made you grow some gawunas? Well, I wouldn’t miss your wedding for the world and I would have loved to hide my face because the world now knows how I treat you but you deserve this so I will never take this away from you.”

Lara: “Good. Here is my new number please update me and call me tonight to finalise the negotiation dates and all.”

Mom: “I will. You look good and I always knew you would turn up well and marry a good man.”

Lara: “Thank you mom I need to be somewhere.”

I missed Gail so I was never going to make it on a taxi I called a cab. I knew I was going to go hungry because my money was running low but I needed Gail at that moment. Month-end was not far I was a big girl I was going to handle it well.

Guard: "You want to come back here?"

Lara: "I miss this place, yes but I am still finding my feet out there so no I am good. You know I feel so strange as I tattle things I wish to come back here sometimes but I always get encouraged that I am free and I will have a good life."

Guard: "That's true."

I left my things in the reception area. When I was following him I had flashbacks of that place. But the good thing was I was out of the place.

Gail: "You were here last week. Do you miss this place that much?"

Lara: "You don't want me to miss you."

Gail: "Try again Goldie."

I laughed; yes that's how much she knew me more than my own mother. I started singing like a canary just one question.

Gail: "Do you want my opinion?"

Lara: "Yes I would love that."

Gail: "The old Gail would have loved you to fight him but the new Gail advises you to love him and work for your things. You will get money from the state soon."

Lara: "I kind of stopped that."

Gail: "What?"

Lara: "They already think I am a gold digger so I am leaving it for now I will work and see what to do."

Gail: "I will not tell you what to do because I trust you to do the right thing so whatever I will support you all the way."

Lara: "I need to talk to the warden is he around?"

Gail: "Yes he is but he will be going home soon. What do you want from him if I may ask?"

Lara: "I want to know if I can continue with the programme or I need to pay for my studies going further."

Gail: "Oh I forgot about that. I hope that they will not make you pay."

Lara: "Me too."

We spoke about different things then I left for the warden's office.

Him: “Miss Rhodes; I wanted you to go ahead with the wedding first then I was going to ask for a meeting. The good thing you are here so I will have to deliver the news now. The board sat down and decided that you will need to continue and finish your degree because they owe you so much for the time you spent here when you were innocent.”

I wanted to cry but I thanked God for that. Minus one problem, I thanked him and went home. When I was paying the taxi driver I saw Bukho coming I was not angry at all I just smiled.

Bukho: “Are you angry my love.”

Lara: “Not at all I just got the good news that my degree will be paid up for by the board.”

Bukho: “About the pre.....”

Lara: “Please let us leave it I am so happy to think I need more good news.”

Bukho: “Well they are going to your family on Sunday.”

Lara: “That’s great I will call my mom.”

Bukho: “Wait what

Lara: “Long story. I love you. I will see you tomorrow.”

I kissed him and walked away with him confused. He was going to learn the hard way that not involving your partner. It wasn't pay back but I was too happy to talk about depressing news.

Life was good. My wedding was going to happen and life was starting to fall into place. I loved him so much to be angry at him.

40

Bukhosi

“Why are you so down? Did they dump you again?”

I looked at the door and it was my uncle Polly. He was going to be working from the Johannesburg branch till after the wedding. I gave him a faint smile. To tell the truth I didn't know how to feel.

Bukho: “I think I am very impulsive and I don't know how to curb that I always tend to make decisions without thinking them through then go and ask for advice even when I know that what I did is wrong.”

Polly: “Bukhosi I am not in your brain so spill it out.”

Bukho: “I send Klaas to Bonolo with a prenup.”

Polly: “You did what?”

Bukho: "I wasn't thinking."

Polly: "Clearly you were not thinking. Do you ever stop and think before you do those stupid things?"

Bukho: "Ah..."

Polly: "Ah..ah... That's all you know. Did you ever stopped and thought how this poor girl might feel? This girl had been in

prison for two good years for a crime she didn't commit. Her friends are now up there and to her, it feels like she is from high school. Her boss is to be commended because not all people out there can rehire you even if you were proven innocent. Have you ever stopped to think about why she is marrying you? She is young and beautiful; somehow a 'celebrity' who most men would love to have because of her courage. I admire her too and her strength she is alone in this place but she is holding her head high up there and chooses to forget the past and move on."

Bukho: "I didn't think of it that way."

Polly: "Your problem is that you don't think at all. Whose money are you preventing her from getting?"

Bukho: "I thought mom....."

Polly: "Do not even involve your mom in this because now I see that you are nothing like your parents."

Bukho: "I was....."

Polly: "Do you know why I am here today? I will tell you anywhere because it seems you don't know where all this money is coming from the money you are excluding your wife from. Portia and I met well point of correction she found

me when I was just a struggling young boy. She didn't care about what background I was coming from. She didn't see a

poor little boy to her I was a person with so much potential. From the time she personally got interested in my life I vowed never to disappoint her and I never because she is a good person. When I met your dad it felt like I had a brother I wanted and never had. My brothers became jealous but I never cared because without them I would never have managed to have my own franchise. I am happy that there is something I will leave for my kids because she gave me a chance."

Bukho: "I am sorry."

Polly: "Your problem is that you do not think."

Bukho: "Right now she mended things with her mom I thought I was going to be there all the way but she doesn't want to include me."

Polly: "You are lucky she didn't cancel the wedding. If I were her I was going to cancel this and look for a richer man to take care of me."

Bukho: "Don't say that Uncle Polly I love that woman."

Bukho: "Well, act like it before you become single. I will even help her find a rich man not a boy with a good heart. You know I have a long list of rich bachelors. Now take me to your mother."

I was not in the mood, to tell the truth, because my parents were going to roast me. The drive home was tense with him

venting out. When we got home he just slammed the door as he went into the house.

Mom: "Then

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why the long faces?"

Polly: "If it isn't your dumb stupid son."

Dad: "What has he done now?"

Polly: "I am not in the mood. I need a glass to drink my wine."

Mom: "You know we don't drink so there is no wine."

Polly: "I know but I came prepared this time around as if I knew your son was going to spank me upside down and put my balls on toast."

I wanted to laugh but he was so pissed.

Dad: "Will someone please tell us what the heck is going on?"

Polly: "He forced your daughter in law to sign a prenup."

Both: "What?"

Polly: "I will be in my room if the food is ready."

He had a room at home because the house was big enough and he was part of the family. They both looked at me mom was disappointed she just turned and walked to the kitchen to finish

her cooking. Dad didn't even ask me he went to the lounge as I followed him behind as if I am a school child following the principal to his office. He sat there and un-paused the movie.

Dad: "Your mom should start paying me big time. I am now working for free as an editor while she pays her editors. How much does she pay them so that I can ask for mine too?"

I just laughed; just like that, he was avoiding the topic. I knew it was not over but I just didn't want to spoil the mood.

Bukho: "I think a couple of thousands."

Dad: "That's a lot I can even buy something for my girlfriend."

Mom: "I heard that. Come the food is ready and go call your uncle Bukhosi."

Dinner was okay up until dad asked.

Dad: "So is there any wedding or not?"

Polly: "I do wish it was off so that he could wake up from the fantasy he is living in. You have to get off your high horse because the world doesn't revolve around you."

Dad: "Whose money is it in the first place? You know your mom had a very good inheritance when we got married but not even once had the money been an issue in our marriage. We worked equally hard to provide for you a good future. I never thought; not even once that my son would be so selfish. This girl has

been through a lot and I hope for your sake she will survive this."

There was quite as we ate I felt bad but there was nothing I could do to erase what I did.

Mom: "You are a grown man and you know what is good for you. I am not going to say anything but tell you that we won't be there always to think for you. If you can't use your head

don't come running to us because we won't be here forever. You are still my son and I will never love you less."

That was the only thing she said although she looked disappointed in me. After a nightcap, I drove home. When I got there I called Nolo she answered on the third ring.

Lara: "I was about to sleep."

I was surprised she was okay with me. I thought she was going to be hurt and angry at me.

Bukho: "Sorry I just got home from my parents' place. Are you good?"

Lara: "No; I am just nervous about tomorrow."

It was going to be the negotiations.

Bukho: "Please don't be everything will be fine."

Lara: "I was tempted to tell my mom aboutyou know."

Bukho: "Please I love you the way you are and it will never change the way I feel about you."

Lara: "What if they discover that after the wedding and....."

Bukho: "Who will tell them because I will never tell them? I chose to marry you because I love you not because of something you didn't choose."

Lara: "Okay let me rest. I love you."

Bukho: "I love you more."

It was music to my ears. She really was a good person. I needed to work on my communication skills as my uncle warned me.

The negotiations went well. Nolo was trying to mend fences with her mom and I was going to support her all the way. I loved her and her happiness came first.

Kian: "Are you nervous?"

It was D-day. I was not nervous but really scared. What if she left me on the altar? She took the preup thing well so I was sceptic.

Bukho: "It is expected right?"

Kian: "Speak for yourself hay."

I just laughed. We were going to get married in the same venue because she was not an Adventist we were not going to use the

church. She wanted a small cosy wedding and she was going to get that. We had tried to make sure Gail was present but the paperwork delayed and we failed but Sis Moo was there. I bet she was happy.

I watched her with her mother approaching as "A thousand years" by Christina Perry played

The day we met,

Frozen I held my breath

Right from the start

I knew that I'd found a home for my heart

Beats fast

Colours and promises

How to be brave

How can I love when I'm afraid to

fall But watching you stand alone?

All of my doubt suddenly goes away somehow.

One step closer

I have died every day waiting for you

Darling don't be afraid I have loved you

For a thousand years

I'll love you for a thousand more.....

She looked so beautiful and so innocent I just felt tears coming uninvited. I wanted to protect her with my all. When I approached her she smiled because she knew I felt like they were walking slowly. I had told her the previous night that I would do that

Lara's mom: "Please take care of her because I failed and you can't afford to fail her too."

Bukho: "I will mama."

It was going to be a long journey for them but I was willing to help them heal.

"I love you Nolo."

I whispered as she blushed.

"I love you more."

Pastor: "We may now begin."

I was the happiest man in the whole world. The service went on with me zoning out. I was that happy. I loved the smile on her face more than the things that were happening.

Bukho: "Lose your tail."

I was whispering at her.

Lara: "No baby not going to happen."

Bukho: “Bad wife.”

We were at the reception and people were busy talking about us I hated that part of speeches I wanted everything to end so that we could be just the two of us.

Lara: “I know what you want and we will be done soon.”

Bukho: “When we leave this place I am driving and no one will ask us where we are going.”

Lara: “Yes husband. I will be calling you daddy tonight.”

Okay, she got me and I was so going to punish her. I was happy to be her husband and I was looking forward to our lives together.....

41

Lara (Bonolo)

Finally I was Mrs Radebe I was happy that I will finally belong. I knew it wasn't going to be easy but I was going to make the most of the moments I got with my husband. The issue of the prenup I had made peace with it. At least what was mine was mine even during our marriage. I finally read the contract.

Some might deem it as being naive from my part but I knew

that life was too short. Take it from someone who had

“You seem to be far away.”

It was my husband. It felt weird yet beautiful to hear the sound of the word I never thought I would mention in this lifetime.

Lara: “I am thinking of how lucky I am to be this happy and have a family that loves me more than my own family.”

Bukho: “You forgot a handsome husband who loves and cares about you.”

Lara: “Hello motto.”

We both laughed.

Bukho: “If I don’t call my own phone who will. You have to be your own cheerleader before you have fans.”

Lara: “So who is your second fan?”

Bukho: “I am looking at her.”

Lara: “Oh, you are sure of yourself hay. Can we go already I am getting bored?”

Bukho: “That makes the two of us. Go say your goodbyes to your family then we will leave. I feel excited; this feels like we will be eloping.”

I shook my head leaving the dance floor going to my family's table. My little brother was there and he was happy I was back. He wanted to come back home but I was not going to let him stay with our mother no matter what. I was building a relationship with my mother yes but I didn't trust her at all. I was going to make sure I spoke to my husband and stayed with him.

Uncle: "Here comes the bride."

I smiled looking down.

Aunt: "You were the most beautiful bride. My brother would have been in tears seeing you watch down that aisle in the morning. I bet he is smiling wherever he is."

Lara: "His killer smile that always made me feel like I am the luckiest girl alive."

My mom just looked down. Since I came back I had sensed that something was wrong with her. It was not like the rude person had gone but there was this cloud that I couldn't explain that loomed over her.

Uncle: "He is a proud dad I bet."

Lara: "I came to bid you farewell because we are leaving."

Mom: "You can't wait to play adult games."

She was whispering and we just both burst out with laughter. My uncle just looked at her. He was still mad at her but I was slowly forgiving and forgetting the past for my sanity.

Lara: "Let me go before mother corrupts me."

Mom: "As if I am the one who corrupted you. Please don't corrupt my son in law."

Aunt: "She has already started."

Lara: "let me leave before you all gang up on me."

They laughed hugging me simultaneously.

Lara: "Please be good and I will take you to stay with us."

I was whispering to my brother's ear. He smiled and hugged me tightly. He was the only thing close to dad and he was a replica of dad.

Lara: "I love you all. Let me love you and leave you."

Them: "We love you too."

I met my husband halfway.

Bukho: "Are you done?"

Lara: "Did you talk to your family?"

Bukho: "Not all of them you know if I had to we would have left tomorrow morning."

I laughed pushing him playfully.

Lara: "Be nice."

Bukho: "You know I am right so let's go I am eagerly waiting for you to call me 'daddy' so I am ready Mrs; when you are ready."

Lara: "Let's do this."

He took my hand and we ran to the car giggling like teenagers. Someone called his name but he told me not to look back or I will be Lot's wife.

Bukho: "That was breathtaking we should have eloped you know the adrenalin rush was going to be more than this."

Lara: "You are crazy now I almost messed this gown and you know it has to go back."

Bukho: "I told you to buy it."

Lara: "What will be the use when I will use it once? Or you will divorce me and I will get married again?"

Bukho: "Over my dead body. Now come and kiss your husband for the first time."

Lara: "But we kissed earlier on."

Bukho: "That was a forced one because the pastor told you so."

I just laughed going towards him and we stood next to the car and kissed. My body reacted and I knew the feeling was not even close to what I felt before. It was as if it got approved from the most high place. Do you get me? Well never mind people would think I am crazy.

Bukho: "That was..... let's just get out of here."

He opened the door for me and when I looked at the back there was a bag with my clothes. I knew it had my clothes because it was the only bag I had.

Lara: "Who brought my clothes?"

Bukho: "I am always prepared my love. I was not going to waste any of our honeymoon time."

Lara: "But I thought we already had that?"

Bukho: "Post honeymoon then. Besides, there is no honey to the moon without the honey you know what I mean."

We just laughed. I knew what he meant.

Bukho: "When are you going to learn how to drive?"

Lara: "Never."

That was the honest truth. I was never going to drive a car because it scared me. I never even pictured myself alone in a car.

Bukho: “Why if I may ask. Do you realise that there will be times you will need to drive for emergencies?”

Lara: “I am scared and if there is an emergency there are taxis and meter taxis for that. Why would we take away their bread from the table and enrich some people when we can enrich our mankind.”

He wanted to protest but I was never going to drive a car even if it was meant to save my life.

Lara: “Case closed Mr. Radebe.”

Bukho: “Yes ma’am.”

We spoke about other things while he drove to the resort in the outskirts of the city along N3 highway.

Bukho: “We are here Mrs.”

At least it was already dark so my wedding gown was not going to turn heads that much. He went ahead with the bags and

came back as he carried me bridal style. I was a bride after all. When we got to the room he didn’t waste time

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I think it was what he had been waiting for all along. He attacked me with a breathtaking kiss.

Lara: "What was that?"

Bukho: "Well now Mrs Radebe we begin a journey this is the start of our life."

He turned me around as he slowly unzipped the gown. I was feeling all sorts of anticipation I have never felt before.

Bukho: "Your skin."

He was planting kisses at my back. The moment the gown hit the floor he carried me as if he was carrying a feather. He then laid me on the bed his eyes were becoming smaller by the second.

Bukho: "I love you Mrs Radebe."

Before I could get a chance to respond he smashed his lips onto mine I moved my hands up and down. When the heat got stronger I unbuckled his belt. I knew I was a little rusted but I managed to do it on record time. Please don't ask me how but I was really ready for this.

Without delay he left my lips and helped me as we made sure he got out of his clothes. It was my first time seeing him without a shirt on.

Lara: "You work out?"

Bukho: "I used to. Kian and Thuto introduced me to rugby and when I stopped playing I still loved going to the gym once in a while."

Lara: "I am joining you from now on."

He loved as he kissed me.

Bukho: "Jealousy doesn't suit you."

I covered my face as I felt his hands travel to my treasure. The feeling was very unique but so good.

Bukho: "You are ready and I am ready too."

Lara: "Please I need you now not your finger."

Bukho: "Okay no need to bite my head off."

He smiled as I helped him position himself. The anticipation and the excitement I had I was even sweating in the wrong places but it felt right at the moment.

When he entered me it was as if I was on another planet. I tried to move my hips to meet him halfway. My disappointment

came when he just groaned after a few strokes. Let me say five to the exact. Wait a minute was that all.

I looked at him with a surprised look and his face fell. Wait were we done? I was left hanging he took a tissue and then wrapped the condom on it on his way to the toilet. Wait.

Lara: "Baby; wait what is going on. Don't tell me that the fire was only made out of tissues?"

I tried to have a normal laugh not to show my disappointment he turned around and looked at me.

Bukho: "I think the anticipation got the better of me then I couldn't hold it any longer."

Lara: "Wait was it your first time."

Bukho: "What; no; never I would have told you."

Lara: "I am sorry no need to get worked up. Let me go and bath."

Bukho: "I am sorry baby I do not know what is going on."

Lara: "It's fine these things happen."

Bukho: "Look I am a man okay and I know how you are feeling right now. It is written all over your face; no need to pretend."

Lara: "Baby I said I am cool."

Bukho: "Suite yourself."

Well, I was not going to let Mr. Tissue paper fire make me feel bad. At the back of my mind, I was caught in between. Why would they practice no sex before marriage? I would

have known his performance then. I just got under the shower unaware that I just spoke too soon.

The bathroom door opened as I was just under the shower then he came in ready for action. His face just told it all.

42

Bukhosi

“What just happened?”

I was standing there as I watched her going butt naked to the bathroom. I got hard again. But what if I ejaculated early again? I pushed it aside as my shaft was getting harder and throbbing.

Shiz niz; I am going in there even if it is going to kill me.”

I rolled a condom and got to the bathroom. She was facing the other way in the shower and I didn't want to disturb her. I just wanted to make sure what happened before was going to happen again. I wanted to make her happy.

I took a sponge and rubbed her back. She turned and smiled at me.

Lara: “What are you....”

Bukho: “Ssshhhh my wife might hear us. I do not want to be caught I am still young to die.”

She giggled mouthing “okay” sending me to the rooftop. I loved this woman and I wanted her happy always. I squeezed the sponge and rubbed it up and down her back at first and pulled

it in front and then started rubbing. I regretted this because my shaft was getting harder and harder by the minute.

Bukho: “I love you do you know that?”

Lara: “I love you too.”

Bukho: “It was a question, honey, not a statement.”

We both laughed as I slid my hand to her treasure she moaned as I slid one finger followed by the next. She held my hand; I pushed them deeper as she moaned louder.

Bukho: “Keep quiet your husband will kill me.”

Lara: “He will forgive you for making his wife moan with pleasure.”

I deepened the finger thrust as I bit my lower lip. I was not going to wait longer as I quickly turned her and smashed my lips into hers while lifting her other leg up balancing myself on the wall. My shaft was beginning to be painful. I trust as she

screamed. I didn't wait for her next scream as I smashed my lips into hers again.

Lara: "Aahhh...baby that too....."

Bukho: "It's too what?"

She smiled and looked aside.

Bukho: "Look at me. I am your husband so do not be shy please."

She smiled and I thrust harder because her smile was driving me to the edge. I slammed into her like my life depended on it as she moved rhythmically to meet me halfway. I lifted her and thrust harder.

Lara: "Love...I"

She didn't finish as I carried her and placed her on the closed toilet seat. I knelt and looked at her eyes.

Bukho: "I love you very much. All the time when we make love may you please look into my eyes. I know first impressions count but get used to this. I always ejaculate fast on my first round I don't know why and I don't want to make it a problem because I know I will make you happy."

Lara: "I love you too. I am sorry for my comment before I never meant it."

Bukho: “No need now can I eat my meal without disturbances.”

Lara: “You are the one disturbing my husband.”

Bukho: “Yes ma’am.”

She laughed and stopped as I carried her, turned her, and sat on the toilet seat making her sit on my shaft. She closed her eyes as I went deeper. Her breathing was changing and I knew

she was going to the finishing line before me. I made her hold the sink. She was looking down. I tilted her head to look into the mirror.

Bukho: “Look at you. You see how beautiful you are when you are about to.....”

Lara: “Do not even say....”

I groaned as I felt release was near. I disposed of the condom when we were done and flushed.

Bukho: “I want to rub your back it’s dirty.”

Lara: “You are the one with a dirty mind.”

We laughed as I took us to the shower again. If I was told that marriage was going to be this refreshing I would have married ages.

Who was I kidding I was not going to do that without her. She was my sanity and my better half. Although I didn't want to stay longer for my honeymoon I was enjoying so we increased our number of stay there. I think Lara also enjoyed it too although it was going to cost her money. Speaking of money I wanted to talk about the prenup but I never found the right time to do. She seemed happy and I didn't want to disturb our peace because we were at peace. What I knew was that I was going to speak to Klaas.

Lara: "Can we stay here forever?"

Bukho: "Then have Mr. Nails breathing down my throat. We are going on a long holiday this December; remember."

Lara: "Spoiler. You are heartless a husband is supposed to support her wife."

Bukho: "Yes ma'am."

Lara: "You are not funny. I will forgive you because I had a really good time and thank you for this holiday."

Bukho: "Thank you for making it enjoyable for me too. Now it's back to reality and house hunting."

Lara: "I am okay with your apartment."

Bukho: "Point of correction in our apartment. I am following your lead ma'am because you are the lady of the house so

your decision. I was hoping we could do that before the little ones join us.”

Lara: “That won’t be happening soon as you know.”

Bukho: “Yes I know but it won’t hurt to be prepared. We need to see the doctor about your medication also.”

Lara: “I know and we will do that together. You need to understand the risks and be aware of the pros and cons.”

Bukho: “Okay let us not talk about that we will cross the bridge when we get there.”

Lara: “Now let us say goodbye to this place in style.”

Boy did we do exactly that?

Going back home was a hustle but we had to go back to reality.

“You are glowing.”

Bukho: “Come on mom a man does not glow.”

Mom: “Isn’t he glowing Bonolo?”

Lara: “He is glowing I can even see it from miles away, I wonder who is behind that glow.”

Bukho: “Traitor. Dad, is it too late to ask for a divorce?”

Dad: “You were supposed to run before you signed. I wish I listened to my dad when he said run.”

Lara & Mom: "What?"

Bukho: "Oh

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oh someone is in trouble."

Dad: "I am out of her."

Bukho: "I am after you."

Mom: "So how was it?"

We left them talking I was happy that my wife was happy. I was hoping to keep that smile forever.

Dad: "She looks happy and you are happy too."

Bukho: "We had a great time. I love her dad she is an amazing woman. I am glad I chose her. I was thinking she was going to be emotionally dependent on me because of what she went through with that scumbag. I am happy that she treats me well."

Dad: "Then you have to help her heal because internal scars do not heal as fast as external wounds. I am still curious though as in who killed her boyfriend."

Bukho: "Ex-boyfriend."

Dad: "Jealous of a dead man."

Bukho: “Whatever; it’s not important; what is important is the fact that Klaas knows who it is but he doesn’t want to tell me he says it will spoil the fun out of it when we find out.”

Dad: “I am now curious. Is it any of the witnesses?”

Bukho: “I doubt but I am waiting eagerly. Nolo says she wants to forget because it doesn’t concern her now that she is free.”

Dad: “Please do not make her cry because if you do you will answer to my wife and when she is grumpy I do not know how to control her so I will be the one to put you in your place.”

Bukho: “I will never mess it up, dad. Let me go and get my wife. Well, it sure sounds sweet to say that.”

We both laughed.

Dad: “Sure feels good now I can die because all my kids are married and happy.”

Bukho: “Bells is not married yet.”

Dad: “Have you seen how happy she is and what a good mother she is?”

Bukho: “You are right she is the happiest I guess she is more than happy.”

Dad: "Sometimes you don't need to be married to be happy. Some people die single and happy then some died married but miserable. She told me a man who will tie her down would be a man who is worth having and he would have to be a strong man."

Bukho: "She also needs a man who will match her confidence level and love kids."

Dad: "If he doesn't love kids then it will be a no go area."

Bukho: "Okay dad let me go take her because tomorrow she is working so I need to make sure we sleep early. I also have an early meeting."

Dad: "That is if you will sleep at all."

Bukho: "Don't say that. Well, I have been meaning to ask you as a doctor. I didn't know who else to talk to. I ..."

I told him everything.

Dad: "Don't worry son it is hereditably so I know the feeling. You married young at least I was a little older when I married your mom. With my other girlfriends, I made sure I masturbated first but it's not an issue do not worry."

Bukho: "You don't know how embarrassed I was on my wedding night. I didn't know where to hide. I saw the

disappointment on her face I know she was mentally comparing me to the moron.”

We both laughed.

Dad: “Just keep exercising and eat healthily and drink a lot of water.”

Bukho: “You know I do more than that.”

Dad: “Then worry not.”

We went to the kitchen where they were busy chatting. Mom was the best mother ever. She never had biological children but the way she loved kids was refreshing. I knew Nolo was in good hands. I think she is extra good to her daughters in law because she never got that from her first mother in law.

Bukho: “It was a pleasure to be here but we need to get going tomorrow is back to work.”

Mom: “Okay I packed food for you two already so that you won’t slave my daughter-in-law when she is going to work tomorrow.” Bukho: “Mom!”

My wife was blushing looking down with my dad just laughing.

Mom: “What? I know you. You are lazy and your wife will be slaving the whole day then slave at home too.”

Bukho: “Baby; let’s get out of here before my mother poison you against your loving and caring husband.”

Mom: “Husband you say.”

We said our goodbyes and got home. After our bath, we warmed the meal chatting. Her phone beeped she took it and looked at it. Lara: “Ah...What?”

She gave me the phone and it was an email, I read through.

Bukho: “What the.....”

43

Lara (Bonolo)

It was not what I needed after the good time I had with my husband. The honeymoon; let me say I was not in the mood to share it with anyone as I was still recovering from the shockingly goodness of it. If you hear what I am trying to say raise your hand.

Alright back to the email. I was shocked when I received the email from my so called father.

Bukho: “Is this who I think it is?”

Lara: "I am also shocked I do not know but my mom said the man who fathered me left her for a young and vibrant woman who was not pregnant. He didn't want kids so why is he reaching out now?"

Bukho: "I would like to find out too."

Lara: "This attachment is not opening here."

Bukho: "Use my laptop to open the email then."

Lara: "Please bring it if you don't mind."

Bukho: "Here you go."

He said after some time as I was frustrated waiting for it to open. I took the laptop and luckily enough, his laptop was not a slum tiger like mine.

Bukho: "Breath Nolo please."

Lara: "Okay. I am trying my love but this is not working."

Bukho: "Nothing and no one will hurt you I promise so relax. Maybe it's a family photo or his photos to try reconciliation with you."

There was silence as I waited with luck it was opening.

Lara: "Aaaahhhhhhhh."

I screamed pushing the laptop away from me.

Bukho: "What the....."

He was looking at the laptop. I was shaking what kind of sick father can do that?

Bukho: "What is this doing with him and why would he....."

My phone startled us and like retards we jumped screaming. We looked at each other and laughed at ourselves although we were facing a dilemma.

Lara: "Mom, this is not a good time."

Mom: "I take it you didn't hear the news."

Lara: "What news?"

My husband took my phone and placed it on a loudspeaker.

Mom: "Mlulami's brother has been murdered the same way he was found in the same way they found his bother."

Bukho: "What so the pi....."

I shook my head no so that we could see the attachment."

Lara: "When last did you talk to my father?"

Mom: "I do not understand."

Bukho: "She is asking when last did you speak to her father?"

Mom: "Is that a true question or a prank?"

Lara: "Yes mom my father, try to keep up."

Mom: "Your father died remember."

Lara: "Let me rephrase then. My sperm donor. When last did you speak to him? Who is his name? Is he a Mr. Mayo?"

Mom: "I called to tell you about the murder and you are interrogating me. What is this and what is really going on here?"

Lara: "I am confused too but if you answer my questions maybe I would know what to make of this."

Mom: "He was never a Mr. Mayo he was Jabu Khubeka. I last spoke to him when he threw me out of his house I last heard that he lost everything and that was the last contact I heard or saw."

Lara: "Okay that is what I needed to know because I want to make sense of this."

My husband was on the laptop trying to look closely at the attachment sent.

Mom: "What is going on?"

Lara: "Nothing much mom I will call you back now."

As I was dropping the call Bukho's phone rang. I became suspicious that he already told someone.

Bukho: "Hello dad, mom."

I couldn't believe this. The fact that we were married was clear enough that we were no longer kids and he ran to his parents before he even heard my side. What if I wanted to solve the mystery and keep it to myself then involve them when I couldn't solve it?

Bukho: "I wanted to....."

I looked at him sternly

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shook my head then left to go and drink water.

Bukho: "I will call you tomorrow.....No we are fine..... Yes she is fine.....I am sorry to bother you I will tell you tomorrow.....I love you too."

He dropped the call and found me leaning on the fridge door. No matter how cold a day was I never drank tap water. I only drank it when I didn't have a choice. He circled his arms around me. I eased myself.

Bukho: "What have I done now my love?"

Lara: "You told your parents?"

Bukho: "Is it a bad thing."

Lara: "What's the use?"

I left him there going to the bedroom. There was no need of talking to someone who didn't know right from wrong.

Bukho: "Baby, come on, what have I done?"

Lara: "Clearly you do not see anything wrong here. Let me tell you."

I was sitting at the edge of the bed he came closer with the side chair. We were facing each other.

Bukho: "I am listening."

Lara: "We are not kids anymore. The fact that we are married we gave up I for 'we and us'."

Bukho: "I know that my love and....."

Lara: "Please let me finish."

Bukho: "Okay I am not saying anything again."

The way he said it I wanted to laugh but it was a serious matter if I laughed he was not going to take it seriously.

Lara: "When I stopped you from telling my mom what was going on it was not that I didn't want to involve you but out of respect because I knew we haven't discussed this matter. I will only tell her when I am sure we are done discussing this

matter. So when you call your parents it means we are still kids who can't even make their own decisions.

I trust you and I trust myself to solve this without worrying and stressing people. My mom is not okay to me because I know her even when she didn't care about her she still was my priority and I loved her. I want to find out if she is okay. If we burden her with some things we can solve on our own how would we feel when she just collapses.

We are a family and adults now so we need to discuss this first solve our problems if we can't then we will involve them. Even if we solve these problems we will tell them eventually but

after solving them. So husband of mine give us a chance to be adults, not kids who run to their parents."

He got up took both my hands and made me stand. He then gave me a tight hug.

Bukho: "Thank you God for giving me such a wife."

I learned on his chest and inhaled then exhaled. I thought he was going to flip but here we were.

Lara: "Here I was thinking we were going to have our first fight."

Bukho: "Sorry to disappoint you wifey but you made sense there."

Lara: "I was worried that you would have a big head and tell me you are the man of the house and deserves to be respected."

Bukho: "There is no need to be rude when the truth is facing you. I love you and I know we will make a very good team. Now, what do we do?"

Lara: "First of all mom said he is Jabu what; what. I want to know why he is using Mayo's email address."

Bukho: "Okay send him an email then."

I was shaking but it had to be done. We waited a little while.

Lara: "It's late he will never answer us. Let's just sleep."

Bukho: "Are we not going to discuss what he attached in the email?"

Lara: "Until I am sure that this is my father I will never take those seriously I will believe when I know he is really my father."

Bukho: "Do you think he has been watching you grow all along?"

Lara: "Thinking about it is very creepy I feel like vomiting."

Bukho: "He was even following your case."

I ran to the bathroom and vomited because it was too much for me. Our bathroom was at the far end unlike at my place where it was just opposite our bedrooms.

Bukho: "Are you okay?"

Lara: "I was just feeling nauseous I am just sick."

Bukho: "Are you sure we are not having a little one?"

Lara: "Do not be silly you know that we are using condoms."

Bukho: "Anything can happen."

Lara: "Bukhosi Radebe; do not test me because if you impregnate me on purpose and put my child's life at risk I will kill you myself."

Bukho: "I am just sayi...."

Lara: "Do not even test me."

Bukho: "Come there is an email."

Lara: "Why didn't you tell me?"

Bukho: "How was I going to do that when you were busy threatening in front of my kids that you will kill me."

Lara: "Which kids?"

Bukho: "These ones."

He said touching his package I just laughed. My husband was just a kid.

Lara: "You are silly."

Bukho: "You make me silly."

We checked the email he looked at me and shook his head.

Bukho: "He is saying all of them will pay for hurting you. Who is this person?"

Lara; "Do you think Mlulami and his brother were killed by him?"

Bukho: "He may not be that crazy."

Another email came through.

Us: "What?"

44

Bukhosi

"Baby, this is beyond us, really."

I didn't know what to say or think. I needed legal wise or even clientele. I just laughed at the thought.

Bukho: "Baby, I think we need to involve Klaas in this?"

Lara: "Yes I agree with you but only after I am sure this is my father or sperm donor or whatever."

Bukho: "How will we establish that?"

Lara: "I am giving him my number to call me and I will ask the questions."

Bukho: "Do you realise that he might be a serial killer and he will have your number."

Lara: "Love; come on. Do you think if he could have my email address that easily, he couldn't know everything about me? He already knows where we are staying already so let us stop panicking and let us hold the bull by its horns."

I laughed but I was shit scared. Sorry for the language.

Bukho: "Let me check maybe he is watching us as we speak."

I said looking through the balcony and the door. Nolo was dead from laughter. This woman was strong while I was this scared.

Lara: "Relax this is not Hollywood and we are not shooting a movie neither are we being sharksed."

I laughed at her statement as I was laughing at myself too.

Bukho: "Okay let us do this ish."

She sent an email and with no time her phone rang. We both jumped up and then laughed before answering the call. She placed it on a loudspeaker.

Man: "Hello. Bonolo, is that you?"

He had a deep voice and he knew about her name. My wife looked at me and I nodded in approval.

Lara: "Yes that's me and who are you?"

Man: "I am your father, I....."

Lara: "Wait a minute let us just correct that from the word go. I buried my father he was a kind and loving man so tell me who you really are. I also know a few things about my sperm donor so let's cut the crap."

My wife was breathing fire even her ears had turned red. I am kidding please do not tell her.

Man: "Okay, I deserve that."

Lara: "Yah right you deserve that and more. Please get to the point and tell me what is your deal and how did you get Mlulami's murder pictures?"

Man: "You didn't look closer. I am Jabu your 'sperm donor' as you put it. I know what I said to your mother and I regretted it. When I realised you andit doesn't matter because you

two are my only daughters and I neglected both of you. I left the country for good when I was declared bankrupt. I had only one offshore account. Then I contracted a disease that left me infertile. I came back for you but both your mothers were living their lives and I didn't want to disrupt you two. And you are practically twins."

Okay, that was news to us but can he get to the point already.

As if he heard me.

Man: "To cut long story short. I saw your documentary and I knew it was time for me to be a father I never was from the get go. I came back hired a private investigator. I didn't have much money I only asked to find out who killed your so called boyfriend and frame you. From then I took upon myself to do everything myself. You know what they say too many cooks spoil the soup. I knew if I wanted to go deeper I needed to be alone because when money is involved people turn against each other. I knew the PI would demand more money and turn against me in turn."

Lara: "So you killed his brother just to prove that I didn't kill him?"

Man: "He raped you and got away with it so he was not innocent."

Lara: "Still, who are we to judge?"

Man: "I told you I will make those people pay."

Lara: "My mother hurt me too so will you kill her."

Man: "No need for that her time is up."

Was this man for real? Was such a man going to be my father in law? I was not going to entertain those thoughts.

Lara: "What do you mean?"

Man: "That is not important. So I did exactly what the killer did; to recreate the murder scene."

Lara: "So who killed Mlulami?"

Man: "Your lawyer has all the information I am not going to communicate again up until I leave the country."

Lara: "So you are running away after killing a person; a human being who had a family and a life?"

Okay, I was not going to comment on that.

Man: "That is what I wanted to tell you so if you are going to judge me then so be it."

Lara: "Well run. Isn't it what you always do best?"

Man: "Whatever makes you happy. I can see you are still hurt, I will give you time to care for your mother till her time is up

then when you feel the need to contact me you will. I am going to deactivate both the number and the email address I was using. When you feel the need to contact me you will do as I did too.”

Then there was a click sound of the phone dropping then the long phone sound followed.

Lara: “The nerve.”

Bukho: “Don’t you think you are being irrational. If my daughter had to go through what you went through I am sure I would be in jail right now.”

She was quiet for some time and she huffed. I stood up and encircled her into my arms. No one said anything even after praying we were both preoccupied. I didn’t even realised when we slept but when I woke up she was already up and it was time to prepare for work.

Lara: “Hay my love, you are up, great I ran a bath for you I was about to come to wake you up.”

Bukho: “Thank you very much

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my superwoman.”

Lara: “Do not flatter me because I know I can’t cook like my mom and I can’t even drive.”

Bukho: "If I wanted a cook I would have married a chef and if I wanted a chauffeur/ cook I would have advertised for the post."

We both laughed.

Bukho: "Now come, kiss your husband good morning and how did you sleep?"

Lara: "I don't know when I fell asleep but after I did I didn't have trouble or nightmares."

Bukho: "Good we have to meet up with Klaas during your lunch hour. Do you think we will make it?"

Lara: "Yes I can make it. Besides I don't even think I will ever be able to rest if we don't see Klaas."

Bukho: "Okay, now come and wash my back."

Lara: "Don't even think about it. I do not want to be late on my first day back at work. Finish up so we can pray and eat before we go to work."

Bukho: "When are you joining me at church?"

Lara: "Let us not push it."

Bukho: "Yes ma'am."

I smiled going to the bathroom. She didn't want to go to church since she came out of prison. She told me that the day 'My God' told her why bad things happen to good people then she was going to trust and believe again. Our morning was smooth and my wife was time cautious which impressed me. I was never going to nag her all the times we had engagements.

Bukho: "You need to have a licence."

Lara: "You are already complaining the first day."

Bukho: "No, I am not I am just saying you have to overcome your fears."

I knew she was going to take it the wrong way but can you imagine our workplaces were like east and west. I had to drive through traffic from both directions. As if she read my mind.

Lara: "I do not mind taking a taxi."

Bukho: "Never."

Lara: "I was thinking. Some mornings you will have to go early for shooting and I will have to wait for you but it will be an

inconvenience. I would like to hire transport like how the school kids do."

Bukho: "Is that even possible?"

I was wondering if I was living in a different world. I used transport till grade 11 from then I was going with my parents because we knocked off late. I was staying on campus during my university years. I was not that bright like my siblings so I needed study groups.

Lara: "I know a few people from our building who stay in these sides of town so we can share the responsibilities."

Bukho: "We will look into it then."

I was comfortable with the fact that I was driving her. I was going to let go later not then.

Bukho: "I will come to pick you up during lunch."

Lara: "Okay."

Bukho: "I love you too."

She laughed came to my side and kissed me. I knew she was going to say I didn't say I love you. I watched her walking towards the building and I fell in love again.

During lunch, I was there on time. Klaas agreed to meet us after so much begging.

Klaas: "You better keep it short and precise please."

Bukho: "Good afternoon to you too Klaas sir."

He just smiled and sat down. He shook our hands and loosened his tie. I immediately showed him the emails.

Klaas: "I had already filed a criminal charge against the killer. The one who killed Mlulami is the 'mother.'"

Us: "What?"

Klaas: "Technically she is his mother because she raised him but she is not the mother. The mother had an affair with the father and he was born then she dropped him when he was two and never looked back. She left the province and asked to be left alone. So when she was framing you she was punishing you for all the women who date married men."

Lara: "I wasn't aware that he was married, to begin with. I had left him so what was her deal?"

Klaas: "Her husband was also going to choose him as his successor hence she killed two birds with one stone. You have to pay for making Mlulami's wife cry and he had to pay with his dear life for taking her son's spotlight. The father loved her son less and she was angry thinking the father never loved her but his mistress. Well, I am not a storyteller I am a lawyer who deals with facts. So I had already filed for a criminal charge against her."

Lara: "I am confused so she is the one who paid all those people?"

Klaas: "Yes, the husband was injecting money to her community charity organisation while she was also funded by the government. She saved the money so she is loaded also although not rich. She planned this for a year and a half that's why it never had 'loopholes' until the documentary came out and then their part of being incompetent came crashing their 'solid' case."

Lara: "I was just an unlucky pony in their revenge plan. Which means they could have framed anyone?"

Bukho: "But they chose you, that's the difference. At least now she feels how it is to lose a son too. Are you going to charge Nolo's father too?"

Klaas: "I am not sure. As for now, I am not focusing on that."

Lara: "Why not he killed also."

Klaas: "I will pretend as if I didn't hear that. I believe in justice somehow. This is not my case and I will only deal with my case. If that's all then I would like to take my leave. Since your case, I always receive calls left right centre. Lara, you still want to cancel the whole thing?"

Lara: "Yes."

She looked down at her juice. Klaas said his goodbyes and left.

Bukho: “What is it, baby? Talk to me.”

Lara: “I can’t explain it but I feel like my ‘father’ should pay.”

Bukho: “Trust me he is paying. And would you prefer a world with Mlulami and his brother?”

Lara: “I guess not.”

Bukho: “Now cheer up and your father will also pay for his sins someday.”

Lara: “Or never, see God always punish the good and innocent and leave out the guilty.”

Bukho: “Let us not go there. We will be fine.”

Lara: “Yes I believe so. I will call mom and fill her in. Please call your parents too so that they won’t hear it from the news.”

We hugged for a while and I took her back to work. I was praying that everything will go back to normal..

45

Lara (Bonolo)

I was not being irrational I was just angry because even if mom was married I think he could have been in my life somehow. I was even wondering about my sister. I wanted to know her because I craved a sister when growing up. Belinda and Wani had become my bigger sisters but there was going to be a vast difference as she was going to be sharing the same blood with me.

I also wondered if she was going to accept me as I was or she was just going to be like my father and just run for the hills. I was not going to entertain those thoughts because I was still concentrating on the case as it was ongoing. I was not involved anymore but their sister was updating me. We were never going to be friends again but I needed her help so I communicated from time to time.

“Why are you torturing yourself about this case?”

I was with my mom. We were trying to mend our broken relationship. She was sceptical but I didn't care because I was really genuine in that.

Lara: “I will tell you the moment you tell me what your boyfriend meant.”

Mom: “He is not my boyfriend but your father. Or sperm donor; as you prefer it.”

We both laughed.

Lara: "You are not going to get away with it so out with it."

Mom: "You have to ask him because I didn't know what he meant."

She was hiding something I could tell from her voice. She might have thought that I didn't know her but I knew her better because she was my mother. Her coldness when I was growing up made me study her closely.

Lara: "I will let it slide but when I start digging you won't like it."

Mom: "Is it the lawyer talking or my daughter?"

Lara: "Both"

Mom: "Then I am in trouble if it's both. Can I hire Mr. Klaas?"

Just like that, she had managed to divert our attention. I was waiting for my husband to collect me. Of late he was distant and sometimes came home late. He was not cheating that much I knew because he didn't smell differently or change his password or any of the signs a cheating partner has. He was as loving as ever. The three months of being married to him proved to be the best. My in-laws loved me and embraced me.

I was wondering maybe he was tired of using condoms. When we went for my check-up together my doctor

discouraged us from stopping the protection. I hope he was not pulling away because of that.

Mom: "stop daydreaming while I am here. This boy has bewitched you I tell you."

Lara: "Do not say that."

I was blushing.

Mom: "Reminds me of your father and I."

Lara: "No offence but which one?"

Mom: "None taken. The father you knew who was my husband. Before the infidelity and all the things I did to him, we were happy. He used to carry me from our house to the bus stop because he felt like the road was too dirty for me."

Lara: "What? Tell me more?"

I was excited like a 5year old given a candy stick. I had dreamt about my parents being in love and I never pictured that cruel mom always. So when she said that I was over the moon.

Mom: "You are full of fantasies. I want to learn more about you and my son in law then."

Lara: "Yak mom that's gross."

We both laughed.

Mom: "In my mind, I loved your father dearly even when my actions said otherwise. My pride too. Please make sure you didn't take my pride and do not have friends because some don't want to see you happy."

Lara: "I hope that the two I have are not like that."

Mom: "Just be careful."

She looked into space and I saw tears running down her cheeks. She was far and I knew she was thinking about her mistakes.

Mom: "I wish he never died early. Right now he died hating me."

Lara: "Never; my dad loved you and sometimes it makes me angry that he loved you so much. Just show him that you have changed by taking care of my brother. I am grown up now but I think my brother still needs your love. That will make me happier too."

Mom: "What did I do to deserve you?"

Lara: "Life gave me a second chance. I have three moms now. Mrs. Radebe, Gail and You; or and not forgetting Sis Moo."

We both laughed.

Mom: "That one is overprotective of you. Can you imagine she threatened me?"

Lara: "Gail is worse. I will be going to see her next week with her daughter. She finally softened to the idea of mending fences with her mom. She watched the documentary and me forgiving you made her change her mind."

Mom: "The documentary exposed me but instead of being angry I am grateful because I saw where I went wrong. Well, your boyfriend does not have timing; when we are still enjoying."

I looked outside and it was him. Wait a minute it was Beli.

Lara: "It is his sister."

She knocked and I opened it for her.

Beli: "This is not your house. Who permitted you to open it?"

Mom: "You can ask her again."

Lara: "Are you ganging up on me? Well, when did you arrive?"

Mom: "Let her in; why are you talking to her by the door."

Lara: "Well come in."

Mom: "Tell her to get a licence because she is now making all of you her personal chauffeurs"

Beli: "She has a phobia and there is nothing we can do about it."

Mom: “Phobia my foot, those things were not there when we were growing up. You either learn or be forced to. Now someone goes to jail for forcing their child to learn something that will help then

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in the near future.”

Lara: “I do not want to pee on myself like I did in prison so no thanks.”

The atmosphere became tense but Belinda as open as she was she changed the topic amicably. My mom was still living in the sitting room; which had an open plan accommodating the dining and kitchen in one place. She said if she removed the tenants she was going to be lonely because she always had time to talk to them often. We had a cake and tea while Belinda was telling mom about her travelling stories. We left just before dawn.

Beli: “Do you see a change in Bukhosi?”

I knew what she was talking about but I acted obliviously.

Lara: “Nothing much because I am so happy and I couldn’t have chosen a better husband.”

Beli: "I can see you are glowing and happy. Please take a closer look at him. I don't stay here and I visit only on occasions but I noticed the way he conducted himself. You know Lolo's father was acting like that some days but I ignored it till I was left alone to pick up the pieces."

Her story was touching and I was never going to go through that. Well, I had to confront him then.

Lara: "I thought maybe its work stress because his phone has nothing and he is always home on time. Do you think he is a cheating type?"

Beli: "Not cheating but he is hiding something but I know nothing will be hidden forever."

I felt the chill down my spine but then I had to trust in him and our marriage. He was the best husband so far.

Lara: "Let us change the subject I can't think like this I will have a heart attack."

Beli: "Sorry hay. So what are we doing for your birthday?"

I smiled thinking about the party planned for me in prison. I couldn't resist because it was my home for some time.

Lara: "Unfortunate for you I will be in prison and you will miss it."

Beli: "What?"

Lara: "Not in that way man. I was asked to come because the prison organised something for me."

Beli: "It seems you want to go back."

We both laughed but deep down I missed sis Moo and Gail the rest I didn't miss at all.

Lara: "I am not going there anytime soon unless your brother rubs me the wrong way."

Beli: "I will be your cellmate as I will help you with that."

We laughed and talked about different things. His sisters were very friendly only Busi was distant because she was older than them. When we got home my husband was there watching soccer. I never liked it but I tolerated him and his first love. They teased each other with his sister and it was a sight to watch. When Belinda asked him about what he was hiding I was in the kitchen. He didn't say much. Belinda left when my mother in law was calling none stop for her to come and tuck in her son. Coconuts, don't tell her but it was too much, well she was white after all.

"Baby, you will tell me if something is bothering you right?"

We were watching a movie after our bath. I loved to recap before sleeping always. He tensed a little but I ignored it.

Bukho: "Just like Belinda you think I am having an affair."

Lara: "Your sister thinks you are having an affair? Why would she think that? I told her how happy I have been and I don't think you can cheat can you?"

I was using reverse psychology because I wanted to see his reaction and response.

Bukho: "Belinda is imagining things. She had that experience with Lolo's father and she thinks all men are the same."

Lara: "I told her that she is imagining things too because you and I do not have secrets. And I told her that you have a lot of work to do so you are always in the office when I call and you will never do anything as you love me so much."

Bukho: "I love you more than I love myself."

Lara: "You will tell me if there is anything wrong?"

Bukho: "Of course I will"

Lara: "I do not want to go to jail for real this time. I know the ins and outs so I will be comfortable there."

He choked on his saliva as for me I was not in the conversation anymore because I wanted to trust him.

Bukho: "Come here."

He circled me into his arms and brushed my hair.

Bukho: "I will never deliberately hurt you. I love you and I love our life."

Lara: "I love you too and I trust you. Are you coming with me to my birthday celebration?"

Bukho: "You don't even need to ask. I already booked two days off."

Lara: "Mmmmm two days, I wonder what is in store for me."

Bukho: "That Mrs. Radebe is for me to know and for you to find out."

Lara: "I love you."

Bukho: "I love you more."

To my surprise, he was the one who organised everything I was even asked to dress up. There was a videographer too. I was a princess on that day. Gail's daughter was there too and she was softening up although I knew it was a long road I was happy.

We took the party to his parent's house later because the family wanted to celebrate with me. It was my first birthday party ever. I had missed my 21st so he made it possible for my 25th.

After that, it was back to reality and my exams were coming up so I was always busy. Law was not a child's play because I was out of my comfort zone. I had asked Klaas to drop the legal suit against the state.

The day I finished my exams was supposed to be a celebratory one. I cooked our favourite meal and my husband came just as I was about to finish.

Lara: "Right on time. That is why I love you. You always have amicably timing."

Bukho: "Hello."

Lara: "Is everything okay?"

Bukho: "Please come to the parking lot with me."

Lara: "You are scaring me."

He turned and walked away. His face was expressionless. I followed him with a pounding heart. When we got there he opened the backseat and my jaws dropped

46

Bukhosi

"Baby, what is going on?"

I was lost of words because, to tell the truth, I didn't know how to explain it to my wife. Was I just going to say "Hay remember the day I didn't come to pick you up from prison I was screwing my ex and she got pregnant?" That was going to be rude. I knew somehow I was screwed either way.

Bukho: "I can explain."

Lara: "I asked you to never lie to me and you did."

Bukho: "Technically I didn't but....."

Lara: "This is a human being Bukhosi and whole human being. If he didn't look like you I was going to think that it was a prank."

Bukho: "I am sorry."

Lara: "No; you are not sorry because if there was no baby you were not going to tell me were you?"

Bukho: "I wanted to tell you and then you left to be with Simo I tried when we started afresh but you said you want to forget."

Lara: "So this is now my fault?"

Bukho: "No, never I wanted to tell you everything and....."

The baby cried startling both of us.

Lara: "Where is the mother?"

Bukho: "That's the thing the hospital called and they say she checked herself out and left the baby with my number on top of the bed."

She was sweating and changing colour. I knew I screwed up big time. I picked up the baby and he didn't want to stop crying.

Lara: "Give him to me."

She was aggressive and looked at me with killer eyes. I took the bag with clothes and the milk I bought and followed her. Some people were staring from their balconies. That's why I hated apartments.

Lara: "You are just like any other men."

Bukho: "I am sorry I....."

Lara: "Just save it."

She went to the bathroom and closed. What if she was going to drown the innocent child? I was panicking. I called dad he was not picking up then I called my mom.

Mom: "This better be good."

Bukho: "She is going to kill my son."

Mom: "Hello, are you sure you calling the right person?"

Bukho: "Mom; I know I called you. Bonolo went with my son to the bathroom and locked."

Mom: "What are....."

I heard the bathroom door close again then I checked and she had taken the bag which had the baby things.

Mom: "Hello, hello....."

I dropped the call and knocked at the bathroom door.

Bukho: "Please baby; open the door."

Lara: "If you know what is best for you right now you will just shush."

Bukho: "I want....."

My phone rang then I went to the balcony to answer it.

Mom: "Bukhosi Radebe if you know what is good for you and if you have a death wish say it now."

I was in trouble.

Bukho: "Mom; I am so sorry to disappoint you, I know right now you will hate me because my wife hates me now."

Mom: "Your wife will never hate you and please make it snappy I am listening."

Bukho: "I have a son with Veronica."

Mom: "You what?"

Bukho: “Mom please do not.....”

Mom: “Do not even go there. Veronica who is older than your older sister. The one we warned you against. The one you promised never to see behind our backs?”

Bukho: “Mom please I need you more than ever. I know I wronged all of you and the family will be disappointed.”

Mom: “My question is “How old is your son?”

Bukho: “Two days old.”

Mom: “You have been married for almost ten now and a child is supposed to be carried for 9 months.”

Bukho: “Mom, I.....

She had dropped the call. I was in trouble. I sat in the sitting room watching a TV which was off. I think it was when I saw darkness when I knew that night had fallen. I went to the bedroom and the two of them were sleeping peacefully. How? There was a flask that she used at work with the baby bottle next to her.

I opened the closet and took extra blankets and pillows. I wanted to watch movies because sleep was not even next to

my mind let alone the body. I remembered she didn't eat. I cooked and then placed it on the bedside table. I was shaking

because I knew my marriage might be over. My son sensed the situation so I never heard him cry. He was clean I guess she was bathing him then.

“So you sleep on the couch now.”

It was my wife and she looked gorgeous. I fell in love again.

Bukho: “I didn’t know if I would be welcome there you didn’t want to say anything and I assumed...”

Lara: “So you are assuming for me now?”

Bukho: “No baby I am sorry.”

Lara: “Are you still seeing her?”

Bukho: “No it happened once.”

Lara: “I am not a child and I know this child was conceived after we got married how when I don’t know.”

Bukho: “It was a mistake.”

Lara: “Yah right. Once upon a time a penis loved playing then one day when he was going to the shops he never stopped playing then he tripped and fell on top of the vagina and then they said oops it’s a mistake. The end.”

I wanted to laugh at the way she said it but then she sent shivers through my spine the way she said it.

Bukho: "Baby, I...."

Lara: "Save it."

I looked at her going to the kitchen, she brought breakfast for me.

Lara: "I am taking my son to my mother in law's place as I am going to work. Oh

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and dinner is at 6 pm you wouldn't want to miss family dinner now, husband, would you? My mother in law will help me shop for the baby things so you better settle the bill."

With that said she left with the baby. I didn't even get to hold him. I was sure I would hate him for ruining my life. The whole day I was on autopilot mode. I tried to call everyone but no one answered my calls even my wife. This baby was a curse. Sorry God for that. When I got home my wife was dressed well and dinner was ready. Well, what was going on?

Bukho: "Hello."

I was hesitant.

Lara: "Well do not just stand there go on and prepare for dinner I am ready."

Bukho: "Baby I am sorry for what i....."

Lara: "Do you think I will poison you? Not at all, I am not a murderer. I will eat all the food if you don't want to."

Bukho: "Where is the baby?"

Lara: "You mean your son? No; point of correction, our son?"

I looked down.

Lara: "Well he is with your parents and they are coming now. So go and get ready."

I was in trouble but I was happy my parents were going to be there to fry me too. I got ready as she asked. I was too tired but I knew my parents wanted me ready too.

Lara: "You want a drink."

Bukho: "Just water."

She went to the kitchen and that was my mistake. After drinking the water I didn't know what came next. When I woke up I was hungry getting in and out of consciousness.

"Well, I wouldn't want you to shit yourself while I am busy so that's why I need you hungry."

This was real I panicked and passed out. It was morning when I woke up to excruciating pain.

“I was going to die. Please God let her castrate me only not kill me and if she doesn’t kill me and forgives me I will never look at any woman again let alone bring a child.”

“I love you. Okay, point of correction I loved you and you go around and break my heart. I was fine single and picking up my pieces and I was doing fine. Was I just a pet project to you?”

It hurt deeply and I didn’t know how to react. Was it the fact that she used past tense of love or was it the hurt I had caused her? Why didn’t I take it from my parents? Does the apple not fall far away from the tree?

“I am taking my son away. He doesn’t need you as a father figure.”

She took another wax and I knew I was going to be in pain again. Why did I marry a madwoman? Who waxes her husband when she is angry?

“I am sorry, baby; I don’t know what got into me.”

“Then Bukhosi I am going to remove the devil that got into you.”

I was tied both hands and legs on either side of the bed. The pain was becoming my second nature. I should have known her silence was a sign.

“It is already gone I promise my love I will not do it again.”

“You are right it won’t happen again because we are getting a divorce.”

I don’t know what hurt the most? The way she was torturing me with or the fact that she was leaving me. I confessed that at first I married her out of obligation but I got to love her. I didn’t mean to hurt her God know that. If she forgave me I was going to retire and stay home to build my family.

“Your mother is calling. I am done packing our things you won’t even find our trace in the house.”

I wanted to say he was my son, not hers but I knew what was good for me. She answered the phone then placed it on my ear.

“Mom; I am sorry please forgive me. Please talk to my wife to forgive me. I swear I will confess everything and repent if need be.”

Mom: “What is going on?”

“She is leaving me with our son.”

Mom: “Well I should have left you a long time ago.”

She dropped the call.

“I will call the ambulance and wait for the police to come and arrest me. You know my phone number, give them if they want to arrest me.”

She left me like that. I was bleeding my shaft I guess was as big as a log and I was losing consciousness. I just closed my eyes and it was lights out..

47

Lara (Bonolo)

I wanted to cry but I needed to be strong for my son. Yes, he was my son even though I ran away from the truth. If I let them take him to his family I was still going to be paying for his upbringing. Then I was going to look for his family no matter what. If they took him then so be it because I didn't want him to feel like I was feeling then because of my absent father.

Legally we had to let the authorities decide but I knew how slow the system was. How did I get here? I was asking these questions to myself the whole way as the taxi took me to his mother's place. I had left my son there. He was a no-name baby. No matter what I was not going to give him the name without his consent.

"You are back."

It was my mother in law with a smile on her face. I admired that woman because she raised the kids who were not biologically

hers but she loved them still. Was I going to love the little boy the way she loved her kids?

Lara: "I don't think I can do this?"

Mom: "Yes you can and you will. It is just as simple as 1,2,3 and if you faced jail-time this is nothing. You just take one day at a time and believe in God."

Lara: "That's the thing I do not believe in God; if he existed we wouldn't be suffering like this."

Mom: "You will understand it all by and by."

I never got what she was saying but I just wanted time out from him. I was never going to divorce him because I knew he was not like Mlulami at all. I loved him like I have never loved anyone before.

Lara: "I love him so much and I didn't mean to hurt him."

I just broke down as I remembered that he was left alone and in pain.

Mom: "For now you need time apart please take care of yourself and hurt. When you have healed; then you can sit down and talk like adults."

Lara: "I do not have any leave days left."

Mom: "Who said anything about taking leave? Go somewhere and heal."

Lara: "I am taking my son."

She just smiled and hugged me.

Mom: "At least you know that he is your son. I am glad because that is a start. I will go and buy a few things for you and I hope you will heal first before going back. If you go back there before you heal you will hurt each other badly."

Lara: "Thank you for listening. I am leaving."

Mom: "I will ask for the driver to take you to your mother's place that's where I will find you with the things I will buy for the baby. You have to learn how to drive now that you have a son entrusted upon you."

We both laughed as my teary eyes got glassier.

Lara: "Thank you for being a good mother in law not a monster in law."

Mom: "Get out of here before you turn me into a monster in law. Oh and don't worry your boyfriend is in the surgery his dad and uncle are taking care of him so no police involved."

I just nodded because I was too embarrassed. The driver drove us to my mother's place. I was planning on going to Mr. Nails'

place because he had no problem accommodating me. The other advantage was the fact that even when he was not going to work his driver drove some workers to work which was going to be an added advantage to me. At least Mrs. Nails to be was going to look after my son. Well, I forgot to tell you that the helper who was jealous of my relationship with her got her

courage and confess her feelings. It was an uphill task for her because Mr. Nails was a hard nut to crack. I couldn't even study him myself. Well

that was not my bone to chew. I was pre-occupied I only realised when the driver said we have arrived.

Lara: "Thank you very much."

Driver: "It is my job ma'am."

He was the company driver but they used him here and there. I was the one using him more on those days. My mom was always home, which was strange. I was going to ask her this time around.

Mom: "What a beautiful surprise. What the....."

She looked at the sleeping baby and looked at me.

Lara: "May we please come in?"

This boy was good. I think he sensed that he was born out of infidelity but what was strange was that I was beginning to warm p to him.

Mom: "Come in and tell me what is going on."

Lara: "I just need to sleep."

Mom: "This is your husband's child isn't it?"

How can she ask when the bus was written its destination? I rolled my eyes and sat down.

Lara: "Hello to you too mom."

Mom: "How could you? The same thing I did to your father is the same thing that is happening to you. Oh my God."

Mom was never going to change in some of her traits. I had to tolerate her then. I still loved her and we were becoming close so I was okay with her negativity.

Lara: "Mom, worry not about me these are the things we find on our way to our destination."

Mom: "How could you agree to take care of his child? When are you going to have yours? There is no time and I won't see them before I"

She trailed and tears were forming. I was getting worried.

Lara: "Mom; are you okay?"

Mom: “Nothing.”

Lara: “No mom; please do not do this.”

She left me and went to her chest of drawers and came with a file. She gave it to me and I was shaking. She was still crying. It was a hospital file and as you know that most doctors’ handwriting is like ants had invaded the paper. No offense.

Lara: “I don’t understand.”

Mom: “I thought you went to school?”

Lara: “This looks like a cockroach infestation here.”

We both laughed through our tears.

Mom: “I am dying Bonolo, I

Lara: “What?”

She even used Bonolo which was not usual at all. I perused the file again and I saw the word chemotherapy and cancer and I sank on the sofa defeated.

Mom: “I wanted to tell you but I kept postponing because you were getting your life back. I was given only 6 months so I am taking each day as it comes.”

Lara: “No mom; it can’t be. I will pursue my case with the prosecutor’s office and then we do chemo if need be.”

Mom: "I am afraid it is too late. It was cervix cancer but then this time around it has spread to my womb and intestine or rather my middle body and internal organs are affected causing a malfunction in my whole system. I am not responding to the medication at all."

Lara: "No mom; there is something we can do about it."

Mom: "Even if there is a way I think I do not want to go through the chemo because I researched it."

Lara: "You are one selfish person do you know that?"

Mom: "I am not being selfish you are grown and your brother is....."

Lara: "That is selfishness talking. You always think of yourself and nothing at all. How can you"

We were both shouting on top of our voices unaware that my son was crying. My mother-in-law was inside already which meant that she came in without any of us realising it.

Her: "CUT IT OUT YOU TWO!!"

She was angry and I was not even next to explaining my emotions.

Lara: "I will not cut it when this woman is being selfish."

I went outside banging the door which startled me also in the process. Was it too much to ask for to want my mom to live longer as I had just formed a bond with her? Where was their God when I needed Him the most? I just held onto the wall and cried. This time my cries were loud. I felt a hand smoothing me. It was one of the tenants. She was a lovely lady.

Lady: "Whatever it is this too shall pass."

I was still crying when she left and came back with a glass of water. I drank and went inside after thanking her. I stood by the door when I heard my mother in law talk.

Her: "She has been through a lot please do not exclude her in your life. You should have told her earlier."

Mom: "I am not well up that I can just go for checkups if I want. When I went to the hospital it was already late."

Her: "Let us help you then."

Mom: "Is it too much to ask for, if I want to spend my last days happy with my family not under the needles and vomiting? I know my time is up so I want to spend my last days happy."

I felt the tears come again. Was I supposed to accept all those things at once? Was that fair to me?

Her: "Let us give her a chance to take this in. Remember she just had a son from her husband's infidelity."

Mom: "You are right."

Her: "Come here."

I think they were hugging I just went inside. I cleared my throat and they looked at me.

Lara: "If you don't mind I would like to go."

My son was sleeping. It was funny how I accepted him without questions asked. My beef was with his father so I was never going to be petty.

Mother in law: "Are you sure you are going to be okay?"

Mom: "Please let us talk."

Lara: "I need to sober up and come tomorrow. Please let me go and rest."

Mom: "You may leave him."

Lara: "No we will be fine. It's time we started bonding. I might not be prepared to be a mother but I am a mother now.

Mom: "I love you and I will always do."

Mother in law: "We will always be there for you."

They helped me pack and I was never going to tell them I was going to Mr. Nails. They assumed I was going to my old place to be with Hlengi and Zoe. I let them be.

When I got there he was there with Mrs. They looked happy and I was happy for them. I excused myself after they offered to help with the baby.

Mrs: "You will be fine."

Lara: "Yes ma I will be."

Mrs: "Now rest I will sleep with him."

I didn't even want to argue. I prepared for bed. I didn't even want to hear how my so-called husband was doing although it was eating me. When I was about to sleep an email came through. I didn't know the sender.

"Here is your sister. I am glad you already have the same blood. I hope you will get along. I will always love you. Father."

I opened the attachment and almost dropped the phone in shock.....

48

Bukhosi

When I woke up I was not only in physical pain but also mentally I was in pain. To say I knew how I got there was going to be a lie. The last time I was conscious was when she was leaving with her bags.

When I turned I felt a sharp pain.

Nurse: "Sir; please do not move the drip will be messed up and it will hurt you."

I was pressed I needed the loo. There was too much pain in my bladder.

Bukho: "I need the loo."

Nurse: "You have to do it where you are."

Bukho: "Are you insane, how am I going to do that?"

Nurse: "With all due respect sir you have been doing that for two weeks."

Bukho: "What?"

Muzi: "What seems to be the..... oh you are finally awake."

Nurse: "Please excuse me."

Muzi: "Do not let him intimidate you. Come and do your job."

She hesitated then came back, uncle Muzi gave me a scary look and I looked aside.

Muzi: "Now let us give you a thorough check-up."

The way he was doing it was as if I owe him. It was too painful; I just wanted it to be over. I could not feel my shaft but I could feel my legs. How was I to function without my..... oh no. Tears just fell involuntarily.

Dad: "Is he awake?"

Muzi: "Also crying like a small baby."

Bukho: "Did she castrate me?"

They looked at each other and laughed.

Dad: "You should have thought of that before cheating."

Muzi: "God I love your wife."

Bukho: "What?"

Dad: "Well I love her too. I hope all women take her advice and most men won't cheat."

Muzi: "I know a few who would want to take pointers."

Bukho: "Please I am in pain here."

Dad: "Do not worry son you will have as many kids as possible although I am not sure how."

They looked at each other again and laughed hard.

I gave up and just rested. They were busy talking when I felt sleepy and dozed off. I woke up to people talking and laughing. With closed eyes, I prayed silently that my wife was amongst them. I opened my eyes very slowly as if doing that will make my wife present when I eventually do.

Mom: "He is awake."

Bukho: "Hello everyone."

Busi: "He is finally up. Hie there Mr cheating death."

They laughed. My family had a way of making a serious matter a joke. I gave up on being serious because I was never going to get it from them so I just listened as they chatted as if I was not even there.

Busi: "Do not beat yourself up my love its part of life."

Kian: "Baby

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give the boy some air. He needs to recover and we need to go to men's camp and cry about it or celebrate about it."

I laughed through my pain.

Bukho: "After I see my wife maybe."

Mom: "What wife?"

Bukho: "What?"

Busi: "We haven't seen her or heard from her since the day you got here."

My mom's face said otherwise. She might know something that others didn't know.

Bukho: "What do you mean?"

Busi: "We do not know where she is her phones are off and her friends have never seen her. I even went to see her friend from prison and sis Moo they also haven't heard anything from her."

My heart was beating fast I was not ready to lose her.

Bukho: "Please tell me this is a joke."

Dad: "Everyone it's time to go home I need to check on my patient."

They said their goodbyes and my dad checked me again.

Bukho: "Is it true that my wife is nowhere to be found?"

Dad: "I think she thought you were going to report her I doubt she would want to go to prison again."

Bukho: "I would never do that when I am clearly in the wrong."

Dad: "That is why we took you here instead of the other hospitals. He didn't have the equipment needed but we had to so that the police won't be involved."

Bukho: "Thank you, dad."

Dad: "Do not thank me. I didn't do it for you but my daughter in law. She has been through a lot and when she had to enjoy her freedom and marriage. She will be busy again taking care of her ailing mother as it seems like she is the only one she has now.

She doesn't need a weak husband like you. I will even look for a lawyer to divorce you."

Bukho: "What is wrong with her mother?"

Dad: "She has cancer and in its final stage so there is nothing they can do."

Bukho: "What?"

I was stuck there because of my weakness while my wife was out there cold and lonely. I felt more than hurt.

Dad: "Bukhosi you have to man up."

My dad never used my full name and it meant I have disappointed him it broke my heart.

Bukho: "I am sorry dad. I swear to God when I see temptation I will walk the other way. I know I was supposed to be her protector but I became her worst nightmare. I don't deserve her. I wouldn't be surprised if she wants a divorce. How is she coping with the newborn?"

Dad: "I suspect your mom knows where she is because I saw a baby picture on her phone and it's a recent one."

Bukho: "I suspected too."

Dad: "Just focus on recovering and we will take it from there. I am even ashamed to call you my son. When I had you I was not married to your mother so do not even in your wildest nightmares compare us."

I laughed.

Bukho: "It's wildest dreams dad."

Dad: "You don't have dreams I know you have nightmares of your wife leaving you."

He laughed while I frowned.

Bukho: "Not cool dad."

He helped me with the urine bag and I was free of it. I even used the loo. It was painful I didn't even want to look at myself. When I was left alone I had time to think. The first time it

happened was when my wife was released from prison. I never should have gone there in the first place.

Then she told me that she was pregnant I believed her I wanted to hear what was going on. It was just after our honeymoon. It just happened and when I look back I can see that she was not pregnant then. She conceived the second time. How could I have been so naive?

My only hope was that my wife had the heart to forgive me. Why did I even get tempted?

After a week I was feeling better and I had to go home. The apartment was not a good place for me anymore. I asked Bran and Wani to help me while I looked for my wife. My first step was to apologise to my mother in law. I even did the same with sis Moo and Gail. I knew they were going to tell her. I went to her former flatmates and I could tell they also didn't know where she was.

When I got to her workplace I was not allowed in but I knew she was there. They worked in the same building with Hlengi so how come they never met.

Hlengi: "Even if she was coming to work I would never see her because they use the lift from the basement where the company cars park and I use the lobby lift. Even when we were roommates sometimes we only met at home."

Bukho: "Please tell her that I am sorry."

Hlengi: "What did you do?"

So she never told them. Well, she was a good wife what did I expect?

Bukho: "Thank you for your time."

I was defeated but not giving up. I got a three-bedroom house with a beautiful garden. It was what she wanted because I had listened to what she wanted. I didn't have much money at the time so the bank bailed me out as some of my money was tied up in investments.

I wanted to call Klaas about PRENUP when I remembered my mother in law. I was a little well to drive but I asked the driver to take me just in case. When I got there she was not feeling well the dishes were not clean.

Bukho: "What is going on?"

M/law: "I was not feeling well and I cannot put anything down. I do not have airtime to call Bonolo but I didn't want to send a call me back as she is still getting used to my days which are numbered."

Bukho: "Next time send a call me back to me I will see what to do. When last did she come here?"

M/law: "She came three days back but she was not okay I could tell. My worry about her is what caused my lack of appetite and me being sick."

Bukho: "Okay let me help you."

I had hoped that my wife was going to come. I sent the driver home I was going to use a cab. I cleaned and warmed the bathing water for her. I cooked enough meals for at least three days.

M/law: "Your parents taught you well. I know you are going to be a good husband to my daughter; just fix your mess."

Bukho: "Do you think I still have a chance?"

M/law: "Yes I know so. I saw it in her eyes even though she didn't want to say it. She still loves you."

Bukho: "Your words gave me hope right now."

M/law: "Off you go so I can rest."

Bukho: "Yes ma'am."

I left with a heavy heart. Why couldn't her relatives stay with her? This was not good. She was not going to make it but she needed family around her for her last days.

I was in deep conversation with myself when I heard the cab driver saying we have arrived. I had not unpacked the boxes as I

was waiting for my wife to come to do it. I had that hope and feeling that my marriage was not over.

“I swear I left the lights off.”

I was talking to myself as I was unlocking the house. Was I being robbed? My heart was beating so fast.

When checked the sitting room things were neatly packaged, what the.....

I heard voices and I followed them. The other one was of a giggling baby. Wait a minute...

I rushed to the main bedroom and it was slightly open.

Lara: “Your daddy will be surprised at how grown and mature you are. Mommy will protect you always.”

The baby made baby noises.

Lara: “Yes baby daddy is a cow but we love him still.”

I laughed with tears in my eyes.

Bukho: “Daddy loves you two very much.”

She turned looked at me then tears ran down her cheeks. I met her halfway as I hugged the life out of her

Lara (Bonolo)

My time away gave me peace of mind and time to think and reflect. I was re-evaluating my life. I loved this boy with my all but I had a feeling that the mother was going to come and claim him. I was not going to take that on him. I loved him without reservations.

On the other hand, I was getting used to the fact that my mother was not going to be with us for long. I had to listen to my mother in law because she was making sense. She was the best because she supported me through it all. I was sceptic thinking she was going to take her son's side.

Mr. Nails: "We are going to miss this little champ."

Lara: "So I am not going to be missed at all."

Mr. Nails: "You only come to me when you are in trouble. Remember when you left the country."

Lara: "You are the only person without drama."

Mr. Nails: "I wish I had a daughter like you."

Lara: "I am here now."

We laughed. They were helping me to pack with Mrs. Come to think of it the things they bought for the baby were more than 5 big suitcases. I stopped complaining at number three. My mother in law also always had an excuse to see the baby because she needed to shop for baby clothes.

I was not complaining at all. I was going to serve his money for school.

Lara: "I will come and visit."

Mr. Nails: "I see you daily at work I don't need to see you again here. I only need my boy. I will send the driver to come for him over the weekends."

He had stolen their hearts indeed.

Lara: "Sorry grandpa we are a full package."

We laughed as they escorted me to the car. I was still shocked by my sister that I had just pushed it at the back of my mind. I was going to tattle it when my mom was feeling better. I had so much hope that she was going to make it.

Both: "Please take care and don't be a stranger." I laughed.

Lara: "If I didn't know better I would have thought that you rehearsed that. Now you are more like twins. Young love."

Mr. Nails: "Get out of here."

I laughed and got in the car. They waved until the car left the house. It was funny how I have changed. From being a reserved person to an outgoing person who managed to make her circle grow wider. It all started with Gail then the rest followed.

My mother in law had managed to get the spare key from my husband, I didn't even ask how. I was just glad she did.

"Your daddy didn't even bother to unpack. He is as lazy as we remember him."

I was talking to my son as I placed him on the bed. He was not a light sleeper which always gave me time to do my things. I started with the kitchen stuff and then the sitting room. The good part was that the kitchen had fitted cupboards so I didn't have to move anything.

I wanted to be excited about the house but then the PRENUP made me realise that it will never be mine and I will never own a house as my salary was not even enough to buy a car of my dreams. Well, don't laugh because in my dreams I could drive even though in real life I was scared as hell.

When you have a target it is easy for the time to fly. I didn't even manage the bedrooms and I was not even sure where he wanted his son to sleep. I bathed my son as he was awake. We were busy chatting and laughing when he came in. My baby still

didn't have a name his father and his family were going to name him.

Lara: "Your daddy will be surprised at how grown and mature you are. Mommy will protect you always."

I tickled him and he laughed. That laugh was always music to my ears.

Lara: "Yes baby daddy is a cow but we love him still."

He laughed again

Bukho: "Daddy loves you two very much."

I turned and looked at him. He was the same man I married and the same I had fallen in love with. I was going to accept my punishment if he planned on opening a case for me. I was never going to apologise because you do that if you didn't mean to do it. As for me

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myself, and I, we meant it sshhhhh please do not tell him.

I saw him striding to me and I just went there involuntarily. He circled me into his warm arms.

Lara: "I am sorry."

Bukho: "Sshhhhh please let me enjoy this I missed it."

He was sniffing my hair and he continued to squeeze me tight. I was feeling him as if he was crushing my bones. He released me and looked into my eyes.

Bukho: "Please do not apologise."

Lara: "Do get over yourself MR I am not apologising for what I did I am apologising for taking him away and not communicating."

Bukho: "Here I was thinking that you are sorry for making me infertile."

Lara: "I am not sorry because you deserved it and more."

We kept quiet and entered a staring contest. Then we both laughed hard.

Bukho: "You are cruel."

Lara: "Test me and next time I will even cut your legs."

I had pulled a serious face from the bag of faces.

Bukho: "Do you think after this I will even sneeze next to any woman?"

Lara: "You better not. Tell even those women that admire you in their hearts that they will get you in trouble because I will be watching you."

Bukho: “Baby I

Lara: “Don’t baby me and I am still working on forgetting all this fiasco so trade carefully. Don’t think I am stupid for coming back because I love you. There is a limit to everything.”

Bukho: “I have started working on myself and I promise this is the last time I disappoint you because soon it will be just you and your brother.”

Lara: “Sister too.”

I knew I was not going to avoid the topic forever. He might as well be the first one as he was my partner.

Bukho: “What are you talking about?”

I took out my phone and showed him the email and the picture.

Bukho: “Well I will be damned.”

Lara: “You can say that again.”

Bukho: “So your sister has been under our noses all this time.”

Lara: “I felt the connection from the first day I met her but I took it lightly thinking it was just one of those things.”

Bukho: “Now that you know when are you going to meet up with her?”

Lara: "I don't know right now I am thinking of focusing on my mother. I have to come to terms or else I will lose the last month we are given together."

Bukho: "Speaking of her. I was there with her she is not okay. I even cooked a few meals for her. That is where I have been. I cleaned it because it is not good for her health."

Lara: "What? I am such a bad daughter. I last saw her four if not three days back. Let me go and"

Bukho: "Calm down let us sit down breath and think rationally."

I sat down and did the breathing exercises then I was calm after a few minutes.

Bukho: "So while I was cleaning there and on my way home I was thinking. Would you mind if she comes and stays with us?"

Lara: "Will you allow that ...I mean will you do that for me?"

Bukho: "Babes she is my mother in law and her last memory would be nice if she was with family not alone with no one to even care for her .!"

I was in tears. Was it guilt or it was genuine? I discovered he was indeed genuine as he had shown me so much of that before all the drama.

Lara: "Thank you very much. I wish my aunt could allow my little brother to come too."

Bukho: "Let us not fight them because they are officially his guardians and they might sue you as you are not blood-related to him."

Lara: "I am his blood and we share a mother. They were okay with everything because the truth came out now they want to be dotting guardians and they want to play God. They are taking advantage of mom."

Bukho: "My love calm down; we are not fighting I was just stating the obvious."

Lara: "I am sorry. But it hurts I wish I can do something."

Bukho: "For now let us give your mother the best last days ever."

Lara: "Thank you very much."

Bukho: "Do you realise that this is the first time we are sitting down and discussing things?"

Lara: "Yes and who is to be blamed?"

Bukho: "Both of us. We are adults and we need to calm down and discuss things without running to family or running away."

Lara: "You are right."

He left my side and searched everywhere for God knows what.

Lara: "Then; what are you looking for?"

Bukho: "This needs to be documented for future use."

I laughed covering my face

Lara: "Oh God will I ever hear the end of this?"

Bukho: "Never. Now sign here and tell the world that my husband is right."

Lara: "Not a chance."

Bukho: "Well I am going to rent one room and leave you with your son."

Lara: "You wouldn't."

Bukho: "Watch me."

He was so serious that I had to give in and sign what I didn't even know what it was. Just because I said he was right.

Bukho: "Now I will frame this."

I just laughed and looked at my son who was agitated. He was hungry.

Bukho: "May I hold him?"

Lara: "You don't need to ask. He is yours. No, he is ours."

Bukho: “Thank you for loving him even though his father is a cow.”

Lara: “Yes he is a cow. We might not have our own.”

Bukho: “We will do, don’t argue with me because I still have one ball left. Ono gondostolo.(One testicle”

We both laughed because it was our favourite part of that movie.

He circled us in his arms.

Bukho: “I love you two.”

Lara: “We love you also.”

When we were still in our bubble there was a knock.

Bukho: “This time of the night?”

I followed him to the door and when he opened boooooom...

50

Bukhosi

We looked at each other with my wife.

Hlengi: “Aren’t you going to let me in?”

Lara: "How did you know that we now stay here?"

Hlengi: "Is this how you greet your newly found sister."

Us: "What?"

Bukho: "How did you....."

Lara: "You know."

Hlengi: "I got an email from our so-called father so that's what he said in the email, he said we are sisters."

Lara: "How did he get your email address? Well, don't tell me because I know now that this man can even hack into the presidential system."

Hlengi: "I want to know him."

Bukho: "What?"

Lara: "You are all alone on this one I am not ready to do that."

Hlengi: "Please do it for me."

Bukho: "Baby, this is a chance for you to....."

Lara: "No offence but my mom is sick and I want to focus on her. I am not sure how many months she has left but I want to spend them with her."

Hlengi: "Is your mother that sick? Why didn't you tell me?"

Bukho: "I think she was still processing because it is not easy being told that you only have a few weeks to live."

Hlengi: "I am so sorry. I will be there for you and with you all the way. We are family now and even though I didn't know back then you have been my family."

Lara: "I would love that but that man is not going to come into my life."

Hlengi: "Easier to say because you grew up with a father figure in your life. I never had one even my uncles were so mean to my mother because she got pregnant with a man who left her. I was a thing to them then we moved. I always needed a father figure but my mom never wanted to talk about the man. She never dated again and it's just been my mom and I."

I felt sorry for her because I was thinking about my family. I looked at Beli she had shunned away from the relationships because of a man who didn't want to be happy with his woman.

Lara: "I am sorry about that. At least you have me now."

Hlengi: "I would love to know your mom before she leaves us and I would love to introduce you to my mom."

I watched her closely and see her face drop then it lit up. I was hoping that she would be encouraged to see that there is life after cancer.

The baby cried and I just wanted to give them privacy. I hurried to the bedroom.

“So you are this grown. Do you know who I am?”

He then smiled and said baby things.

“I need to give you a name. I will wait for your mom if she wants to give you I will let her. You are hers after all.”

He smiled a little and my heart started beating fast. This was my son. Even if he was born through infidelity I had to accept him because he was not his parents. My wife loved him I had to love him too.

He finished eating and burped before I could even help him.

“Sick, man, you have to say excuse me.”

He made baby sounds.

“Okay let us change your diaper. “

“You are going to be a good father.”

I looked behind us and saw my wife admiring us.

Bukho: “Thank you very much. Is she gone?”

Lara: "Yes she came with her boyfriend he was waiting in the car outside."

Bukho: "So how do you feel?"

Lara: "I felt the connection from the day we moved in together. She is not an outgoing person but we connected from the start."

Bukho: "Are you going to meet her mom?"

Lara: "I am thinking about it. It won't be any harm to try because soon my mom will be gone."

Bukho: "I am happy. I was talking to my boy that we are waiting for a name from you."

Her face lit up.

Lara: "Are you sure?"

Bukho: "Positive."

Lara: "I have been running a few ideas."

Bukho: "Okay let's hear them."

Lara: "Not something that your mom had, like the B now they call us B&B so no."

We both laughed

Bukho: "As long as you are the one who will give him because I was going to give him Bernard."

Lara: "It's like an old farmer's name. No offence to anyone who is a Bernard but it's like those white farmers who have a pipe in their mouths and an ascent like 'Bernarrd'. The R will be heard from afar."

I laughed at her ascent, I realised that I had missed my wife.

Bukho: "Okay Mrs. Bernard let's hear it."

Lara: "I want us to name him Jaalen."

Bukho: "What does that mean?"

Lara: "I know I am not a Christian and stuff but I thought for you. Jaalen means calm and serenity."

Bukho: "Wow."

Lara: "I have been studying him and he is so calm. He only gets irritated when he is hungry and has a wet diaper at night he sleeps peacefully."

Bukho: "Are you sure you never had a baby in the other life?"

Lara: "Do you think I make babies and leave them with my married boyfriend?"

It was a bad joke.

Bukho: "I am sorry it was a bad joke."

Lara: "Yes it was. Just because I forgave you it doesn't mean I have forgotten."

Bukho: "I am so sorry my love. It was a bad joke and I know you are still hurting. Please forgive us."

My son made some sounds and we both laughed

Bukho: "You see even J agrees."

Lara: "Or he is J."

Bukho: "Yes some of these people won't know how to pronounce it so J will be simple."

Lara: "Okay then. I am a little tired from moving those boxes."

Bukho: "Sorry hay. Should I prepare his room or you will help me tomorrow?"

Lara: "We will sleep together today tomorrow I am leaving you together you know I have to work tomorrow. After work, I will come with my mom."

My son was an angel I think I woke up only twice. Nolo was tired so I let her sleep. I woke her up when I had prepared a bath for her.

I was getting the hang of being a dad. I was so hoping that the stupid biological mother was not going to come and claim the child.

After work

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the driver brought them home. She had brought most of her clothes. She was looking better than the previous day. Nolo looked like her mother so much that is why we couldn't point out that they were siblings with Hlengiwe.

Things were starting to look up because my wife was starting to lighten up around me and everyone. I had really broken her, I should have known better.

Taking care of her mother took most of her spare time and her weekends we were not drifting apart but she was slowly falling into depression because her mom like expected was not getting better.

Mom: "Nolo, you should go out with the girls this weekend."

Lara: "But I can't I"

M/law: "Yes you can and yes you will."

Mom: "You need to rest this weekend I am going to help your husband with the baby and your mom will take her medication soon she sleeps though out and you know it."

Bukho: "Come on my love you need this."

Lara: "Okay."

She was reluctant but she took our advice and joined Zoe and Hlengi. They were trying to bond after the incident.... well I had meant to ask her mom what happened.

Bukho: "What really happened when they went to see Hlengi's mom?"

They both looked at each other.

Mom: "Well nothing much."

M/law: "She rejected her. She is just bitter and I get where she is coming from. Let me go and bath."

Mom: "I will help you."

Well, that was how I was avoided.

"My boy I know when I am being dismissed. Let's hope you won't do it to me too."

He spoke his baby language and smiled. His smile was priceless.

It made me fall madly in love with him daily.

She came back looking fresh and I was happy she took the day out with the girls. My son knew his mother very well. He jumped up and down when he saw her.

Bukho: "Somebody missed you."

Mom: "He will be a mama's boy just like his father."

Bukho: "Come on mom, not in front of my kids."

They laughed at me. I was happy and my mother-in-law was getting better, so we thought.

"Baby, wake up we have to take mom to the hospital."

It was like I was dreaming. I concentrated on the dreaming again but I was shaking again, then I woke up in awe.

Bukho: "What is going on?"

Lara: "Mom is crying. She is saying this thing is eating her alive."

Bukho: "What?"

This was like we were in a horror movie my wife was panicking.

I went to her room and she was crying and praying.

"I know I wronged you God but do I deserve this punishment. Why will I be subjected to this torture of being eaten alive? I am begging you, please take me now. Ah.....this is so painful I wish I can die."

Tears flew uninvited; I didn't even know how my wife would survive.

Bukho: "Ssshhhh you will be fine."

M/law: "Nothing will ever be fine. This thing is growing and eating me. I thought vampires were a myth but I can feel it eating me."

She was losing her breath. My wife came all dressed with our son in a car seat.

Bukho: "Let me rush and change."

Lara: "I will ask ma to help me."

Ma she meant our helper who stayed with them when we were at work. We were going to pay her extra that month-end because she had overworked. I was thinking while I dressed as fast as I could.

I called my parents while we were on our way. They said they were going to meet us there. I was left in the car with my son because he was not allowed while they went inside.

Mom: "What is going on?"

Bukho: "It is too bad this time around mom."

Mom: "Leave the baby with ma here in the car and we will rush and see what is going on."

We rushed inside and found my wife with puffed eyes.

Lara: "This is too bad."

She rushed into my arms and I wrapped my arms tightly around her. Deep down we all knew it was time although we were still in denial.....

51

Lara (Bonolo)

This was it. I had to say my goodbyes because I had made peace with the fact that my mom was leaving us. I looked at her faint smile and smiled with tears running down my cheeks.

Mom: "Please forgive me. I wanted to tell you that I am sorry for everything I have done. I wish I had more time but I do not."

Lara: "Mom you apologised enough let us save your energy."

Mom: "I have to say this before I go. Please take care of your brother."

Lara: "You know he doesn't want anymore. I do not know what they told him but he is too distant. I know I am not her biological sister but we grew up together and close."

Mom: "Do not give up on him, he is still young. When he is old enough to know right from wrong he will come to you. I trust

you will live your life to the fullest do not even worry about him for now because he is well taken care of for now.”

Lara: “If you say so, mom. I wish we were given more time together.”

Mom: “God has all our lives mapped up the way He wants us to live our lives the way it was supposed to be mapped.”

Lara: “I have doubted God and now it is getting harder by the day because things keep piling up. I am a mother by default now. I am even.....”

Mom: “Lara Bonolo; breathe because you are going to have a heart attack we will bury you before we bury me.”

I laughed even though I didn't want to. I hugged her tight and went out. I couldn't stop tears reality was far worse than what I have imagined it will be. I had prepared myself mentally but it turned out to be far-fetched from reality. My husband came running to me.

Bukho: “Are you okay my love?”

Lara: “I just need a break from all this.”

I had cried enough and the hiccups were starting to irritate me also.

Bukho: "Okay no problem. I am taking J to the grandparents and it will be just the two of us."

Lara: "No my son is....."

Bukho: "I am not taking no for an answer. Your son is not going anywhere but he will need a healthy mom."

Lara: "Okay."

I was defeated but I needed a breather. When we were about to go Hlengi came in we shared a hug.

Hlengi: "I am so sorry about your mom. My mom sends her regards."

I laughed sarcastically.

Lara: "We both know that is a lie."

Hlengi: "I am so sorry about what happened."

Lara: "I will never hold it against you as it is your mom, not you."

When we went to see her mom she chased me out like a dog. She said my father was seeing my mother the same time she was seeing her. She said if it wasn't for my mother she was not going to be dumped.

Hlengi: "I wish mom can be forgiving and see that I need you in my life and my dad. I am this lonely person. I don't wish to get

back to her family because my uncles are so mean. I want to move on but she is still hoping they will reunite and be one happy family. I am done with them I am not going to force myself into their lives.”

Lara: “I am tired let me go and rest we will talk.”

Hlengi: “I took days off to help you.”

Lara: “Thank you very much I do not have any leave days left. I do not know what to do.”

Hlengi: “I will help you take care of her when she is here and come with fresh meals. My boyfriend left his car with me. He went on a team-building camp.”

Lara: “I hate those.”

Hlengi: “He was hoping to get a raise afterward so that he can raise the money for us to get married. I hope it works out.”

Lara: “It will worry not.”

We said our goodbyes as we drove home. My mother in law had already taken my son and ma was going to get a day off or two as I wanted time alone.

“I already ran a bath for you go and refresh up and then I will tuck you in.”

I looked at him and nodded. While I was bathing I wanted to pray but it never came because I was not good t that.

“Please God let your will be done”

I was defeated so I never knew how to pray and beg God.

Surprisingly I slept peacefully after that short prayer.

Days went by still there was no change and they were planning on discharging her again because there was nothing they could do. We prepared her room again. I cleaned it and bought new linen. I was woken by a call from the hospital.

“I am sorry....”

I never let her finish I just let the phone slide down. My husband woke up in the nick of time and talked to them. I was done with hoping and I was not going to have hope again.

“We need to go to the hospital.”

Lara: “I am okay here I want to go and clean her house so that she finds the place clean.”

I was still in denial. I knew she was gone but I didn’t want to admit it.

Bukho: “Okay let me drop you there then.”

He did well by not arguing with me. I finished packing her things and took them with me. I was not in the mood to talk. When he dropped me I just locked myself inside and cried.

“They say there is a God but I have never seen him. Why would he ever let me suffer like this? I just got to know my mom after all these years. Why am I not supposed to be happy? Where do people go to when they die? I want to follow them too because I am nothing and I have nothing left here.”

I cried and fell asleep. I didn't even hear my ringing phone I only woke up from a big bang on the door. It was my aunt and my brother. I hugged him as we cried together.

Aunt: “I will clean here. You too go and sit in the car.”

I didn't have the energy to argue I just followed the instructions.

When my husband came he took me home. I slept the moment my head hit the pillow. I had a dream when I was young and my mom had scolded me for following dad. I then followed her

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she freaked out but I just hugged her smiling. I was still hugging myself when I woke up.

“Bad dream?”

Lara: "Good one on the contrary because I wanted it to never end maybe my childhood was going to be much better."

Bukho: "Come here."

He hugged me tight and I didn't want to let go.

Lara: "Thank you very much."

Bukho: "No need to thank me I am here because it is my duty. I love you."

Lara: "I love you also."

He prepared a bath for us while I packed my things. We were going to stay longer there because I knew her family was going to fight about things and all. So I was prepared.

Bukho: "I will miss you dearly."

Lara: "You will come daily."

Bukho: "Definitely and you know if you need anything I am here. Are you going with J?"

Lara: "I just want to check how the situation will be. Then if I am happy I will take him. In the meantime, ma said she will help me and your mom said she will check on her also."

Bukho: "All will be well."

I didn't want to say much I was mentally and physically drained. When I got home; it felt weird calling it home because my home was with my husband then.

All the rooms and the yard reminded me of my childhood and I found myself crying. Surprisingly the families were getting along. I was happy my in-laws were helping too. The day of the funeral I was too drained. I held my brother on the other side while my husband supported me on the other. My brother had been strong all week long but he was not strong enough when we went to the chapel.

His cries made me cry more.

Bukho: "Please be strong for your brother"

I just nodded although I knew it was impossible. The preacher was taking too long because it became sadder. The speakers spoke about her childhood and late-life. Although she was a closed person she had a few friends and family members who were close to her.

"She is gone."

Lara: "Please do not leave me also."

"It's the same you are not my sister what if you do not care for me?"

Lara: "You will always be my brother, blood, or no blood. I will never leave you alone okay."

He just nodded but little did I know it was the last conversation we will have. When we left for the graveyard I was having a little loss of breath but I thought it was because of too much crying.

Busi: "Are you okay?"

She was looking at me with a worried look.

Lara: "I am going to be fine."

Busi: "I am asking as a doctor now because I can see your eyes are dilated."

Lara: "I think it is too much crying."

Bukho: "She will go and check you then we will be sure about your theory."

I smiled awkwardly. I didn't want to go near any hospital because I still had a bitter taste.

When the coffin was lowered I couldn't help but wail because reality hit me that we were given little time. I took care of her yes but it was not enough. I wished to have taken her on a holiday or something.

At least there was support from the family and my in-laws. When all was done it was decided that they put tenants in all the room and the money was going to be sent to my little brother every month. I was used to being sidelined and at least I was working.

Bukho: "We are done. Everything went well. Now can we go?"

Lara: "I want my bed more than anything."

Bukho: "Busi is bringing your bags."

Lara: "Yes, thank yo....."

I felt dizzy and it was lights out. When I woke up Busi was wearing her coat and doing her things.

Busi: "Thank God you are up. We can't have another funeral."

Lara: "I still want to see my son grow. So dying can wait."

Busi: "Well your son is happy to have you. I rushed you to where I am working because that was the only place that came to my mind."

Lara: "It's okay. Where is everyone?"

Busi: "They are outside. Your hubby is worried sick. You will give him a heart attack."

Lara: "Not intentionally. So what is wrong with me?"

Busi: “Apart from exhaustion I found something and I asked them to test your blood. I am hoping to be wrong but I know I am not.”

Lara: “What is it?”

Busi: “Let us wait for the results.”

Lara: “No harm in telling me what you suspect right?”

Busi: “I think you.....”

52

Bukhosi

I was pacing up and down the corridor. Busi was taking long I was agitated in a sense that I wished dad was taking care of her.

Bukho: “What is taking them so long?”

Dad: “She is a good doctor trust her.”

Bukho: “Why are you not helping her?”

Mom: “Son you know that he is not working here. She will be fine, don’t stress.”

Belinda came rushing and passed us going to her room.”

Bukho: “What the.....”

Dad: “Language and you know she was not going to just stand here when she knows that your wife needs her support.”

After what seemed like a lifetime Busi came out with an emotionless face. I got scared but then remembered that doctors live happier when people shit themselves for nothing. My sister was not any different.

Busi: “She is going to be fine worry not.”

Bukho: “What was the problem?”

Busi: “Doctor-patient confidentiality.”

Mom: “Amen”

She lifted her hands and left going to the ladies. My dad just sat down.

Bukho: “Can we go and see her at least or we still need doctor-patient confidentiality?”

They laughed but I couldn't because I was irritated.

Dad: “Leave your sister alone she is doing her job. May we?”

Busi: “He can go first as he is the husband.”

I didn't wait I went there. She had a faint smile on her face. Bukho: “Beli; you didn't even great. How are you?”

Beli: "I am good now that I know she is fine. I will go and freshen up then call my son."

Bukho: "You left him?"

Beli: "Yes I delayed yesterday because there was bad weather that's why I delayed. Remember he has school."

Bukho: "Okay I will see you later."

Beli: "Bye Nolo I will come to see you when I am refreshed."

Lara: "Okay then. Thank you for coming."

She left and I sat next to her and held her hand.

Bukho: "Please do not scare me again. Tell me that you will be okay. Promise you will never leave me."

She smiled looking down.

Lara: "I will not promise anything because I am not God but I will try to hold on."

Bukho: "That's better because without you there won't be B&B."

We both laughed.

Bukho: "So what is the problem?"

She hesitated at and I knew she was not going, to be honest, or was I being paranoid.

Lara: "It's too much stress and exhaustion."

I didn't want to cause any more stress so I just kept quiet she was going to tell me when she was rested.

Bukho: "We are going to be fine."

Lara: "Am I going home tonight?"

Bukho: "I will ask my sister but I doubt when they have already placed you on a drip."

Lara: "I was hoping to go home. I was looking forward to my bed."

We both laughed.

Bukho: "Where you drinking your pills well and on time."

Lara: "You know that I wouldn't miss those no matter what. I will be fine as long as I avoid stress and make the best of the time we have."

She was whispering the last part.

Bukho: "What was that?"

Lara: "Nothing my love. I will get better for my boys."

Bukho: "That's my girl."

I spent a few more minutes with her before I let mom and others check on her. I went to look for my sister because I needed answers.

Bukho: "Please tell me what is going on?"

Busi: "You know that even though you are married you do not have the right to know unless she wants you to. Even if you are married in community of property; well in your case you married out of community of property."

Bukho: "Should you rub this into my face?"

Busi: "Just stating the obvious. Sometimes we make decisions because we do not think about the future. This will teach you to make sure you analyse things before you make decisions."

Bukho: "I am not going to hear the end of this yes but for now can we put this aside."

Busi: "Even though she will tell you. It's not something to worry about because if you worry your son will be restless."

Bukho: "Thank you for nothing doctor."

Busi: "I am still your sister."

I left the hospital conflicted but my sister was right. I was not going to have a sick baby and a sick mother.

I went with my mom home to see my son and then I left driving home. I felt all alone in a big house. Our house was small and cosy but alone it felt like a big hole. I slept in front of the television because it was going to be my companion. I woke up late but I was in time for the morning visiting hour.

“You have to tell him, babes, because this is a big thing. What if you escalate faster than you think?”

Lara: “You know how expensive these things are and I am not privileged enough to have all those medications.”

“I think there is no harm because it’s on its early stages.”

There were three voices the other one was of Beli and the other Wani. Okay, I was going to listen to them till I got what I wanted.

Beli: “I think even mom can help you. We will contribute.”

Lara: “I do not want to disrespect my husband that way. He will not feel well when I accept this.”

Beli: “So tell me how are you going to get the money?”

Lara: “I will raise it myself.”

What money were they talking about?

Wani: “Well he is the one who made you sign the damn PRENUP!”

Okay, I was getting worried.

Lara: "He had his reasons."

Beli: "Well

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stop making damn excuses for him. That won't remove that cancer."

Bukho: "What?!"

I even dropped the plastic that had toiletries and fruits that I had brought.

Beli: "Get well soon Nolo and I will see you before I leave tonight."

Wani: "I will see you tomorrow because I am taking the twins for their dance lessons."

Bukho: "No, no, no, do not leave on my account. Continue I will just leave these."

Beli: "This attitude made you and your stupid lawyer draft a PRENUP; so lose it before I do it for you."

She had even turned red. It was the first time I saw her that way.

Lara: "Thank you guys for coming."

They left and I was still looking at my wife for answers.

Lara: "Please do not look at me like this."

Bukho: "So when were you going to tell me?"

Lara: "Bukhosi, a lot has happened; our son, I am positive and my mother just died and now I realised that she left a curse with me."

I was feeling my heart beating fast; she had never called me by my full name. It was either cheese boy or pet names.

Bukho: "Hay look at me."

Lara: "No, please do not change my mind."

Bukho: "I am not going to listen to you. I accepted you with your status and now this is ours because we are married."

Lara: "You saw how my mom was. It is going to be hard."

Bukho: "I am going to talk to you when I have spoken to the doctor. You are not a doctor."

She sighed and I just called Busi.

Busi: "What do you want?"

Bukho: "So you don't greet anymore. When are you coming we need to talk."

Busi: "I am coming in an hour and she is going home today."

Bukho: "I am not going anywhere the office can wait."

Busi: "Okay I am busy see you in an hour's time."

I looked at her with a sad face.

Bukho: "We are going to beat this. I know."

Lara: "I have lost hope and I do not have a fighting bone left in me."

Bukho: "You have a lot to fight for. Do you want a stepmother to raise your son?"

Lara: "Of course not. I will wake up from the dead."

Bukho: "So let us fight God has a plan."

Lara: "I think He hates me because he gives me all these challenges and all these diseases."

Bukho: "I will not comment on that because you know it's not true. Now let us go and have a bath."

Lara: "The nurse will help there are other patients here."

Bukho: "We will put a do not disturb sign."

She wanted to argue but I didn't listen because I knew I was not going to take a no for an answer.

Busi: "It is just a small lump for now so we can cut the breast and also cut another one to curb it."

She looked hurt and looked down.

Bukho: "So you think all this will work?"

Busi: "From my professional point of view, yes but God knows the future. She will need you more than ever and you have to pay for her hospital bills because I think moving her to a private hospital with better services will do."

Bukho: "I got rid of the PRENUP so I am taking care of my wife. If it leaves me bankrupt so be it."

Lara: "Baby I....."

Bukho: "No Nolo I am not losing you without trying. At least it was detected early."

Busi: "Yes and her chances are higher than her mom's."

Bukho: "You hear that my love we will be fine."

Busi: "Let me sign your file and release you to the hospital of your choice."

Bukho: "Thank you very much."

My wife was too quiet.

Lara: "I will pay you back all your money."

To avoid a fight I was not going to dispute.

Bukho: "We will draw up a contract don't worry."

Lara: "Okay."

She smiled and I kissed her with the assurance that all will be well. I knew I was not going to take her money no matter what. We were embarking on a journey to the unknown but I was going to hold her hand all the way.....

53

Lara (Bonolo)

I was going to trust my husband when he said all will be well. I was defeated because all my hope was gone. Believe it or not, I wanted to survive this for my son. I couldn't fail him as his mother. Kids are brought down to this world innocent and some parents destroy that. I didn't want J to be like that.

Bukho: "Penny for your thought?"

Lara: "I miss my son I just want to go home."

It was the truth.

Bukho: "Just two more tests and we will be going home today my love."

Lara: "Can we skip it and I will start with it next month."

Bukho: "Not happening; my love. Next month will turn into a year and before we know it we would be facing a dilemma that can't be solved."

Lara: "Do you think this will work? Will I be truly healed?"

Bukho: "We need to trust God."

Lara: "I do not think I would do that because he is the one who brought us here in the first place."

I was mumbling the reply."

Bukho: "What was that?"

Lara: "Nothing."

Bukho: "I hope it is nothing because God will show you who is God so that you can fully trust in him."

To be honest I had stopped believing there was a higher being. Imagine J was not mine biologically but I was already overly protective of him, so what kind of a father was God who let his kids suffer?

Busi: "Do not over-think all will be well."

I didn't even see her standing there

Lara: "I am not. I miss my son dearly."

Busi: "One would swear this parenting thing was not thrust upon you. You are even a better parent than I am. I hope this big head of my brother knows that you are special."

Lara: "I hope for his sake he does because this time around I will make sure I remove the whole set that makes him commit adultery."

Busi: "I will help you."

Bukho: "Hello, I am here and you are busy talking about me."

Busi: "I am not even bluffing."

Bukho: "Okay now can we go home."

Busi: "Okay grumpy. Let me take her saliva and draw the blood. Then you two can go home. The medication I gave you will not heal you, it will just numb the pain and dizziness for now but you will need to go to the hospital as soon as the blood tests are out."

Lara: "Am I going to be there forever?"

Busi: "No as long as the medication doesn't make you sick. If it does then you will stay there till the operation."

I wanted to ask Busi as I was comfortable with her. Also, it put me at ease as she was not going to lie because her brother needed me the most.

Lara: "Will the operation be done at the same time or should I just do it in different intervals?"

I looked at my husband to check if he was okay with the operation.

Bukho: "Are you still cutting both breasts?"

I didn't know how to react because this was hard on me also.

Busi: "If we leave one; chances are very high that it might come back and attack the other breast. It might come back but better to be safe than sorry. If it comes back it will be hard and she will have to go for many operations and heavy medication."

He looked at me with pitiful eyes and I just looked aside. I didn't know what to do really.

Bukho: "I love those breasts too much. Can I keep them then?"

I swear I didn't want to laugh but I did and Busi laughed too.

Busi: "We are serious here and you are busy playing. What is wrong with you? Yes, you may keep them you pervert."

Bukho: "Those are mine silly woman."

They went back and forth while I just laughed. At least after a stressful week, he made me laugh. He was so stupid but I loved him.

Bukho: "On a serious note. Will she be okay to do both operations? Are her body and mind ready for this?"

Busi: "No one is ever ready but we will be there for her. She needs you now more than ever."

Bukho: "I know that and I will be here."

Busi: "Now off you go. You will hear from the hospital next week. Remember to eat healthily and make sure you take your medication on time. This will make sure your hormones are balanced before the operation."

Lara: "I am still trying to wrap my head around this and it's too much. Let me take one day at a time."

Bukho: "Okay sis I will call you. Let me take her home because this has been too much for her."

Busi: "Okay just relax everything will be fine."

We said our goodbyes and went home. On my way

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I was conflicted. I didn't want him to lose his life and time looking after me. I think he read my mind.

Bukho: "Do not worry; I want you to leave all the worries to me."

I just nodded.

Things went back to normal but I didn't like the attention and the sympathy. I was always looking forward to be with my small family. My husband cut the hours from work and he made sure he took me to and fro work.

Bukho: "How are you feeling today honey?"

Lara: "Do you know how many times have you asked this question?"

Bukho: "I know it's because I missed you so much. Tomorrow I am not going on set so I will be with you the whole day."

Lara: "I am going to work."

Bukho: "No I talked to your boss."

Lara: "He is such a traitor that one."

Bukho: "Come here. I love you so much and I want you to know that you and J are my life."

J: "Da...da..."

Lara: "Okay, I am jealous."

He laughed and asked his son to repeat what he said but it was just him playing.

Lara: "It was by chance."

We spent the following day indoors. My brother had shunned away from me I couldn't blame him I guess my uncle and aunt had poisoned him. They had moved to my father's house. He was my brother to me although we only shared a mother, my uncle was the one who poisoned him.

My biological father was making progress with Hlengi she was telling me everything but I was not interested. I was loving my relationship with Hlengi we were like twins and Zoe always said we made her feel like a spare wheel but I loved them both. Her mother was still angry she was even angrier at Hlengi for having a relationship with her father.

Oh; oh vomit was coming. I rushed to the bathroom with my husband on my tail. Luckily enough my son was sleeping.

Bukho: "What s wrong?"

Lara: "I....."

After vomiting, I just passed out. I woke up in my private room at the hospital.

Bukho: "It is time."

Lara: "Are they operating today?"

Bukho: "Yes they just want you to sign. I signed already waiting for Busi to give them more information."

Lara: "Before the operation, I want to see my brother and my son."

Bukho: "No you are not leaving us. If you see them you will never feel the need to come back."

He wanted to cry, he was right. I mentally prepared myself to see them when I woke up. That way I had a lot to come back for.

Lara: "Okay. I am ready."

Bukho: "Are you sure."

Was that man okay? He asked me not to see people I wanted to see when I agreed he was sceptical of what was wrong.

Lara: "I think I will die because of you."

Bukho: "Do not play like that because I will bring back to life and kill you myself."

Busi: "No death threats when we are faced with this dilemma."

Bukho: "What took you so long?"

Busi: "I was in surgery besides I knew she was only going to theatre letter on."

Lara: "I think I am ready."

Busi: "Let me go and talk to your doctor."

She quickly went while my husband hopped on the bed and brushed my cheeks.

Bukho: “I love you and please come back to me. I want to give you a girl just after this operation.”

Lara: “You are crazier than I thought; thinking about making babies when your wife is on death bed.”

Bukho: “I am giving you something to come back to.”

He was right. I was even blushing like a love-struck teenager. I smiled and looked aside.

Bukho: “I still make you blush. Damn, I am good.”

We talked about the future. I knew talking about the future made me positive. I was wheeled to the theatre with him holding my hand. That was the last thing I felt; his hand on mine.

When I woke up the first instinct was to touch my chest tears just fell down my cheeks, what kind of a woman was I without breasts? Why did this God hate me so much?

Bukho: “You are making my wife ugly wipe those tears.”

I smiled through those tears. I thought he had gone and was never coming back. I wasn't going to blame him. Who would

want a wife without breasts? How was I going to breastfeed our kids?

Bukho: “Those tears make me sad. I am the one who should be crying because you have been out for two days I thought I have lost you.”

Lara: “What?”

It came as a whisper.

Bukho: “Do not strain yourself. The doctor said you need more fluids. Come drink up.”

He forced a straw into my mouth.

Bukho: “I am not going anywhere. As soon as they remove those bandages we will take a pic shirtless to show the world that we are a unique couple and God loves us.”

I was suppressing a laugh because I was in pain.

“Please leave my patient alone. Should I tell her how you cried when her pulse was too low and we almost lost her?”

It was a white male with a horsy voice.

Bukho: “Doctor I hope you have insurance for releasing such files.”

We both laughed.

Doc: "I hope you are feeling better. This is just the beginning."

I wanted to sink down and never come back. So it was just the beginning.

Bukho: "I will be here all the step of the way."

Doc: "You have a strong husband. Please take care of her. For now, I want you out of here. Go and bath because my patient doesn't need bacteria from you."

He smiled and went out after kissing me. I was sceptical but I had to take one day at a time..

54

Bukhosi

Did I care that my wife had no breasts; hell no I loved her the way she was. When I married her I knew she was HIV positive but I was in love with her regardless. She completed me and I was nothing without her.

The bonus was the fact that she loved my son and didn't take my sins to him even though he was born from infidelity. To her, he was her firstborn and I loved her for that.

"Hay; stop it your mom will beat us. I am planning to score tonight so if she is angry I will be cold and lonely."

He made baby sounds.

“You are so cruel. If you have a girlfriend I will also do the same and mess things up for you.”

He laughed at me.

“Stop messing with my baby. What are you teaching him?”

We both looked at the door and laughed.

Bukho: “I am not the one who messed up the bathroom my love.”

A. “mngd akfhr sosnnd.”

Bukho: “You are lying. Baby, he is lying it’s not me.”

She laughed picking him up from the tub talking baby language to his mother.

Lara: “You are framing my son.”

She laughed going out.

“When will I have someone supporting me? Even my mother has turned against me. Let me watch my TV because it will love me back.”

I was mumbling while they went away.

Lara: “We love you too and I hope the tub is clean.”

“This son of yours is a traitor. I am not going to entertain you two.”

Lara: “I can hear you. We love you too.”

I laughed at them. This was my family and I loved them. She came alone while I was watching television.

Lara: “Baby; may you please come and change my bandages.”

I was the one who was taking care of that. At first, I used to vomit because it was too deep and scary. As time went on I had developed thick skin.

Bukho: “This has healed well.”

Lara: “That is all thanks to you.”

Bukho: “We are in this together remember?”

Lara: “You are the best husband ever. Thank you for being in my life. I love you.”

Bukho: “I love you more and there is no need to thank me. It is my duty to support you as my wife and the love of my life. Come let us clean you.”

I was even good at cleaning the wounds. I cleaned her and changed the bandages. We were left with only two days to start Chemotherapy.

Bukho: “Are you ready for chemo?”

I knew she avoided the topic but I needed to make sure she was mentally prepared at the time.

Lara: "Are you going to be with me."

Bukho: "All the way my love. You know I can never leave you. I will leave you when you are done dying."

She hit me playfully.

Lara: "Let me die then."

Bukho: "I think you have a real death wish because I will wake you up and kill you till you die."

Lara: "You are crazy."

Bukho: "Crazy in love."

We laughed as we went to watch the television together. We had developed a custom of talking before sleeping. We got to know each other better. I was better at communication and I was not even impulsive because talking made me make decisions calmly.

The day came. Busi had advised us to do both radiation and chemo. So we were going to start with chemo then end with radiation.

Lara: "I thought I was not going to be ready."

Bukho: "Morning to you too my love."

She smiled.

Lara: "Morning baby. I am ready."

Bukho: "You are even happy and smiling."

Lara: "I have a lot to live for. I have a son who I would love to see going to school. I have a husband who will be miserable without me because I did him a favour to marry him."

Bukho: "I am not going to comment because I am happy too."

Our happiness was short-lived. When we came back from the shot, she was given she started getting sick.

We had to take J to my mother. She was always sick sometimes vomiting or sometimes with a running tummy. I was even losing hope that she will get better.

Lara: "Why don't you divorce me?"

Bukho: "Where is this coming?"

Lara: "I am always sick. You don't go to work anymore. Uncle Polly was forced to move here to take care of the business. I had been forced to take a leave of absence at work and it is unpaid leave. My son might grow up with an evil stepmother so well I might as well accept my fate."

I don't want to lie there was a lump on my throat. I had been strong for both of us but that day I cried. I didn't know what to say. I just hugged her and cried; we cried silently till I couldn't take it anymore. People always said men do not cry but I cried that day. I begged God for a miracle because I had prayed and prayed I was about to give up too.

I bathed her and took her to bed. She was so frail and had lost weight. I was becoming helpless by the day. Mom was helping me during the day most of the time but she was too strained too. I prepared a bed for her and pray then she rested. I went to the garden we had a small one.

"God please take me instead because she doesn't deserve to die."

That day I knew I loved my wife because I was willing to die for her. I took out my phone and watched my son playing with her mother. They were a match made from heaven. I had tried tracking her biological mother because I wanted to know if she would want her child back but she refused she even agreed to sign a nondisclosure agreement. It was my gift to my wife. I was planning on telling her about it when we were done. On that day I just felt defeated.

I looked at other videos then I came across one I didn't know. It was taken a week back. I watched it, it was my wife.

“I know you have hope and you believe in God but I have no hope left in me and I am not giving up but facing reality. I might not make it; in fact, I know I have a body that is giving up on me. I will rest in peace knowing that I was once loved and I loved back. Take care of my son. If you ever bring another wife before he goes to college I will be a ghost. When she opens the cupboards I will be there to scare her to death. If she dies she will meet me here waiting for her and I will kill her again. I love you both and I will always love you.”

She kissed the camera. I wiped away my tears and played it all over again before I went back to the house.

“What if she is gone already?”

I said out loud and ran to our bedroom. I shook her but nothing.

I panicked and went to get some water. Before I splashed water

I saw her changing side.

“Thank God.”

I placed water aside and hugged her for my dear life.

Lara: “Ahhhhh.”

Bukho: “Sorry did I hurt you?”

Lara: “What is going on?”

Bukho: “I thought you had gone. I saw your video.”

Lara: "Oh that one. I was in too much pain that day; I swear I thought it was my last day on earth."

She was even smiling as if she didn't just scare me.

Bukho: "Please do not do that again."

Lara: "Come let us sleep

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I am a bit tired."

I just nodded. I was used to it. She was always tired. But she could sit to accommodate me. If she did we would have a rough night.

The following week we were starting radiation. I was sceptical about it. I asked mom and Busi outside while the doctor was taking care of her.

Bukho: "I am very scared."

Busi: "I know you are that is why I came today."

Bukho: "You don't understand. She has given up already do you think this will help."

Busi: "I told you the blood tests were clear but we need to be sure it will never come back again."

Mom: "I know you want to lose hope my son but now is not the time to give up. She needs you. We need you too. Keep on keeping on and pray."

Busi: "Mom is right we need to pray hard. For me, the worst is over. Chemo was the worst if she pulled through radiation won't make her that sick."

Dad: "She is right, son."

Mom: "When did you get here?"

Dad: "Just arrived now. I was taking J for his shot. Ma is with him in the car."

I just sat on the cold bench and put my head between my legs.

Bukho: "I just want this nightmare to be over. Why can't we be happy for once? We just got married. It's almost half a year now with these ins and outs of the hospital."

Dad: "Son; our journeys are not mapped the same. We have to accept what God has planned for us. You are the strongest. You are handling this very well. You are so far, please don't give up now. This is almost over you might let the devil mislead you and give up only to realise you were at the end already. Keep on the faith."

Somehow because my dad said those words they mattered the most and made a difference.

When they were done we got in. She was not staying at the hospital. With chemo some days she would stay a night because she would be weak.

Dad: "You look better than they led me to believe."

She smiled showing the most beautiful smile I fell in love with.

Lara: "Without hair."

Mom: "You will still look beautiful even if it didn't grow back."

Dad: "We will still love you the same."

We went for a group hug. She had to feel that no matter what she was not alone in what was happening.

Busi: "I am going back to work. Be strong because J needs a beautiful and strong mother."

Lara: "Thank you for the support."

Mom: "We do that for family."

We went to the car to see J. He was not sure of us first then it clicked. He jumped up and down when he saw his mom. After some time we left he was crying but there was nothing I could do. I was not going to be able to take care of him and the mother. Lara: "He had forgotten me. My son had forgotten me." That pained me.

Bukho: "Only a few weeks to go and we will be done, we will be family before you know it."

Lara: "I wish I could have him for a weekend."

Bukho: "We will have him because Hlengi and Zoe will be off; they said they will sleep over the whole weekend."

The smile that formed on her lips and face was priceless. I was happy that they were still close. Hlengi was the big sister she needed. She was the only family she was left with. At first, I thought they will bail on her but then they proved me wrong.

Lara: "Then we have to get their favourite."

Bukho: "All done." Lara: "You are the best husband."

Bukho: "I didn't want you running around the shops. You know what happened last time."

Lara: "I miss my old life. I miss shopping."

Bukho: "You will not miss it after some time because Beli is taking you and you will shop till you drop there."

She laughed.

Lara: "Can you imagine she wants me to come with Wani. You know that one always says I work hard to look good."

Bukho: "Worse she got a promotion; Bran says she buys

everything and anything.” Lara: “Those two are funny.”

Bukho: “I always laugh at them.”

The day came when we were to get the news. Finally, we were done with chemo and radiation. My wife didn't have a single ounce of hair left but she was looking better. Busi was right radiation was better than chemo. The outpatient was ours; the whole family had come with their dogs and chickens, just kidding but everyone was there.

The doctor came out and was freaked out with so many eyes. It was our family holiday and no matter the results we were going to have the holiday on that day going forward.

Doc: “I...

55

Lara (Bonolo)

We were all cramped in the doctor's office. I had told the doctor that the news was not a secret because they were going to find out. What better way to tell everyone at once as to avoid being questioned. I didn't want to be asked so many questions.

The other thing was their support overwhelmed me I was indebted to them. It was only fair for them to see the end results of their hard work whether good or bad. Almost everyone was there I couldn't even look them in the eye because I was in tears of joy and their support made me emotional.

Mr. Radebe: "Please doctor we can't breathe make it snappy."

He was even overwhelmed himself because he only saw a half of the clan in the hallway when asked to come in the rest came out from their hibernation chambers and joined. Not literally though.

Doctor: "I never knew you were all here. Okay, let me read the results."

Mrs. Radebe: "Please say it in plain English. We have too many doctors in this family so we are tired of Greek."

Busi: "Mom."

Bran: "No offence sis but she is right Nolo also needs to go and rest."

Thank God because when he explained the results to me I took almost a day to process and understand what he was saying.

Doc: "Okay in short we are finally cancer-free. So it means....."

The poor doctor couldn't even finish they all burst out at once some in tears of joy some shouting God's name. I think the hospital was on standstill at that moment because of the way they shouted. I was just a weeping mess.

Bukho: "Do not cry my baby we are free. I know you are still sceptic but we are free. We defeated the devil. God is great."

I just buried my face in his chest and cried some more. I was hoping that my mother should have had the same chance I had. I really missed her, especially the days I was in pain I missed her more.

Wani: "Now we can plan the....."

Beli: "Not the place and time my love."

They looked at each other. I was curious about what they were talking about. I loved their relationship. It was not like of sisters in law but blood sister. Busi acted like a mother hen towards all of them and I understood when I saw the age gap and that she was the firstborn.

Uncle Muzi: "So was it the clinical diagnosis or the initial stage one?"

There they were at it again speaking Greek.

Doctor: "It is the clinical one."

Uncle Muzi: “We thank God.”

Others looked lost but the doctor didn't give them a chance for questions at that stage.

Doctor: “We also found out that her blood was cleaned there is not even a trace of the virus.”

Okay, some were not aware of my status because my husband said it was not common knowledge I was supposed to tell whoever I want at the time I wanted to. Wait a minute did the doctor just say.....

Lara: “Wowowo.....what are you talking about?”

Everyone was looking from us, my husband and I as we were seated the other side with him holding my hand.

Some: “What?”

Doctor: We do not have any trace of the virus in your body.”

Bukho: “How is that possible?”

Doctor: “Okay in simple terms. When we do Chemotherapy we burn each and every cell in one's body. So that's why some days we kept her here secluded from the rest to avoid infections. So all the cells in the body will be burnt then the body starts from the top to manufacture those cells. In this case, the virus was burnt, then when they started to

manufacture new cells they were completely gone in the body.”

Bukho: “They must continue to burn in hell with their owner.”

My husband got angry at Mlulami when I told him that he deliberately infected me because he said no one deserved me except him.

Mrs. Radebe: “So if it’s possible to kill the virus completely why aren’t people doing chemo?”

Doctor: “Some people have a weak immune system that can’t take Chemo that’s why some patients die at that stage. The other reason being the fact that it is too expensive that’s why some cancer patients can’t even afford cancer treatment.”

He was right without my husband and his family I would have died. I was planning on working extra hard to pay him back his money even if it meant living the rest of my life paying him back.

Bran: “I still believe it can only be God.”

They all chanted an “Amen”. I wish I could believe as they did. I was going to rethink it but I was still a little bitter and sceptic.

Busi: “So the medication you put her on is for?”

I had even forgotten that I was still going to take medication until I fully recovered.

Doctor: "Her immune system needs to fully recover. For now, she needs her sweet time before even going to work."

Bukho: "Can she at least visit or travel to be specific."

Doctor: "As long as is to just relax. She also needs her medication by her side. I will also need the places she will travel to so that I will recommend a doctor who will do checkups if needed. "

Beli: "Now doctor I have one last question."

Oh; oh everyone was going to be asking questions.

Doc: "No problem you may ask ma'am."

Beli: "May we go and celebrate now?"

Everyone laughed; that was Belinda for you.

Doc: "Yes please you may get out of here so that I can work in peace. You were starting to crowd me."

We laughed as we went out. We were the last ones to leave my husband thanked him and wheeled me outside. I was in a wheelchair as I was still not physically well.

Bukho: "You hear that baby. We can now get rid of the protection."

I just laughed, of cause I was also thinking about it and I was even not sure whether to cry or laugh because the news I had just received was out of this world. I was thinking about spending time with my son. He was not with us and I was missing him.

Busi: “You will ride with us because Bran has kids in his car now.”

Bukho: “No problem. Who came with the kids; is it Uncle Muzi?”

Busi: “Yes the kids were with them and aunty Noma.”

She was also in a wheelchair like Bran but they were full of life as if they never had life problems. This family was something I wish I had when growing up but I was happy the universe chose for me.

Kian: “Let us go people the parents already left; we can’t keep them waiting.”

When I thought the whole clan was at the hospital I had lied to you. We didn’t go home he drove to my mother in law’s place. It was a big yard but that day it looked like the smallest yard ever. Some cars were even parked in the neighbours’ yard the next five yards from either side had cars parked in their yards.

Busi: “Do not be alarmed. We needed to celebrate this day regardless of the results.”

She said when the husband was parking in the yard. They had left space for us so that I wouldn't walk a long distance.

Kian: “My side of the family is here also so that's why the commotion.”

Bukho: “Believe me love we can fill the whole province without even including other families.”

I just felt tears running down my cheeks involuntarily. It was overwhelming. Kian's family was from KZN Mooi river so I was feeling like a queen and it was emotional.

Bukho: “Please do not cry Nolo.”

Lara: “I just feel overwhelmed right now.”

Busi: “Okay now wipe the tears before they think we were abusing you all the way from the hospital.”

I smiled and did as told. When he opened the door for me the air hit my head and I remembered that I was bold.

Bukho: “Here is the hat.”

Lara: “Thank you very much.”

He was so thoughtful. I was just standing there looking at my son who was worried again. He took time to register then he opened his arms. I just took him and kissed him all over as he giggled.

Mrs. Radebe: "Mommy is home to stay my boy."

J: "Nana."

We all laughed and I was led to the patio. It was a little warm there. There were introduced one at a time but my head was spinning because there were so many people. Busi's in-laws and her brothers in law with their families were there. It was like we needed a stadium for that celebration.

Bukho: "Are you okay my love?"

Beli: "Bukhosi, please leave this child alone. She is fine we will call you when she needs your attention."

Wani: "We are still gossiping about our husbands so how will we do it if you keep popping up. We were about to talk about you so excuse us."

Bukho: "Baby; you let them do this to your one and only husband?"

Beli: "She can still get married again do not be so sure and say only."

Lara: "Please do not give him a heart attack."

Bukho: "Tell them

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my love."

Mrs. Radebe: "Bukhosi, your kind is outside doing what their kind do."

We just laughed then he kissed me and went outside. I was getting tired but I was enjoying the get-together. It was the first and I felt at home. They fought yes but resolved their issues. Argued about how to raise their kids then agreed to disagree I was just happy that I met my husband because I felt at home with the whole clan.

Busi: "Nono your husband is still acting like the teenager I met in college."

Beli: "Ghost will never change, I tell you."

Ghost: "I will change if you find a husband who will make you settle down."

They just laughed and I was looking at him and Nono. They were all lovey-dovey. All those men there really loved their wives dearly. Parts of the family members were vegetarians but what brought them together was the love for God. I was

warming up to them always putting God in everything they were saying or doing.

Bukho: "We are going home now to rest."

It was late.

Beli: "Not before your present."

Bukho: "Yes, Zoe and Hlengi couldn't make it but for you to catch up we would like for you to go on a holiday with your sister and bond. It is time to recap."

This was too much and they didn't know how much I needed this.

Lara: "I do not know what to say."

Wani: "I know just say, "Thank you my husband you are the best" and then kiss him."

She was imitating my voice we just laughed. They had made pink T-shirts for everyone; even kids. They were written 'We survived cancer' with my picture on it. At the back, there was a verse Romans 8: 37.

They bid us farewell I was taking my son with me no matter what. After thanking them and saying our goodbyes we left.

Lara: "Thank you very much."

Bukho: “No need because I only contributed a little.”

Lara: “Even though the support is coming from you first then your family, makes it easy to do it as they follow your lead.”

Bukho: “I love you.”

Lara: “I love you more.”

When we got home there was a shout again. “surprise” I just covered my face because they had caught me off guard.

Zoe: “Welcome home.”

I looked around. There was sis Moo, Zoe, Hlengi, and Gail’s daughter.

Moo: “We wanted a small cosy welcome as your family.”

Gail’s daughter came to hug me.

Her: “Yes and mom sent her love too.”

I was a crying mess again. They truly were my family. I was content. What more could one person want?

56

Bukhosi

I didn't stop taking pictures because they were enjoying themselves. Gail's daughter was telling my wife what her mom was saying about my wife.

Moo: "Your mother will never change."

Lara: "I was scared of her a lot when I got there. I was not even sure if I was going to make it a day yet those months. She became a mother to me."

Her: "Then you were a pee machine there."

We all laughed. I was not part of the conversation I was just a cameraman because it was a ladies' night. She was tired but the conversations kept her going.

Hlengi: "Your mother should not beg for a relationship with you at my sister's expense."

Zoe: "I would have done the same. This story is too good to be shelved. We need to know about the juicy details you know."

Moo: "I am just glad your prince charming came to rescue you from a dungeon."

I was smiling like a retard.

Her: "I am glad she was arrested....."

Hlengi: "What?!!"

Bukho: "What?"

Her: "Let me finish. I was so angry at my mom thinking that she only cared for herself only. I was a teenager just angry at the world also giving my granny some problems. Not that I have stopped because as teenagers we live also."

She said the last part smiling. I just laughed because I also had my fair share of teenage drama.

Her: "I have a better relationship with her and she is cool; well cooler than when she was outside so I am good even if she doesn't get parole."

We laughed.

Moo: "Prison is not a walk in the park some go back there because they feel like they don't fit in with the society. Some will be psychologically damaged for life."

Lara: "Do not worry, I will be representing her when my law degree is done."

Zoe: "I forgot you are still a student but how were you copying then?"

Lara: "I wrote my assignments when I was okay so I am done I am left with exams I doubt I will finish in time but then I am happy that I still took a gamble and it is working magic for me."

Hlengi: "I am only glad that I can commit crime freely because there will be a family discount."

Moo: "I will make your life a living hell before your trial."

Hlengi: "Who said I will be in your prison."

Moo: "Who said I don't have connections with other prisons?"

She opened wide her eyes I just laughed.

Zoe: "I am not breaking any law because I do not want to be caught urinating on my pants."

I was not going to listen to those mocking my wife. I went to check on J. I was so happy I couldn't even say it in words because words couldn't put my feeling clearly. Words always missed the gist of the matter.

"What a day."

I turned and my wife was standing by the door.

Bukho: "Are they gone?"

Lara: "Yes they are, reluctantly through."

We both laughed she got closer and looked at J

Lara: "He is sleeping already. May I put him to his room?"

Bukho: "Not tonight. Tonight I want us to pray together and sleep together. I want my favourite people in one place. This is

a miracle I had been praying for and God granted it now I want to make every minute count. I am so sorry if I have ever made you doubt my love for you. I am sorry for the hurt I have caused you, more especially about the PRENUP issue. I am so sorry about J

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I.....”

Lara: “You may be sorry about everything but do not be sorry for J you asked for forgiveness for that and we are past that.”

Bukho: “Still I just think I never said it enough. I am sorry for everything; for the hurt, I will cause in future.”

She hit me with a pillow.

Lara: “You are planning on hurting me in the future.”

Bukho: “Not like that but who knows maybe I might meet a sexy w.....”

Lara: “You finish that sentence you die.”

She was then chasing me around the house.

Bukho: “Let me finish.”

Lara: “You have a death wish.”

Bukho: “Yes ma’am.”

She just laughed and flopped on the couch.

Bukho: "Before I was interrupted. I was saying, what if I fall in love with a bald someone who looks so sexy and beautifulier."

Lara: "You are crazy there is no word like beautifulier; it's more beautiful."

Bukho: "I am inventing that word because it is beyond more beautiful. So forgive me for falling in love with her because I think I love her more than I love my wife."

Lara: "You are silly."

Bukho: "Come here."

I side hugged her; then placed a kiss on her forehead. I loved her so much and I was glad I was given a second chance to right my wrongs.

Lara: "Thank you for being by my side always. Now I am tired let me go and bath and we will go to sleep."

Bukho: "I will make his bottle and come help you out. I placed your pyjamas on top of the bed."

Lara: "Thank you very much."

They were leaving on a weekend so she needed to rest before going out. I had a huge surprise for her. I would have loved for

her to travel to the neighbouring country but I wanted to make sure with the doctor first.

Bukho: "I will step outside for a while what should I bring for you two?"

Lara: "Just junk I want to watch TV in peace today with my family."

Bukho: "I am thinking of not going out too."

Lara: "Just go you will find us halfway."

I kissed them then left. The doctor only had five minutes for me as he was busy. He was already waiting for me. Luckily I was on time.

Doc: "So what can I do you for?"

Bukho: "You remind me of my history teacher he always said that. I am surprising my wife on a trip to Mozambique. Will she be safe?"

Doc: "Lucky is on your side I have a friend from a programme "doctors without borders" he just started last month. I am not sure where she is based. I know your wife will be comfortable with her she is a good woman."

Bukho: "God is indeed very good."

Doc: "I made sure her medication is covered so all will be well."

Bukho: "Thank you very much let me not keep you longer. I will wait for that contact."

Doc: "I will send it before the end of business today. Please remember to take the medication I wrote there. You can't find it in any pharmacy except in hospitals."

Bukho: "Okay I will."

I collected them and went home. My kids were watching TV, well point of correction the television was watching them. I made a simple meal and woke them up.

Lara: "You are back."

Bukho: "Yes I even cooked. I brought the rest of your medication."

Lara: "You are really a life saver; I was even procrastinating. I hate hospital queues. So what did you bring for us?"

Bukho: "See if you smiled like that for your husband the way you smiled for food the world would be a better place."

J even smiled.

Lara: "You are corrupting my son. Give me my food."

Bukho: "Yes ma'am."

Things were slowly getting closer to being normal. She was even reluctant to go because of J but I needed her to have a holiday.

Lara: "Please make sure he sleeps at 7 pm it will mess up his schedule if you don't or should I leave him with your mom?"

Bukho: "My love; relax I got this you just take care of yourself because J needs a sibling."

Lara: "Trust my husband to always have a corrupt mind."

Bukho: "Baby; come on my love. You are not supposed to talk like that about your husband. You were supposed to say yes sir."

We laughed as I drove out of the house. I was going to miss her but I was not going to be selfish we both wanted her back healthy again.

Lara: "I still can't believe you want me to go out of the country for the first time this ugly."

Bukho: "You are very beautiful my wife."

Lara: "What are your sisters doing here too?"

Bukho: "Maybe to send you off."

They removed their wigs and all of them were bald. Zoe was there too. My wife was just emotional watching them.

Busi: "Surprise!"

Lara: "What is going on?"

Beli: "Well boo you wanted us to let you go alone looking this hot. We wanted to be hot too. Who knows I heard Mozambique men are on fire."

Bukho: "Oh God please forgive me for I am about to be the only child at home because I am going to kill these sisters and if their husbands want revenge I will kill them too."

Bran: "Let me kill you first before you say Amen."

We all laughed. I was so emotional. That is why Belinda and Wani kept asking about the flights and hotels. I thought they wanted something else.

Zoe: "Well I accumulated my leave day for this."

Bukho: "You should have told me. I was not going to hire a doctor for her."

Busi: "Well you can still pay her because I am on a holiday so doctor genes are going to be left at home."

Kian: "I think I will have to apply for emergency leave."

I just laughed at how red he was turning. After all those years he still acted like a puppy

Hlengi: "Okay the flight will be called soon."

Wani: “My love where is Pudding; did you pack his passport?”

Lara: “A dog has a passport?”

My wife was whispering I just laughed. Wani had white tendencies no offence but it was as if when they got married they traded places with my brother.

Bukho: “I don’t wish to be Pudding.”

Bran: “Leave our last born alone.”

Emma: “We need to look for another mom while she is gone.”

Wani: “Why did you bring him? Your son has a death wish. Can you see he is the only child here?”

Emma: “I am not alone there is Pudding here.”

My wife and I just looked at each other and burst into laughter.

Busi: “Let us go before we lose some good looking me.....”

Kian: “You finish that sentence Busisiwe you will find that plane in the bottom of the ocean.”

I just laughed and kissed my wife goodbye. We watched them as they walked. Their bald heads made them look unique. I was missing them already but I was a happy soul. We were going to have a new start when she came back.....

Lara (Bonolo)

I was the luckiest person alive. I looked at the girls who I have grown to call sisters. They were all laughing and chatting as we took our seats. Tears didn't stop from flowing.

Wani: "Stop crying they will chase us then Pudding will be devastated she wants to find love too in Mozambique."

We just laughed. She was so dramatic I tell you.

Beli: "I don't trust Pudding she might snatch other people's boyfriends there."

Busi: "We will leave her; no home breakers here."

Hlengi: "Poor Pudding. Do you think she is lonely there with the luggage?"

Wani: "Leave my Pudding alone or I will go to her. I feel like I am going to meet the man of my dreams."

We all laughed.

Busi: "If you want Bran to die of a heart attack."

Beli: "I will kill you myself. I am one with Bran so you hurt him you hurt me."

Busi: "On the real guys you Beli and Zoe need men in your life. How about we go on a man-hunt for you; you can't die alone. Even the bible says a man cannot live by bread alone."

I just laughed because those looked like they had seen a ghost.

Zoe: "Well I am game, I feel left out because you are getting married soon Hlengi and I will be left alone in the flat without a friend to talk to."

Lara: "We are here."

Beli: "Yah right and you will be talking about my husband this; my son that."

Zoe: "Tell them, please. At least you have a child too let me have a hunk here and get a hunky baby."

Busi: "We are still in SA if you never realised."

We all laughed as the plane took off, it was as if the plane was ours. We were making a racket and I wished we were in our own space so we could make more noise.

Hlengi: "People are looking at us."

Woman: "At least it's not boring we are listening to your stories."

We laughed.

Man: "We didn't pay for this."

He was grumpy.

Woman: "Grumpy leave us alone."

We lowered our chat but all in all we enjoyed our flight. We were all bald and looking different but we had little care in the world. I had the best sisters-in-law ever. I was not alone at all.

Busi: "This is the life."

She said sitting on the couch in the foyer. We were waiting for the tour guide to take us to our dinner. We didn't want to eat in the same hotel. Do not ask me why but we were there to have fun not to be conformed to one place.

Hlengi: "Can we go to a saloon after the meal."

Zoe: "What?"

I think she was thinking that we didn't have hair and the word confused her.

Beli: "She means the 'saloon' with double oo, not the salon where the hair is done."

We laughed till everyone was on stand still looking at us.

Busi: "We don't drink some of us."

Hlengi: "I did my research here they serve all beverages in the saloons."

Lara: "I won't even think of drinking. It reminds me of the time I went on a drinking spree."

Wani: "It sent Bukhosi flying. Well, that man loves you and I would like to make you drunk again and see what will happen."

Beli: "Leave us alone we don't want to face his wrath."

Hlengi: "Here he is. He a specimen indeed. Mmmmmm."

Zoe: "Can Beli and I be on the forefront?"

We laughed as they pushed us backward.

Busi: "The brother is so fine."

Wani: "Kian will buy a gun"

Busi: "We are allowed to admire come on. Is it a sin?"

Wani: "It is a sinful sin."

We laughed as we watched Zoe and Beli flirting with him. He was enjoying the attention it was even funny to watch. A call came through. I had forgotten that my husband had roamed the phone.

Lara: "Baby."

Bukho: “Do not baby me. Have you found another husband when you can’t even call me that you have arrived?”

I just laughed.

Lara: “I am having fun and you are cramping my style.”

Bukho: “You don’t say.”

Lara: “How are you and my son?”

Bukho: “I think you will call when you want to hear about us. Now I called because I was waiting for your call thinking after opening my present you will call and scream.”

Lara: “Oh... I forgot. We are going to the saloon. So we might get back late.”

Bukho: “Are you going to drink again? Do I need to buy a gun?”

We both laughed. It was as if he was listening to the girls’ conversations earlier.

Lara: “I will call you guys tomorrow. I hope there is too much airtime.”

Bukho: “Don’t worry I loaded as much, you can call your boyfriends.”

Lara: “Aren’t you the coolest husband ever?”

We both laughed. We talked a little then I dropped when I saw the ladies motioning me to come.

Lara: "I love you two ugly ducklings."

Bukho: "We love you too mother of ugly ducklings."

Hlengi: "Please we left our belts to have fun come drop that call and switch it off."

He laughed

Bukho: "Run along my love."

I dropped the call and ran.

Lara: "Hlengi don't be a loser."

Busi: "Come Mr gorgeous is taking us to our dinner."

We laughed and he just smiled. I was happy we had friends and family who cared. I was going to make the most of it.

Zoe: "I am going to the bar to drink."

We laughed because the saloon was so sophisticated that the bar area was far. Hlengi was already there.

Beli: "Hell

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no what are those guys doing to Hlengi? Come we need to rescue her.”

We took our things and left.

Guy1: “Well, well, well, look at this; what do we have here?”

Beli: “Please don’t even think about it because we are packing.”

Guy2: “This is not South Africa we can get you arrested.”

Wani: “Who talked about packing weapons? We have hands God gave us for free.”

Guy2: “You think.....”

He didn’t finish his sentence we saw beer running down his face. When we were about to respond the other guy was baptised too then their quiet friends.

Guy3: “What the.....”

Beli: “Run!”

No one said it twice. We ran out of there as if we were in the world 100metre event.

Hlengi: “Are they coming.”

Beli: “You better run.”

Wani: “I didn’t go to the gym for nothing.”

Lara: “I am getting tired.”

Busi: "We got you, boo."

The next thing I was floating on the air and they were laughing. Before we knew it we were around the corner the alley was forgotten and the car stopped in front of us.

Zoe: "Where have you been, boo?"

She said getting in.

Beli: "Brother in law has a sense of being needed you are good."

Lara: "So we have decided who he belongs to?"

Man: "How are you, ladies. I would like to choose you but I heard your husband has a gun."

I blushed.

Busi: "He knows taekwondo too."

We laughed.

Man: "I will be good with my Zoe because you are all beautiful."

Lara: "We are already being territorial."

Wani: "I miss my Bran now."

Us: "Amen."

Wani: "Don't be haters miss your own."

Hlengi: "I will miss that when we have stayed longer."

Busi: "Me too. This week is about us only."

Lara: "Let us go to my room they gave me a present."

Beli: "I was about to ask about it."

Zoe: "Thank you my Vin Diesel. We will chat tomorrow."

He just melted and we laughed going to my room."

Busi: "So your boyfriend gave you a send-off gift while we got nothing. I think I will look for my own Vin Diesel too."

We laughed.

Beli: "Let me open."

Hlengi: "I am the older sister."

I just let them open it. I was thinking a nice lacy thing and just some other gift." Zoe: "What?"

Wani: "We are rich damn."

Busi: "No cursing." Wani: "Sorry mom."

Lara: "What is going on?" They showed me.

Lara: "This man."

Beli: "Klaas and your hubby know how to make your day."

Hlengi: "Can we exchange husbands and you get married to mine." Wani: "This is....."

Lara: "I can't believe....."

Tears just flew I was one lucky lady.

58

Bukhosi

I was missing my wife to the point of hallucination. Or was it that my phone was ringing not hallucination.

It was my wife.

Bukho: "Do you know what time it is?"

Beli: "Thank you hubby for the present. Can we use all the money?"

Hlengi: "Can I get an advance wedding present. It's simple you will pay for my wedding."

Busi: "You have really grown my love. This present is better than any present."

I didn't know who to reply to first. They sounded drunk, but my sisters were not drinkers at all or were they just happy.

Bukho: "Are you ladies drunk."

Wani: "Oh yea of little faith."

Lara: "Please leave us. Go to your rooms I want to speak to my husband."

Zoe: "Now you are chasing us. Don't be giving each other wet dreams."

I just laughed. They took longer to leave because some had already removed their shoes.

Lara: "Baby what am I going to do with you."

Bukho: "Do not make me blush."

Lara: "I am serious. Thank you for the present."

Bukho: "You can thank Klaas I didn't even know he had filed the lawsuit I only saw him coming with the cheque. It was hard for me to keep it away from you believe me."

Lara: "All this money and they didn't fuss."

Bukho: "Your documentary made waves so they didn't want to put more pressure on their office because already they were blamed for wrongfully arresting you."

Lara: "I want to hug you right now. Or let me give you a BJ."

I was even surprised but a good surprise.

Bukho: “Do not make me fly there tomorrow morning.”

Lara: “So you are not joking about the PRENUP.”

Bukho: “Yes I am serious. I wasn’t thinking straight.”

Lara: “Please, I do not want to sound rude but tell me what drove you to it from the first step.”

Bukho: “I heard you asking me so many questions about the money and the family business.”

Lara: “You didn’t feel the need to ask me why I was asking about that.”

Bukho: “Baby, I.....”

I didn’t have an answer for that. I knew it was wrong for me to assume.”

Lara: “My reason for asking backfired. I was asking because I didn’t want us to share those things when we were married. I knew it was going to sound silly but I felt like your kids were the ones who should benefit not me. I have seen my uncle lose everything because his wife became greedy when she saw too much money getting in. I didn’t want also people to think I married you for your money.

So even if you reverse the PRENUP how will it work because we already married out of the community of property?”

Bukho: "I hope this will make up to you but I am thinking of giving you 5% shares if that's any consolation."

Lara: "Your Company was big and it was making money so even 0.002% was going to yield some results. Then I am thinking

about the money I just received and my son I made a decision to not take it not because of spite but because I was thinking about my kids." She paused a little. "But we can give J and the brothers and sisters those shares my love because the quarter of what I received I will invest then the rest I want to give back to other victims or women who leave Jail and life had passed them by. Like Gail, she went back because she didn't fit in and she couldn't find a job. So I want to create an outreach program. I know it's little but little is much when the seed is planted well."

I was in tears.

Bukho: "I married well. Do you know that I love you too much?"

Lara: "Not as much as I love you."

Bukho: "You know that is not true right. If you love me will you please take the shares?"

Lara: "That my love is called blackmail."

Bukho: "Let us not argue then. I will help you set up your organisation and we will need Klaas for the legal part. You will need donors also and.....why am I talking business when it's time for your vacation. I love you. No, we love you and have fun. Are you not going to be lonely alone in that room?"

Lara: "Don't even comment."

We laughed and I dropped the call because J needed his meal. I was not ready to go back to an empty bed so we slept in the living room watching cartoons or they were watching us.

"I wonder what J will learn from these programmes."

Bukho: "Mom, come on. I am trying. Do you think I am a bad husband or a bad father?"

Mom: "I have seen bad people in my life and you are not even close to bad. Why are you asking?"

Bukho: "My wife refused when I gave her shares and she doesn't want my money she says I must give my son and the coming children."

Mom: "I love your wife because it shows that she didn't marry you for your money."

Bukho: "Mom

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please do not make me feel worse. I wish I had not been irrational and impulsive.”

Mom: “Do not be hard on yourself you are a good person. You did what you think was right and you were protecting your legacy because your sisters and brother have to benefit from the company too; although you went about it the wrong way. You will be fine and you married a strong young woman. She is

going to make you a strong husband; so do not doubt yourself. Now go and pick up your wife I am sure you missed each other.”

Bukho: “Thank you, mom. His changing clothes are in his other bag.”

Mom: “I know you told me a thousand times. Now go so that you will find us gone. Enjoy kids.”

Bukho: “Bye my boy. Daddy loves you and be good to granny.”

I kissed her and J then left. It was going to be the first night after operation and chemo. I had missed my wife.

Bukho: “Look at you glowing.”

Lara: “Does it show from my glow that I am a millionaire?”

Busi: “It surely shows my love.”

We laughed as we greeted and after some time we parted ways as each couple went to their cars.

Beli: "So Zoe and I are a couple."

Zoe: "Can I go back and bring my Vin Diesel?"

Beli: "Too late you said he is not into you."

Zoe: "I need a strong Zulu warrior."

We laughed.

Bukho: "Let us leave you couple alone."

They went to the cab laughing. I was happy my wife was back.

Lara: "How is my son?"

Bukho: "Why are you not asking about me though?"

Lara: "I know you are mighty fine and I will be ravishing you in a second."

You should have seen me putting my foot on a pedal at the far end. I was not going to waste any time.

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Bukho: "Baby; it has been four months and I have never seen pads in our grocery list what is going on?"

We were done with medication and life was back to normal. My wife had resigned and Mr. Nails was not happy but he was happy that she was doing something worthwhile.

Lara: "I am even scared to go to the doctor. What if they find cancer in my ovaries?"

Bukho: "You are so dramatic let me call your doctor for the appointment."

Lara: "Wait what...."

Bukho: "We need to curb it isn't it if it's back."

She was scared and I could tell. There was nothing we could do except to know what was going on.

Lara: "Okay."

Bukho: "Hay; hay... we are in this together"

She gave me a faint smile I just embraced her.

Doc: "Mr. and Mrs. Radebe you look good. What can I do you for?"

Bukho: "We have never seen our period for some months now."

He smiled from ear to ear.

Doc: "I love the 'we' part. Do not worry, as I explained before that when we do chemo we kill each and every cell so they are regenerating. Some take longer. To be sure please Mrs, go and pee on this cup."

Secretly I was hoping that we were pregnant. I remember the first night we didn't use protection for the first time in our marriage. Our son was not that young so we were going to manage. I was still in my own world when they shook me.

Doc: "You see I told you it was just that."

I was a little disappointed but I was hopeful.

Lara: "So what happens if they never regenerate?"

Doc: "Chances are slim only 1% can experience that."

Lara: "What if I am within the 1% mark?"

I was shaken by her question. What if.... no God was there for us.

Doc: "Let us not speculate. We will reach that bridge when we get there. Now go and rest and do not stress."

Bukho: "Thank you, doctor."

We left, she was down but there was nothing I couldn't do to make her forget. So I took a day off to spend it with her.

Lara: "Are you disappointed?"

Bukho: “Not really because we still have many years to get pregnant.”

Lara: “What if I....”

Bukho: “Do not go there. Okay on a lighter note. I bought tickets for the music expo. You know we will be singing as a family also with other groups.”

I know she was still not in the mood for church and to talk about God but I was hopeful.

Lara: “Is everyone going?”

Bukho: “Yes you know it will be in North West so we booked a bus because we are many.”

Lara: “That will be nice.”

Bukho: “So are you in?”

Lara: “Yes why not. I will never miss a road trip for the world.”

I just laughed.

Bukho: “Not a road trip. But who knows we might go to see places.”

Lara: “That’s my man.”

We forgot about all those things and life continued. The music expo was going to be the following month. We were more than ready. It was a competition but moreover fundraising so we were not only doing it to win but to help other children of God.

Lara: "Baby, I have something to tell you."

It was a day before the travelling and I was hoping she was not backing down.

Bukho: "Do not tell me you are not going?"

Lara: "What? No; never. I am prepared. But let me show you something."

She went to the bathroom and came back.

Bukho: "What is it?"

Lara: "You know what it is."

Bukho: "Are you sure it is what I think it is?"

Lara: "Positive."

Bukho: "Are you kidding me."

I scooped her and spun her around. I was the happiest man alive.....

Epilogue

Lara (Bonolo)

“How did you find out?”

I looked at him as his eyes were about to be cross.

Lara: “I have been testing since the day we came from the doctor. I felt like I was ready emotionally and I knew I was going to be a mom no matter what. I felt like my body was changing. So I bought these and tested daily.”

Bukho: “Such a process. I am not complaining at all I love your enthusiasm and determination.”

We both laughed as he hugged me tightly.

Lara: “We have to be sure maybe the doctor will say otherwise.”

Bukho: “Let me book for this afternoon.”

Lara: “I tried already he is fully booked. Will we be okay till the trip?”

Bukho: “No I won’t.”

I just laughed at him even though I didn’t want to.

Bukho: “Let me call my sister.”

Lara: “Oh, Busi, why didn’t I think of her?”

Bukho: "Let us go we will call her on the way."

Lara: "My son is sleeping."

Bukho: "I will ask Ma to take care of her. I know it is too much to ask for but....."

Lara: "Let me talk to her."

I left him looking for changing clothes.

Lara: "Ma; I know you are about to knock off but, may you please look after popi for a few minutes if possible we need to rush somewhere."

Ma: "I do not mind at all. I was waiting for my son he will be an hour late so this will work to your advantage."

Lara: "Thank you ma. I will ask my husband to take you home when we come back and he still gives excuses."

Ma: "He might be drinking already."

Lara: "He is young do not even hold this against him."

Ma: "What can I say he is your favourite?"

I laughed. He was just a sweet young man. It was part of growing up because people are not the same. We said our goodbyes and left.

Bukho: "You should learn how to drive. I don't think you will manage to hire a driver for more kids."

Lara: "Pregnant women are not supposed to drive."

Bukho: "Amen."

Lara: "I told you I have driverphobia."

He laughed hysterically.

Bukho: "You created this word my love because there is no such word. "

Lara: "I have a phobia of driving what do you call that?"

Bukho: "Okay my love it is called driverphobia."

I had never been so happy. I thought when my dad was alive I was happy but my family kept me happy. There was no dull moment at all. His family was so supportive. They were busy with what they were doing but if one needed them they turned up.

Bukho: "We are here my driverphobic wife."

Lara: "Not funny Mr. Cheese boy."

Bukho: "Am I still a cheese boy when I am going to be a father of two?"

Lara: "You will always be my Mr. Cheese boy."

Bukho: "You will always be my Miss Rude."

I smiled as he put his right hand over my shoulder hugging me from the side; he kissed my head.

Bukho: "When last did I tell you that I love you?"

Lara: "Right now."

Bukho: "Yes I love you very quickly."

Busi: "Okay love birds I have a job to do."

We laughed because she was coming from behind us.

Bukho: "You are slacking."

Busi: "I am coming from my lunch break and I am doing you a favour, remember. If you were not my brother I was going to look for a boyfriend for beautiful Bonolo here."

Lara: "I am good with my husband."

Bukho: "Thank you, baby."

Busi: "Traitor. Okay, what can I do for you?"

We were in her office then.

Bukho: "We need to confirm our suspicions."

Busi: "I am listening."

We were looking at each other smiling. Busi was lost she just stared at us.

Busi: "Wait a minute you are.....?"

Lara: "I tested twice they are positive but we were told that some things take time when I was not seeing my periods for months."

Busi: "Let us make sure. Well, I am crossing my fingers. I am sure your cell building just took longer but I think you might have conceived the moment they regenerated."

She drew the blood and then asked me to pee on a container.

The pregnancy test came back positive.

Busi: "Well there you have it. Your blood results will come back next week. Should I give you supplements?"

Us: "Yes please."

We both laughed

Busi: "You are both excited."

Us: "Very."

Busi: "Okay out of here."

Bukho: "We have only one request. May you please not tell anyone we want to tell them ourselves?"

Busi: "Done. Zip."

She was zipping her mouth smiling. We left going past the shop to buy dinner for ma. I knew her son was never coming so if she had something to eat she was going to be okay as my husband was going to drive her home.

Lara: "I am done packing."

Bukho: "Thank you

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love. Let us just cuddle I want family time with my kids."

Lara: "Okay I will be done with our meals when you come back from dropping off ma."

He left and we got ready for the movie night. We were going to travel in the afternoon the following day. The hotels were booked and I was thinking the owners of the hotels were counting their lucky stars. It was not only us but people from other provinces and also our bus was full with only our family.

"Please do not lose my bag."

Bran: "Wani baby no drama that's what we said."

Wani: "Okay my love, let's hope the twins and your son will keep me sane."

Lara: "Hello to you too Mr and Mrs."

Wani: "Oh come here. I was always the late one in the family with my little family. Thank God for you two now I am always early."

We laughed J was always making me late. When we were ready to leave he would do something or mess up something.

Lara: "I will take the first spot soon."

Bukho: "Busi has always been the first from growing up till now. No one can take her spot. Even mom has tried."

Lara: "Baby we will try right."

They laughed. We finished and the bus left. I was still faithless but the songs they sang on the bus warmed my heart. When it was 6 pm and we were still on the road they asked the driver to pull over and they sang beautifully and prayed. They were welcoming the Sabbath.

I felt like going back down the memory lane. I wished my family was.....no this was now my family and I had to embrace it. Even though they would go to church every Saturday they never forced me to go with them.

Bukho: "Finally we are here."

I had suddenly felt so nostalgic. I slept while they went to church the following day. In the evening we left for the University where the music expo was going to be held. I set on

top, at the back with the rest of the family. The guys had their group. The family sang as a group and the ladies in the family had their own group. I was so emotional. I was the only one who was just there. I wish I had remained behind with the kids but.....

The guys got on stage. They were all wearing suits with same colour ties. I fell in love with my husband again.

"I wake up in the morning

I get on my knees I did learn from the master

He taught me to pray

I read on from the scriptures the patience of Job

Keep on your faith and live with hope

Jesus is the redeemer and friend

The only comforter when you feel you are

alone He will be there when you cry out

Keep on your faith and live with hope"

I had opened my mouth and I was not blinking. The song hit home. I had doubted His power and I had been blinded by hurt.

I looked around me and all I saw was how lucky I was. I had a family I was going to be a mother. Hell, I had even survived cancer all because I was given a second chance.

I lost my mother but I had gained a mother in Gail, Moo, and my mother in law. I was even giving back to the community because I felt I was needed more than I thought I would be.

Yes, my life had been all about ups and downs but I had managed to stand tall. He was my redeemer and He lived.

Bukho: "Baby, are you crying?"

I had not realised that they had left the stage.

Lara: "I think I want to be baptised and join you in church."

Bukho: "WHAT!"

Someone: "Sssshhhhhh."

Bukho: "Family out now."

Okay, I didn't expect that. The family was big helllooo the bus was full what did you expect.

Mom: "What is going on?"

Uncle Muzi: "We are missing out."

Bukho: "We are going to have an additional member in our little family and Nolo wants to be baptised."

The rest was blurry because I was tossed from one chest to another. From there we joined hands and prayed.

I was taking a leap of faith. I was willing to embrace the new life. I was embracing The Gift of Life.

.....**The End**.....