



CHASING PAVEMENTS

PROLOGUE

TEN YEARS AGO

I never thought I'd wake up on a Monday after such an amazing weekend with my parents at the beach and find them dead in their bed. They were okay when we got home from Durban, they were perfectly fine when they kissed me goodnight and retired to their

bedroom. I do not remember one of them complaining about something that could possibly claim their lives, no headache, no chest pains not even simple hiccups.

I ran to their bedroom this morning because they were taking long to come down for breakfast and the clock was ticking. Daddy had to take me to school after dropping my mom off at the business center then make his way to work. That's how we do things every morning, or should I say did now that they are gone?

When I opened their door they were still in bed with my father's arm draped over my mom's body. I rolled my eyes and walked in to wake my mom first because her husband hates to be woken up from his sleep. I started panicking when she didn't open her eyes or even make a sound, I shook her roughly but I still didn't get a response. I went to my dad's side and did the same but nothing. They were so peaceful, like they were asleep but that wasn't the case.

I started looking around for clues, thinking that maybe robbers broke in and killed them but nothing. Everything in their room was in place, my father's wallet, cellphone and car keys were on the pedestal. When I checked my mother's side her watch and ring were there as well.

Our house is far from the others so I couldn't run to the neighbors to ask for help. I went back to my bedroom to get my cellphone and called for help then after went back to my parents bedroom to pray for a miracle.

"Oh my God!" I stop rocking myself back and forth and look to the entrance, it's my aunt. She looks at me then back on the bed, slowly

she makes her way to my parents. I get up from the cold tiled floor where I have been sitting with my knees brought up to my chest. She checks her sisters pulse then my fathers and I watch as tears fall from her eyes. My aunt pulls up the duvet to completely cover my parents.

"Oh mntana ka sis wami," she says, opening her arms.

"Bantu," I run to her and she folds me in a warm embrace.

"Oh nana, I am so sorry," she says, brushing my back in circles. Now I'm crying, I couldn't because a part of me was still hoping that I got it wrong. That maybe they took strong sleeping pills and they're still knocked out.

"Hush sweet angel, I am here now," I hold on tighter to her.

"T-they are gone Bantu, they left me all alone. What will happen to me now?" I say with a shaking voice.

"You will never be alone for as long as I live," she assures me.

"You are my sister's baby and I will never turn my back on you," Bantu and my mom have always been close, their bond was so special. I wish I had siblings to share something like that with, but atleast I have my cousins, the twins.

"Where are the important documents? I need to call the mortuary to come and take their bodies," I cry harder because them being taken away just cements on the fact that they are gone and I've just been orphaned overnight.

CHAPTER ONE WILL BE PRESENT DAY, LET'S NOT BE
CONFUSED WHEN IT COMES.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 01

PRESENT DAY

MAWANDE DUMA

"I am so proud of my children, this is a big achievement. They came back home after four years with exactly what they went to Durban for, their qualifications," aunt Nobantu says, with the widest smile on her face. My heart is bleeding because I will never know the joys of graduating and having people celebrate that achievement with me. The reason I never went to varsity is not because I didn't finish high school, I passed very well better than the twins. But their mother told me that she cannot afford to send three children to school at once, even though the money was mine.

"I thank you for coming to celebrate the twins with me, please do eat, drink and be merry," she says and the guests in the tent go crazy. This is probably the biggest graduation party they have ever witnessed in Mzumbe. My aunt went all out, she hired an events planner from Johannesburg. The DJ that's playing is from Durban and he was hired because the twins love him, and he definitely didn't come cheap. There's so much food and alcohol I don't see this party ending tonight.

The waitresses that came with the caterer are serving the mains, thank God they didn't prepare anything fancy. People here enjoy isijingi and amadumbe so the likes of prawns and calamaris were not going to fly here. I am just happy that I got the day off from the chores and running around to make sure that the twins are comfortable and have whatever they want. Yes, I was reduced to a

mere servant in my own parents house after aunt Nobantu promised to take care of me.

It has been so hard for me since my parents died, I have been reduced to nothing and abused in a way I never thought possible. At some point suicide seemed like the only way out but I never found the courage to take my own life.

I believe that things might still change for me, that I'll find the strength to fight my aunt and her children.

"Mawande, come help me this side sisi," My aunt whispers in my ear, bringing me back from my train of thoughts. I follow behind her and the strides she's taking tell me that she's mad but what did I do? I mean I have been keeping my mouth shut and only speaking when I'm spoken to, like she instructed this morning.

"Why the hell are you crying in front of my guests? Do you want to get the people of this village talking?" She sneers after we disappear into the privacy of the lounge. I touch my face and indeed there are tears, how could I have not felt myself cry?

"I uhm...I am so sorry aunty, I wasn't aware that I'm crying," I say, wiping my face with the back of my hand.

"Do not ruin my children's day Mawande. You will go out there with the biggest smile on your face and celebrate this day like your life depends on it siyezwana?" I swallow hard while nodding my head vigorously.

"Good, now go and wash your face then rejoin us,"

I splashed cold water on my face and that helped me calm down. I cannot afford to anger her at least not today. Her golden children are

the center of attention and if I dare take that away from them then there will be hell to pay. My punishment comes in different forms depending on what I did, but over the years I've learned to deal with everything she throws at me. One cannot go through something for almost a decade and not grow a thick skin. But I am only human and once in a while her attempts to break me work and I'm reminded more than ever that I'm all alone in this life. I am reminded that my parents died, well it was said that they committed suicide after they found poison in their system. I have never believed that because they wouldn't opt to die and leave me all alone. My parents didn't have a reason to kill themselves. Sometimes I think aunt Nobantu had something to do with their death, but I have no proof of that so I've never voiced it out to anyone.

"Mawande, you must be regretting your decision right now sisi," MaCele, an elderly woman from around our village says as I walk towards the tent.

"Excuse me ma?" I say with narrowed eyes.

"You must regret not listening to your aunt when she told you to go to school, now look at your cousins graduating while you're wasting your time in that shop," where did she take all of this?

"I don't understand why you would choose to stay in this village to run a supermarket over going to university to get education. Your parents must be so disappointed, Nobantu tried but she can't force anything on you," is this what my aunt is going around telling people? That I refused going to school? Why am I even shocked? Of course she will sell them stories to make herself look good and paint me like the ungrateful orphan.

"Just look at them," she says and my eyes move to the table where my cousins are sitting with their graduate friends, all dressed up in their academic regalia. I wanted this, I wanted to be something so I

could leave this hell hole but that opportunity was taken away from me like everything else.

"They are very nice," I say and walk away.

I don't need to hear anything else from her because she knows nothing about my life and what I'm going through in the hands of these people.

I am laying on my bed starring at the ceiling, I have been up for a while now and waiting for my alarm to go off. I don't know why I have it set because I'm always up before it anyway, at 3:30 in the morning my eyes open. It has been this way for about nine years now, no matter how tired or sick I am I'll always wake up at that time. Finally my alarm goes off and I get out of bed and immediately lay it neatly. I draw the curtains and it's pitch black outside, 4am in the morning type of pitch black.

I take my toiletries and make my way to the bathroom, I have to bathe first before going to the kitchen to make breakfast for my aunt and the twins. At 5:30 I have to be on my way to the business center to open the shop at 6. That's my everyday routine, Monday to Sunday, atleast this past weekend I got a break because we were celebrating the twins' graduation.

I pack my breakfast and take the keys to the shop from the drawer before heading out, I always leave while they are all sleeping. When they wake up they eat their breakfast and drop the plates in the sink,

I'll come back from a long day at work and clean the kitchen before starting with dinner. Yes, you can call me Cinderella.

"I was beginning to get worried," Sgora says as I walk out of the gate.

"I'm sorry," I say and he takes my bag.

He is such a sweet guy, atleast to me. Everyone around here is afraid of him, he's not called Sgora -muscle man- for nothing.

He works at the business center as our security guard, we have had a lot of break ins over the years. It wasn't hard convincing my aunt to hire someone because she loves money and losing it was making her go crazy.

Sgora realized that I walk to work on my own every morning and he was horrified because it's not safe. He offered to come and get me every morning so we can walk together, atleast he doesn't detour. He lives further down from my homestead and passes here when going to the business center.

"How did you sleep?" I ask.

"Very well ntokazi, wena?"

"I slept well too, thanks for asking," I say and he starts a conversation about the weather as we make our way to work.

This business center was started by my parents, mom ran it while dad went to work in Port Shepstone where I also attended school. The distance from our village to Port Shepstone is not too much, just 40 minutes tops.

Baba and I only came to help during the weekend when we weren't at work and school. We have a super market and a tavern, I run the supermarket and the guy aunt Nobantu hired takes care of the tavern

that's behind the shop. My parents had the center designed this way so that kids and drunk people don't mix.

When I started working here after matric my aunt added two more rooms, she opened a salon and a hardware. Business has been going really well, affording my aunt and her twins a comfortable life. I've prayed to God asking him to show up for me, to destroy everything that was started by my parents because their blood sweat and tears are now benefiting others and not me their only child. My aunt took over everything, their house, cars, businesses and the money they saved. Leaving me at her mercy, one year after I buried my parents everything changed. Aunt Nobantu started treating me like a burden, like I was inconveniencing her and her children.

Things have been a little slow today, I've found myself dozing off behind this counter a few times. Maybe I should go sit outside with the salon ladies, they seem to be having a bad day too business wise. I love hanging around them because they have hilarious stories to tell, especially on a Monday after a hectic weekend. I get up from my chair at the same time Qophelo walks in with a girl, his arm is around her waist and he's whispering in her ear. The poor girl is giggling and blushing, I feel sorry for her because she doesn't know my cousin. She's just another one of his village lays, I'm pretty sure he doesn't even know her name.

"Take anything you need for now baby girl and I promise this weekend I'll take you to Durban and you'll shop for everything at Gateway," Qophelo says to the poor girl and I want to laugh because that's not going to happen.

"Are you serious?" Her excitement is everything but unfortunately for her my cousin is just selling her dreams.

"I am a man of my word baby girl. Be quick and take everything you need so we can leave," he says and the girl grabs the basket and hurries further in the store.

"Ahh mzala wami, Mawande. I see that you're still holding this place down," he says, looking around the shop.

"Yep," I answer bored.

"Breakfast this morning was good but can you please just use less oil, cholesterol," ungrateful son of a b... He doesn't even know how to fry an egg and he's telling me about oil, nxa.

I sit back down, waiting for his fling to finish taking whatever she wants so Qophelo can pay and they leave this shop.

The girl comes back with the basket full of things, the smile she has on her face makes me pity her even more. She's going to sleep with this arrogant guy because of these things?

"Mawande please give us plastic bags," Qophelo says and I raise an eyebrow.

"I have to count the total first,"

He rolls his eyes, "sisi this is my mothers shop, I can take whatever I want," not on my watch.

"When the money comes short your mother will be looking at me so pay up," I'm not budging. Aunt Nobantu will accuse me of being a thief and Qophelo won't bother telling her that he's the one who came here with his girlfriend to take things. I won't be punished for his shit, I refuse.

"I will call my mom and tell her that you're making my life difficult here," he threatens and I shrug my shoulders.

"I would rather you do that and let her be the one to give me permission to give you everything for free," he clicks his tongue.

"Q is everything okay?" The girl asks, standing behind the angry brat.

"Nothing I can't handle," he says briskly, looking like he's ready to pounce on me.

"Mawande, I said give us plastic bags,"

Haibo! Didn't he hear me?

"And I told you that I need to count the total so you can pay," he chuckles angrily.

"You're testing me," he can puff out that chest all he wants, I can take his anger over his mothers.

"Is everything okay here ntokazi?" we both look to the door and it's Sgora, he's right on time.

"No, Qophelo doesn't want to pay," I say and he looks at my cousin with widened eyes.

"Are we going to have a problem bafo?" He asks and Qophelo shakes his head.

"Nah dude," he takes out his wallet from the back pocket of his jeans and takes out a few hundred rand notes.

"You can keep the change," he throws the money at me and I gasp in shock.

To everyone who has kids, please be careful on who you decide to take care of your children should you pass before they're old enough to take care of themselves. Don't assume that your child is in good hands because the person is your family member, people are cruel out here.

This storyline is important to me because I saw something similar unfold right before my eyes.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 02

MAWANDE DUMA

I'm scared of going home because I fear that Qophelo told his mother what happened at the supermarket. He was wrong but he can spin things just to get me in trouble and their mom won't even try to hear my side of the story. In her eyes the twins cannot do anything wrong, they are her sweet angels but in actual fact the apples didn't fall far from the tree.

I lock up and take every penny we made today, before Sgora started working here aunt Nobantu always came to take the money thirty minutes before I closed shop. She didn't want to risk me being mugged on my way home, but now that this big scary man works here she trusts me to come home with the money.

"I will see you in the morning ntokazi," Sgora says as we stop outside my homestead.

"Yes, I'll see you tomorrow. And thank you for helping me with Qophelo earlier on," I say.

He huffs, "don't mention it," he hands me my bag and bids me goodbye before continuing his way home.

I walk inside the yard and my aunt's Ford Ranger is in the driveway. I pray to God that I'm not about to face her wrath. She always finds faults in everything I do but it's worse when the twins are around. Things around here were better when they were still in Durban but

they've graduated now and all I can pray for is for them to find employment far from here.

I open the kitchen door and find my aunt sitting on the high chair looking at the laptop placed on the kitchen island. She looks at me under the eyeglasses then back at her laptop, I can't tell if I'm in trouble or not.

"Sawubona aunt Nobantu," I greet her and she nods, holding her hand out.

"Yebo Mawande, where is the money?" She asks and I quickly open my bag and take out the money. She looks inside the blue zipper money bag and frowns.

"Is this all of it?" She asks with a snapped eyebrow and I nod my head vigorously.

"Yes, business was very slow today," she's shaking her head.

Imagine how pissed off she would've been if I allowed Qophelo to walk out of the store without paying for his girlfriends things.

I watch her count the money and when she's done she puts it back in the bag and shoos me off with her well manicured fingers. I go to my room to put away my bag and change into leggings and a T-shirt before heading back to the kitchen to start with the pots. I wonder what's on the menu tonight, yes the twins are the ones who choose what we have for dinner every night. When it's just me and their mother I cook whatever and she eats with no complaints, but her brats are pretty particular and of course what they want is what they get.

"Aunty where is Qophelo and Ndondo? I want to start with dinner," I ask.

"Oh, they both didn't say what they'd like so just make chicken, rice and two salads," she says and I sigh in relief. Those are quick to make, I'll be done and relaxing in no time. I open the freezer and take out a tray of chicken thighs and drumsticks, I defrost them and while it's in the microwave I pour rice in the pot and put it on the stove.

The rice and chicken are both boiling on the stove and now I'm cutting cucumber, I'm making Greek salad because it's aunt Nobantu's favorite ever.

"Aunty," I say in a shaking voice.

I've been meaning to have this conversation with her ever since the twins finished with their qualifications.

"What is it Mawande?" She asks without even looking at me.

"When I finished matric you said you cannot send me to university because it would be a lot financially. So now that the twins are done with their education I was hoping that we could revisit the conversation of me going to school," I say and that earns me her undivided attention.

She clears her throat, "Mawande, did you see the amount of money you came back with?" She asks and I frown wondering what that has to do with what we're discussing right now.

"Yes,"

"You are the one running that supermarket and it has been performing poorly in front of your eyes. Where do you expect me to find the money to take you to school?" She asks, taking off her glasses.

What does she mean performing poorly? That supermarket makes her more money after the tavern, we only experience two or three bad days in a month.

"Aunty I thought..." She quickly cuts me.

"There's no money Mawande. Once that changes we will have this discussion again," she says firmly and I know that's the end of this conversation.

The kitchen door bursts open and a crying Ndondo walks in, she's a mess. Her mother quickly gets on her feet and rushes to her princess, aunt Nobantu envelopes her in her arms with worry written all over her face. She's busy asking what is wrong but Ndondo isn't answering her mother but rather continues to cry painfully. Whoever hurt Ndondo will come to regret it soon because Nobantu doesn't joke with her golden children.

"Mawande, make her some sugar water and bring it to the lounge," she says, leading her daughter out of the kitchen. I drop the knife and quickly open the cupboard to take a cup and make her sugar water to calm her down.

Aunt Nobantu is brushing her back in circles as I walk in the lounge, I hand her the cup and she gently moves Ndondo to sit straight so she can be able to drink from the cup. Her mother wipes off her tears with the back of her hand, ruining her make up further.

"You can go back to the kitchen," my aunt dismisses me, she doesn't want me to hear why her precious princess is crying like she just lost her beauty. I am saying beauty because that's the first thing my cousin cares about then money and social media.

I find Qophelo in the kitchen opening my pots to see what I'm cooking, this is what I have to deal with.

"Chicken really? Can't you be creative with your meals? Damn I miss Durban and my many many kitchen whores," he says and I roll my eyes. This boy doesn't have an ounce of respect for woman.

"Your mother is the one who wanted chicken and rice. You can go tell her how she lacks creativity, she's in the lounge," I say and he clicks his tongue.

"I hope today's incident will stay between us," he says, referring to what happened at the supermarket earlier on.

"You paid for your items Qophelo, I don't need to go around telling," I say, going to the fridge to take out feta cheese for the salad.

"You now have an attitude I see, it's time I dealt with you," he says and I don't respond to that.

NOBANTU DLADLA

"MaDladla," Sqalo answers lovingly and I blush.

"Hao baba, you know what you do to me when you call me like that," I say, settling on the edge of my bed. The past 9 years with Sqalo have been amazing, no man has ever made me feel so alive like he does. He has this unrelenting power and dominance that draws me to him, he is mature beyond his years. Ever since we started our relationship I have never been reminded of the fact that he's younger than me. He carries himself well as a man, a manly man.

"I know sthandwa sami, are you well though?" He asks.

"Of course not baba, I miss you," I say and he chuckles.

"Sorry baby, it's just that work and the wife are on my neck," I roll my eyes.

His wife is very clingy, sometimes I get tempted to call her and make my presence known. She can't be selfish with our man.

"Tell her that I also need you,"

He scoffs, "that's a little tricky," I know my place in his life and I'm happy with how things are.

"Anyway, I called because of Mawande," that girl is just stressing me out.

"What about her?" He asks.

"She wants to go to university now that the twins have graduated," I say and he whistles.

"Babe you know that cannot happen," Sqalo was Phila and Nandi's lawyer, Mawande's parents. He reached out shortly after their death and told me that I am her legal guardian and caretaker of all her inheritance. My sister and her husband left strict orders, we were to give Mawande everything that belongs to her after graduation. If she didn't get an education then she would have to be married with a child. Of course I will not allow any of that to happen because I'd be taking food out of my and my children's mouths. I have come to enjoy living a life of no worries and no one will take that away from me.

"What do you suggest I do?" I ask.

"I'll think about it and tell you when you come and visit me in Durban," he says.

Sqalo is smart and I know he will come up with a plan to get Mawande off our backs.

He benefits from everything, especially the lodges in Shelly beach and Margate.

The monthly allowance that's suppose to go to Mawande clicks into my account, of course she doesn't know anything. It would make her more adamant to go to school or even marry.

"Okay then," he promises to call me later and we say our goodbyes.

I have a lot to do today, I'm making random visits to all my businesses. From the business center here in Mzumbe to the lodges. I will check on my investments in Durban when I go meet up with Sqalo sometime this week. It's important to just show up randomly so they can always be on their toes, they need to know that they cannot slack because I'd pitch up and catch them at any time. I'm quick to fire incompetent fools because a lot of people are desperate for work.

I get up from my bed and check if I have everything I need in the handbag. I have to check on my daughter before I leave for the day, Ndondo was hysterical yesterday. I tried to find out what happened but she wouldn't say, I wanted her to tell me who hurt her so that I can deal with the person. No one makes any of my children cry like that and go scot free, I had the hardest pregnancy and I went through hell trying to raise them so I'll never sit back and watch them get hurt.

"Ndondo, my princess," I say, knocking on her bedroom door. She doesn't give me permission to come in and if it was any other day I'd let her be. I turn the door knob and walk in, my baby is still under the covers and I can hear her sobbing.

"Baby please talk to mommy, tell me how to make things okay for you," I say, settling down next to her. She doesn't say anything but cries harder.

"You know it breaks my heart to see you this way, please talk to me Ndondo," my heart is breaking, the twins are my whole life. I would burn down the enemy with me in the same house for as long as my childrens safety is guaranteed.

It looks like I have to cancel my whole day and stay home with my daughter, we aren't going to bed tonight until she tells me what's wrong. I get up and remove my shoes and blazer then round the bed to get in besides her.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 03

MAWANDE DUMA

How long am I expected to stay in this village and be a slave to my aunt and her twins? These people are living their best life with my parents' resources while I suffer. When I turned 21 I tried to find the lawyer who handled mommy and daddy's affairs, his office is in Durban and I couldn't go there because aunt Nobantu expected me to be at the shop all day everyday. I got his office number and managed to talk to him over the phone, he told me that my parents had a lot of debt and they were drowning hence they committed suicide. The only thing that they left behind was the business center and the lodges which are still operating to pay the debt. It was a hard pill to swallow because my parents were happy and succeeding in business so it didn't make any sense. The lawyer then said they will communicate with me once all debt has been paid and I can get everything back because I'm their only child, but I haven't heard from him or his associates.

To this day I don't believe that my parents killed themselves or that they were drowning in debt, but I cannot do anything about it because I don't have proof. I don't even have anyone on my side to help me get to the bottom of everything. What I have, however, is myself and the determination to make it out of this village and my aunts claws. It's obvious that she won't take me to school so I have to make a plan and escape this nightmare I have been living for almost a decade.

Sgora walks in whistling a melody I cannot make out, he goes to the fridge and comes back with a bottle of amahewu. He has this everyday for lunch, I don't know how he does it. I only have that when I have tonsillitis and it's hard to swallow solids. He comes to the till and places a R50 note then asks for R10 airtime and a box of clorets. He's obviously obsessed with porridge and chewing gum.

"Sgora," I say, handing him his change.

"Ntokazi," He fixes his cap with narrowed eyes. He's always dressed in a vest, Nike tracksuit, black suede grasshopper and a Nike cap. He has every item in different colors.

"Can I please use your phone, I want to access the internet. I will load airtime for you," I say and he narrows his eyes.

"Unfortunately I use this small phone, I thought you have these smartphones that drive our youth crazy," he says and my shoulders sag in disappointment. I also use a small phone and I'm only allowed to have it for their convenience. If she paid me for working here then I'd be able to buy myself an affordable smartphone.

"What do you need on the internet?" He asks.

"I wanted to check when the universities open for new applications and find out more about NSFAS and other bursaries," I say and he smiles.

"You want to go back to school?" He asks and I nod with a faint smile.

"That's great Mawande, you're too good for this village. You should be out there living life," he is genuinely excited for me.

"Thank you Sgora," the smile on his face disappears after a quick thought.

"Wait, why don't you ask your aunt to pay for your school fees? I mean all of this belonged to your late parents," I heave a deep sigh.

"Aunt Nobantu will never allow me to go to school," he's shaking his head.

"She doesn't treat you well ne?" He asks concerned and I nod with tears welling up in my eyes.

"She promised to take care of me but a year after my parents died she turned me into their slave," He reaches for my hand and clasps it.

"I'm sorry Mawande, I know exactly how you're feeling," he says softly.

"Don't give up yezwa? Fight until you make it out, you can do it Wande," he gives me words of encouragement. This is the first time we are having an emotional conversation, we normally talk about general things.

"Thank you Sgora," this is the first time I'm talking about my situation with another person. I don't have any friends, the last time I had a social life was when I was in grade 12. I'm sure all of them are successful in their own rights, that group of girls was very ambitious myself included. It's unfortunate that my life took a turn for the worst.

I get home after a long day at work, I had to clean the fridges and dust the shelves at the supermarket after lunch. Aunt Nobantu made her surprise visit today and told me that the store is dirty so I had to take care of her complains. I am the cashier, packer, cleaner, manager and everything else that I need to be at the shop and I don't get paid for my services. She allows me to take toiletries here and make my hair once a month. I get hand me downs from Ndondo, I only get new clothes once in a blue moon. Atleast Ndondo has style and she doesn't wear her clothes until they are over washed.

There's a car I cannot recognize in the driveway, it has Durban number plates. The person is not here for my aunt because her Ford Ranger is not yet back, she was driving it when she came to the supermarket. I'm sure one of the twins has a visitor.

A sink full of plates greet me as I walk inside the house, some days I just want to pack them all in a refuse bag and throw them out. What's so hard with washing your own plate after eating?

"Thank God you're back," Qophelo says, walking in the kitchen with some guy I don't recognize.

"What can I do for you?" I ask.

He's opening the fridge, taking out two bottles of beer, "Lwazi just arrived from Durban and he will be sleeping over. Prepare something nice for him, not chicken and rice Mawande," he says and the friend laughs.

"Your mother told me not to cook, she'll bring food because she's in Margate," I say.

"In that case please wash my jeans, you'll find them on top of the washing machine in the bathroom," he says and I want to cuss him out.

"Qophelo you know I only do the laundry on Saturday when I get back from the supermarket," I'm not changing my routine for him.

"That won't work because Lwazi and I are leaving for Port Shepstone tomorrow afternoon," I take a deep breath.

I'm too tired to do his laundry now, I mean I still need to wash the dishes and clean this kitchen before aunt Nobantu gets home.

"You have plenty of jeans, I'm sure you can find something else," I say and he looks at his friend in disbelief.

"Mawande, you don't know your place in this house anymore. This is the third time you're not listening to my orders and giving me attitude. It seems like you have forgotten who my mom is," he says, taking out his cellphone from the pocket of his sweat pants.

"I'll wash them, please don't call your mom please," I beg but he dials anyway.

Oh Mawande! Why didn't you just do as told, now Nobantu will be on your case.

I reprimand myself.

"Mama, I think someone has started growing wings around this house," he says and I close my eyes.

NDONDOLOZA DLADLA

My heart is broken, I have never felt so much pain in my life. I gave that man 5 years of my life, I met him when I was only 20 years of age and I thought we had a good thing going on. How could he hurt me this way? How could he give someone else what he promised me?

I haven't been out of my room in a few days, the only time I'm not in bed crying my eyes out is when I'm in the bathroom. My mother brings me my food and drinking water, she has been trying to find out what's going on but I just can't tell her. My moms love for Qophelo and I is too much, she never wants to see us hurting. If I tell her what happened she will definitely go after him and that's the last thing I want, as much as he hurt me, I love him more than anything.

I am on Instagram stalking the woman he decided to marry the same day of my graduation party. He told me he couldn't come to my celebration because he had to be in East London for something very serious, I believed him because he's a politician and he's always on the move. But he went to East London to marry this girl, a girl he only met a year ago, atleast that's what the caption of their wedding pictures say. I was supposed to be his wife, I mean we have been through so much together. I miscarried our baby earlier this year and I honestly haven't healed from that, now I have to deal with this betrayal.

We last spoke the morning of my graduation party, he was telling me to check my bank account because he sent me a gift. He told me to have fun and that he will call me later as he's about to go into a very important meeting, little did I know he was getting married. I only found out on Monday, I was driving back home from Shelly beach. A friend of mine called and told me to check my WhatsApp immediately because she sent me something important. I honestly don't know how I made it home safe, I was besides myself. I've been trying to call him but his phone has been on voicemail since.

My iPhone vibrates violently in my hand, bringing me back from my train of painful thoughts, I look at the screen and my pulse leaps. He's calling me, oh thank God. I sit up straight and quickly answer.

"Dedani," I answer with a shaking voice.

"Hey babe, Unjani?" his response takes me aback. How can he be so calm like everything is alright between us.

"I'm not okay, I don't think I'll ever be okay," I say, allowing my tears to fall.

"Haibo! What's wrong?" Is he kidding me right now? Or does he think I don't know that he went to get married behind my back?

"How can you even ask me that? You got married while in a relationship with me," I half shout and I hear him heave a sigh.

"Is that the reason why you're not okay?" I gasp in shock. Is that not reason enough?

"You're not being serious,"

"No Ndondo, you're the one who is not being serious here. How does me getting married affect you?" What the hell is wrong with this man?

"You were my boyfriend of 5 years and you went to get married to a woman who isn't me! That affects me, I'm hurt," he scoffs

"Were? I'm not your boyfriend anymore?" He asks.

"Dedani you are married! How do you expect me to continue with you? I'm no side chick," I love him but I will not allow myself to be used by him.

"MaDladla have I ever called you a side chick?" He asks. What a stupid question.

He doesn't have to say it, he married someone else and if I continue with him I automatically become one.

"Dedani you are married to another woman,"

"You're telling me something I know, I was there so I'm aware that I married Nomahlubi. My question is have I ever called you a side chick?" He's making me numb, why does he think this is okay?

"No you have never," I answer meekly.

"So stop referring to yourself as a side chick, you're my girlfriend,"

"Does your wife know about me?" I need to know.

He chortles, "Is that a rhetorical question?"

I swallow hard. "Listen babe, you still have me. I married Nomahlubi because she makes perfect sense, she's the type of woman a powerful man like myself needs by his side. My career and family look better with her in the picture," he just took the little that was left of me and broke it even further. I don't even know how to respond to that.

"Pack a weekender and come to my place in La Lucia," he says.

"Where's your wife Dedani?" I ask with an attitude.

"Why are you concerned about my wife? Or do you want to marry her as well?" My blood is boiling, he's disrespecting me, "If you must know, Nomahlubi use makhaya, she's performing her duties as umakoti wakwa Mkhize. I was with her the whole week and now I'm back in the city, I want to spend time with my girlfriend," It must be nice being him.

"Dedani I can't..."

He quickly interjects, "Ndondo you have always been an obedient girlfriend, don't allow some woman who got married to your man change that. I'm waiting for you," with that said the line goes dead. I take a deep breath and get up from my bed to go and pack. I'm only going to his house to talk, I need clarity and closure.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 04

MAWANDE DUMA

I have been on edge this entire weekend, I thought I'd be black and blue by now. Or maybe sleep deprived for disrespecting Qophelo by refusing to take his orders. He called his mother on Friday to tell her that I've grown wings, but my aunt hasn't said anything to me or gave me an attitude. Silent Nobantu is more dangerous than the loud Chihuahua she normally is, I cannot help but think that she's going to do something evil to me.

It's almost knockoff time and I'm dreading to go back to that house, if I could just turn back the hours a little. Hell I wish I had relatives I could run to but aunt Nobantu alienated us from everyone, she wanted to do everything without being questioned or frowned upon. I don't want to touch on the subject of my parents' friends, I used to visit them a lot because they forced their way in, they weren't scared of Nobantu. But one day when I was 16 it all stopped, they didn't call or come around anymore. I know for a fact that my aunt had something to do with it, she was probably scared that I will tell them everything and they will help me out.

"I hope and pray that this atleast lifts your mood," I snap out of it and look up to find a smiling Sgora, this is a rear expression on his face.

"Why are you so happy? Did your weekend off do you good?" I ask and he nods vigorously.

"Yes, I managed to push my other job. I even went to Port Shepstone this morning," I didn't know he had another job.

What does he do?

"Did you atleast bring me a chocolate and KFC?" He chuckles, placing a plastic on the counter.

"What is this?" I ask with a raised eyebrow. The excitement on his face is contagious.

"Open it!" he says hurriedly.

I grab the plastic and look inside, I gasp for air and look at him, "you bought this for me?" I ask shocked.

"You need it Mawande, I want you to use it for your research," he says and I close my eyes, allowing my tears to fall. No one has ever done something so sweet for me. I take out the box and open it, the phone has already been set-up. It's a beautiful green Huawei Nova Y60.

"Sgora thank you so much, I don't even know how I will show you my appreciation. You have been a big brother to me for years now," I say and his smile widens.

"I am glad you like it Mawande. Show me your appreciation by making it out of this village and being everything you ever dreamt of," I hold out my hand and he takes it.

"God will bless you, thank you so much," I wipe my tears with the back of my hand.

"It's a pleasure. I have to go now, I still need to handle a few things," he says and I nod my understanding.

It was his weekend off and he used it to go to town to buy me a phone. Wait! How can he afford this? I know my aunt doesn't pay him much, this phone probably costs his entire salary.

"Sgora, you are not going to go hungry because of this right?" He laughs out loud.

"Mawande, enjoy your phone sisi," he says and walks away.

He bumps into a beautiful lady walking in and she gives him a dirty look before clicking her tongue. Sgora just rolls his eyes and walks out, thank God he doesn't get violent with women. Behind the lady walks in maMokwena, one of my biggest customers. She has children who support her very well, she can afford to go to town to do her groceries but she would rather come here. Everytime she's around I have to give her an extra chair and a can of coke then she will chat away.

"Wande ntombi," she says with a beautiful smile plastered across her face. Even after all these years in the land of the Zulus her Sesotho accent is still there and strong. She is originally from Lesotho but was married to a Zulu man, the late bab'Ngidi.

"I just got back from Durban with Nhlelozenkosi but I had to come and buy something to support you," she says and I am shocked. That cannot be Nhlelo, she looks nothing like the girl I know. We went to the same school in Port Shepstone but she finished her matric two years before me. She looks like she just stepped out of a page of Vogue magazine.

"Hi Nhlelo, you look so different, grown and beautiful," I say and she offers me a smile, one that is identical to her mothers.

"Mawande, thank you babe. How have you been?" She asks and I shrug my shoulders.

"How I've always been hey," it hurts to see my mates progressing while I'm stuck in this hell hole.

Mother and daughter don't know how to respond to that, I can't blame them though. They have no idea of what's happening in my life, the villagers all believe that I refused going to school because that's what Nobantu told them.

"Nhlelo is around because next weekend her brother will be home, we are planning a big ceremony for him. My only son hasn't been home in five years, I want everyone to come and welcome him with me. Please come Mawande," maMokwena says and I would love to be there but Nobantu will never agree to give me a day off.

"I will be working mama," she shakes her head.

"No one will be buying because they'll all be at my house. I'll talk to Nobantu to close shop," she says and I just nod.

"Okay ma,"

"Nhlelo bring me two liters of coke from the fridge," she orders her daughter who laughs, they probably bought many many liters of coke in Durban already.

I get home and find the shock of my life, my aunt is standing over the stove cooking. Do we have visitors? This never happens, no one cooks in this house but me. I'm not eating anything because I don't trust this woman, she might want to poison me for what happened with Qophelo on Friday. I found the kitchen door open, she's not aware of my presence so I just clear my throat and she turns and smiles at me. I am definitely dying today!

"Mawande, how was work sisi?" The first thing she always wants when I get home is money. A greeting is too suspicious.

"Sundays are always slow aunty," I answer in a clipped tone.

She giggles.

"That's very true nana, I know I should never expect much," when was the last time she was so friendly and warm towards me? I can't even remember.

"Anyway, I'm making Sunday seven colors. You don't have to worry about cooking today, just relax,"

Jesus Christ please burn all the pots!

"Thank you for relieving me," she's stirring that pot like she's cooking human intestines.

"maMokwena was here, she asked me to give you the weekend off because she has a big ceremony next weekend. You can take time off and go enjoy with everyone,"

Who the hell is this woman and what has she done with she devil?

"Mawande did you see the big big car Nhlelo is driving?" She asks and I shake my head no.

"I know she's in Cape Town working and all but I don't think she can afford such a big car. She must be messing around with a very rich man who is probably married too," she reeks of jealousy.

"I didn't see the car aunty but I noticed how beautiful she is," she frowns.

"Hai qha! My Ndongdo is way more beautiful,"

"She is," I just agree for peace sake.

She clears her throat, "Mawande," her tone has changed, it's no longer light. Now the show for my exchange with Qophelo is about to be start. I knew she won't let it go, she wouldn't be Nobantu if she did.

"Aunty Nobantu," I respond meekly.

Fear bubbling in my stomach.

"I know you want to go to school and I am happy for you, but right now there's no money. I asked around and I was told that university applications will open next month. I will organize you application

forms and we will work tirelessly to be able to have money for tuition next year. What do you want to study?"

Claps once!

To say I am shocked would be an understatement, I wasn't expecting this at all. But I don't trust Nobantu, she might just be trying to get me off her back. Sgora got me a phone and I will make my own research and apply online for admission and funding.

"I'm not sure yet aunty but by the time you bring me the application forms I will know. Thank you so much," she smiles, nodding her head.

I know what I want to study, I'm just not sharing anything of mine with this woman.

Trusting her would be like trusting a snake that will turn around to bite me.

NDONDOLOZA DLADLA

I know I came here saying I just want to talk and find closure in my relationship with Dedani, but it didn't happen like that and I'm actually really glad. He sat me down and explained that Hlubi is only his wife because she has contacts and can make his political career. He assured me that I have his heart while she only has a ring that means nothing, I believed him because I am the one in his house while she's in the village playing wife for his family. This man and I have been through so much for me to just give up on him so another woman can have it all. Dedani loves me and he promised me that this marriage will only go on until Hlubi gives him everything he needs.

I walk out of the kitchen with a plate of food I just finished preparing. I wanted to get us seafood boil but he told me that he wanted a home cooked meal. I don't really cook but atleast YouTube has all these nice detailed step by step recipes. I made oxtail with samp and I'm crossing fingers that he likes it, if I want to be number one in his heart then I have to be better than Hlubi in everyway possible. I will do anything to keep Mkhize as mine.

I find Dedani on the phone laughing, his legs are spread on the couch with the TV on a soccer channel. I place the tray of food with a drink on the table and wait for him to be finished with his call. I settle on the single couch after grabbing the remote, I go on Netflix to watch some series I found yesterday. I had to find something to kill time because he left me in the morning saying he was attending a funeral with his comrades and will be back immediately after. But that didn't happen, he came home in the early hours of this morning drunk as hell. I was pissed but I can't stay mad at him for long, his sex just weakens me and this morning he took me out for breakfast and bought me a bag and shoes at Luis Vuitton. He has always known how to say sorry properly.

"Okay ma, tell my beautiful wife that I will call her before I sleep," he says and my heart thuds in my chest. Couldn't he take that call to another room? I can't bare listening to him saying such even though I know he doesn't mean it.

"Don't be like that MaDladla," he says and I look at him with tears glistening in my eyes.

"Would you be okay listening to me talk about another man in front of you?" He clenches his jaw.

"I would kill you if you even looked at another man Ndondo and that's not a joke," his eyes have darkened. I know he's not joking, he

once punched a classmate of mine for hugging me at a club. Dedani is a very jealous man, but it all comes from a place of love.

"Ndondoloza I am the one married to a woman I don't love, the one who has to stay with her everyday and not with you my love. I am doing all of this because I want us and our children to have the best life, I don't want you to suffer. I need your understanding and patience babe," he says with a shaking voice, hurting my soul.

"I know baby it's just so hard," he sits up straight and pats his thigh. I get up from the couch and go sit on top of him.

"I know it is but we will be okay, be comforted by the fact that my heart belongs to you and you only," he pecks my lips.

"I love you," he nods with a smile.

"That's my girl, now go get me a warm dish cloth so I can wipe my hands and dig in. The food looks amazing," He says, wiping my tears.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 05

MAWANDE DUMA

I haven't slept a wink, I've been on my phone since I got to bed. I think I would love to study in Johannesburg, University of the Witwatersrand. It is one of the most prestigious institutions of higher education in this country and it's miles and miles away from aunt Nobantu and her twins. I'm planning on studying towards a degree in Law and once I have that in the bag I will start piecing together the pieces of what happened to my parents and their money. I will not rest until their names are cleared and my aunt gives me back everything that belonged to them.

My phone says the time is 01:30 in the morning, damn I really need to sleep. This phone is going to be a big distraction, I should make sure that I don't use it in front of my aunt or her children because if they take it I'm never getting it back. I will only use it at the supermarket and when I'm in my bedroom. I power the screen off and place it under my pillow, I'll continue my research tomorrow at work.

I'm about to catch some sleep when a car stops at our gate bursting music, who in their right mind plays music at such a crazy volume at this time? A few minutes later the car drives away, maybe those people were lost or something. I adjust my blankets and close my eyes, I think about how my first day at university will be. The type of friends I'll have and if Johannesburg will treat me better than a place I am supposed to call home.

I am woken up by something rubbing my thighs in circles, I don't make sudden movement but I keep calm to try and make sense of what's happening. I'm sensing someone sitting on the edge of my bed, I won't lie I'm scared as hell. I open my eyes slowly and it's Qophelo, what the hell! I try to jump off the bed but he grabs my arm, pulling me back.

"What are you doing Qophelo?" I ask, already crying. Why would he come to my room so late and touch me inappropriately?

"Relax Mawande, I'm just trying to help you," he says.

"Help me with what? Get out," I sneer and he smirks. Arrogant brat.

"See that? That's exactly what I want to help you with. You're 25 years of age, these days you're always snapping and angry. You need to get rid of the tension and there's only one way to do that, just lay

on your back and open your legs wide for me and I'll make you feel so fuckin good," oh my God this filthy bastard!

"Qophelo leave my room this minute," one cannot miss the fear in my voice.

"Relax, you'll enjoy it," he starts stoking his erect penis while licking his lower lip, I can't allow this to happen.

I scream at the top of my lungs. He gives me a hot slap across the face then pulls me to him, placing a hand on my mouth to silence me but I don't give up. I am kicking and attempting to free myself from his strong hold. My bedroom door flies open and in walks my aunt with widened eyes, relief floods through me. Her son pushes me down and I crawl as far from him as possible while crying.

"Qophelo, what's going on in here?" She asks alarmed.

"Nothing!" He says with no ounce of guilt, regret or anything close to it. He wanted to rape me and he's not apologetic about it.

"It's something because you're naked in Mawande's room and she is crying hysterically,"

"She's just being a baby over nothing. Mawande is a woman mama, I should be the one to sleep with her so she doesn't bring bastard children to this house," he says nonchalantly and I gasp in shock.

"You ungrateful bastard! You're high as a kite, Qophelo how could you go back to cocaine," his mother says angrily and I'm left numb by this revelation.

"I don't have time for this bullshit," he says, walking towards the door. I quickly get on my feet and run across the room so he doesn't grab me.

"This isn't over, I will deal with you in the morning," Aunty Nobantu says, wagging a finger at her son who just slaps her hand away. My aunt is left stunned by his behavior, I still cannot believe that he wanted to rape me and that he's high on drugs.

After Qophelo's drama I couldn't sleep a wink. I kept on thinking that he will come back even though I locked the door after his mother left the room. She didn't say much to me, she just asked if he managed to penetrate me and I shook my head then she left. I cried until there were no tears left, how can God and my ancestors forsake me this way? How much more pain and humiliation must I suffer in these people's hands? I am a good person and I don't deserve this at all.

I've already taken my bath and I just finished with their breakfast. I want to go to work and not be anywhere near Qophelo. I feel safer at the supermarket because Sgora is there but here in this house I will never feel safe. I need to get myself a pepper spray and maybe another lock installed on my door.

What happened just fueled me to find a university far away and never come back here. That's my only hope because I don't have anyone else to take me in, I don't even have money.

"Morning Mawande," I am startled.

"Relax sisi, it's just me," my aunt says and I'm blinking rapidly. I will never be comfortable in my own house again.

"Did you sleep well?" She asks and I shake my head no.

"I am really sorry for what Qophelo did, I promise to deal with him," that's honestly a first, I thought she was going to brush it under the carpet.

I check my small phone and it's time to leave, Sgora is outside waiting for me.

"I need to leave for work aunty Nobantu," I say and she grabs my hand, brushing my knuckles.

"Can this whole thing stay between us as a family, I will deal with Qophelo and he will never do it again," I just nod my head yes.

"I'm glad you understand how important it is to not say anything to anyone," This is to protect her image.

"Tomorrow you will not be reporting for work, I will cover for you because I want you to go to town to get beautiful outfits for this weekend," she's buying my silence.

I'm sure Qophelo will just get a slap on the wrist and this will be forgotten.

"Must I always find you lost in your thoughts?" Sgora says and I offer him a weak smile.

"Sitting alone will have you thinking a lot," he frowns and I heave out a sigh.

"Have you been crying?" He asks, with widened eyes.

"I'm okay, it's nothing," my voice fails me and he folds his arms across his chest.

"Mawande Duma, you were awfully quiet the whole way here this morning. I kept asking about school, something that gets you excited but you said nothing. I thought you'll have a lot to say since you received a new phone yesterday," he is too observant.

I clear my throat, "You know how Mondays are plus I didn't sleep a wink because of my research," he shakes his head, not believing a word I'm saying.

"You want to cry so bad right now, your lower lip is even quivering. Mawande what did your aunt and her children do to you?" He hits the nail right on the head and I just allow myself to cry.

"I'm here for you sisi, please trust that you can talk to me about anything. You don't have to be alone Mawande, you have me in your corner. You said it yourself that I'm like a big brother to you so imagine how worried I get when I see my little sister looking this sad. Tell me what's wrong and maybe I can fix it for you," maybe Sgora was sent to me by my parents, maybe they aren't silent after all.

"I was sleeping and Qophelo was busy...he wanted to...ra...force himself on me," I say but fail to look at him, I am too ashamed even though I did nothing wrong here.

"That bloody bastard! Was this the first time he tried?" The anger in his voice is almost palpable.

"Yes,"

"Believe me when I say it was the first and the last time Mawande," I quickly look up and his face has a mixture of anger, sadness, empathy and assurance.

NOBANTU DLADLA

I am not going through this again, I refuse to have sleepless nights wondering where he is and if he hasn't over dosed. My son promised to never touch cocaine again, he promised that he will not hurt me but he did. I shouldn't have believed an addict, I shouldn't have allowed my love for him to blind me. Everything I do in my life I do it

for the benefit of my children, I do it so they can have everything I never had. You'd think he'd see this and be grateful but he chooses to take drugs and throw away his life. It's time I take a stand.

I take a bucket of ice water and walk to his bedroom, we have to deal with what happened in the early hours of this morning. I still cannot believe that he wanted to rape Mawande, I mean that's his sister. How could he even have thoughts of her in that way? I open the door and he's still under the covers with music playing on his TV. There is a small plastic with white powder on the floor next to his jeans, he brought this nonsense to my home. I'll deal with him and he will know that I'm the mother and he is the child. I pour the water on him and he jolts up screaming and cursing.

"Are you fuckin kidding me," he says, trying to catch his breath.

"Watch your language you spoilt brat," he chuckles, getting out of bed.

"Ma why the hell would you do that?" He is wiping himself with the towel he just grabbed on the pedestal.

I bend down and pick up the cocaine.

"You are back to doing this shit? You even tried to rape your cousin Qophelo, what the hell is wrong with you? After everything we have been through," He rolls his eyes at me.

"Calm down ma, I just did two lines yesterday before leaving Shepstone. It was a once off thing," he says and I throw the empty bucket at him.

"That's how you got addicted in the first place and almost died, it was just a once off thing right?" I say, opening the plastic.

"Whoa! What are you doing?" He asks and I empty the drugs on the floor and stamp of them. He is going crazy, pushing me away so he can save his cocaine. It's too late because it's mixed with dirt and water.

"Are you stupid? Fuck fuck fuck!" I step back because he's scarring me now, I have never seen Qophelo so angry,

"Get the fuck out of my bedroom you bitch! You stupid ignorant bitch, get out?" He is pushing me roughly towards the door and I'm crying. How am I expected to deal with this alone? I can't even go out there to ask for help because then people will know that my son is a drug addict and he becomes violent with me.

I get to the lounge and grab my phone before settling down and dialing Sqalo. He will tell me what to do, he always does. It's days like these where I wish he would just leave his wife and be with me alone, if he was here in this house then everything would go smoothly. Sometimes I wonder if my son turned out this way because he didn't have a father in his life.

"Miss Dladla," he answers and I know his wife is in the car with him and this call is connected to the speaker.

"Hi Mr Shozi, ninjani?" I try my best to keep my voice steady.

"I'm well thanks, yourself?" Not good at all sthandwa sami I need you.

I say to myself.

"Not great, I'm having issues with the lodges and I am in desperate need of your advise. Will you be able to make it to Shelly beach tomorrow?" I ask.

"I don't think that will be a problem. I'll have my assistant call you and let you know what time," relief floods through me.

"okay then, thank you,"

"It's a pleasure, goodbye," the line goes dead and I heave a sigh.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 06

NTUTHUKO BUTHELEZI

Everyone in this village will tell you how violent I am, but they will all fail to tell you why I am this way. They call me Sgora because I have been fighting in these dusty streets of Mzumbe since I was a boy. Fighting everyone who looked down on me and everyone who thought they could take advantage of me. I had to fight for myself somewhere because I couldn't at home, I had to endure so much from a young age and no one fought for me.

My only sin was not being my mothers husband's son; I made my step father angry because I was another man's child. I got beatings and cigarette burns whenever he was drunk because my father managed to give my mother a child and yet he wasn't able to. I was also his sexual object each time my mother was laying in a hospital bed after she was kicked like a dog because her womb wasn't accepting of his seed. We got abused because of his inability to have children, he got mad at us for something that was wrong with him.

I tried running away once because I felt like my mother knew what was happening and she decided to look the other way. But I came to regret that because when I was found my step father punished me in the worst way possible. Each time I look at my feet I remember the night I screamed at the top of my lungs hoping he will hear my pain

and stop but he just continued with the harmer. My mother couldn't do anything because he had her restrained. I saw her helplessness that night but it still didn't take away the hate I had towards her.

When Mawande told me what happened to her my blood boiled and anger bubbled in my stomach. I saw how scared and hurt she was and I just cannot stand on the side, waiting for that bastard to actually rape her before doing something. He might not have succeeded the first time but man like him don't give up until they have what they want. That girl is sweet and she's the only person who sees me as a person and not some fighting machine. I have taken her as a little sister and in my heart I want to protect her, to make life a little easier.

She was given the day off by her aunt so she can go buy clothes, that's simply bribery. Nobantu did this so she can silence her, I've been working in that supermarket for years and Mawande has never been given a day off. That woman is protecting her brat at the expense of Mawande's peace of mind. She is allowing her son to be this monster and let me tell you something, this wasn't the first time. Qophelo has raped someone else out there, that's why I cannot let this slide.

Nobantu is at the supermarket and it was so awkward seeing her behind that counter. She normally just comes to bark orders and leave. I decided to fake being sick and asked for the rest of the day off. She couldn't say no because I pulled my straight face and she was blinking rapidly as she told me to even take two days. That was appreciated because someone needs to deal with her brat, she's failing to be the adult and because of that her son thinks it's okay to treat Mawande anyhow.

I am sitting on the couch in this messy bedroom, I'm pretty sure Mawande is the one who is expected to clean the filth in here. She probably even washes his dirty underwear, Qophelo doesn't know life but I'll gladly give him a few lessons.

I don't think I can wait for him to stop snoring and wake up any longer, I have other matters to attend to. I get up from this single comfortable couch and tower him as he's sleeping facing the ceiling. I fix my knuckle duster and take a deep breath before putting my one hand over his mouth and nose so he struggles to breath.

His eyes open and he starts trying to fight to take in some oxygen but I'm too big and strong, I don't even have to put in all my weight to pin him on this mattress.

Qophelo is kicking and wiggling but I want him to have a near death experience and remember how it felt each time he looks in Mawande's direction. I remove my hand when I see the fight in him die down, he's gasping for air and I'm just standing here waiting for him to catch a breath before I rearrange his face.

"How the fuck did you get in here?" He asks after a few minutes then gets out of bed. Unfortunately for him there's no running away from me, I'm here and I'm his karma.

"You are asking the wrong question," I say and he narrows his eyes.

"Sgora, I'll call my mom and you'll regret getting in this house," he can't even threaten me like a man. That's how these abusers are to someone their size.

"I'm not scared of Nobantu or anyone else for that matter," he flares his nose and scoffs, I'm impressed that he's trying to appear intimidating.

"I'm not afraid of you either," that's good to know.

"Lets make a few things clear Qophelo.

I am here to fuck you up for trying to touch Mawande," I pause and wait for him to drink in my words, "I am here to tell you that you will never ever try anything with her again. Infact from today you'll treat her with the utmost respect because if you don't I'll be in your face again. When she gets back from town you will humbly apologize and assure her that you will never try to rape her again. From today onwards cheese boy, Mawande will not do shit for you, you clean your own room, you wash the dishes and your clothes," he is looking at me like he doesn't understand the words that are coming out of my mouth.

"I like it when someone gives a sign that they hear and understand what I'm saying," he nods vigorously.

"I'm so pissed because you are making me go back on a promise I made myself, I didn't want to beat up people anymore. I wanted to put that behind me but you just had to fuck with someone who is like a sister to me and I can't just watch you make life hell for her. I truly hope that you understand,"

"There's no need for violence bro," these city boys.

"But the is, if I let you go just like that then you'll think I'm joking so I'm going to show you what I do," he looks at the door then back at me, I can tell that his heart is threatening to jump out of his chest.

"Sgora don't do this please," I shake my head and he stupidly thinks it's a good idea to try and run to the door, but he's too slow. I grab him by his boxers and roughly turn him before giving him a blow between the eyes.

NDONDOLOZA DLADLA

The few days I spent with Dedani really did wonders for our relationship. We managed to get back on the same page and I got reminded of why I fell in love with this man in the first place. I don't think I will ever love another man the way I love him and thank God that I never have to because he has promised me forever. He is a man of his word and not even this fake marriage will get in the way of that.

My mother called this morning asking me when I'm planning on coming back home because Qophelo is back on drugs and she needs me to talk some sense back into him. My heart broke for mom because I know how she prayed day and night for my brother to stay clean, I did too. It's not nice seeing my twin being a slave to cocaine. We almost lost him and that was probably the scariest time in our lives. I wonder what triggered him into going back to drugs because he swore on his life to never touch those things. I promised my mom to come home tomorrow because Dedani told me that we needed to have a conversation when he gets back from work.

I hear a car pull up in the driveway and I know it's my man, he's home early today. His work day normally ends around 6pm and it's only 4:30pm, I'm not complaining though because it's nice to have him all to myself. Hopefully today he will help me cook or at least chop some vegetables. I've always dreamed of having those moments with my guy.

The front door opens and I get up from the couch with a wide smile on my face, he stops in front of me and pecks my lips.

"Missed me?" I ask, circling my arms around his neck.

"You have no idea babe," I love Mkhize, period!

"Good thing we are together now," I say and he yawns. My poor baby works so hard, I should run him a relaxing bath and find a great recipe to prepare on YouTube.

"As much as I love having you around baby you're going to have to go home today," he says and I frown.

"Why?" I ask with a shaking voice.

"Because Hlubi is driving back as we speak. She left my village like an hour ago," I thought she'll be doing her duties as makoti for the entire month.

"My mom cut her stay short and told her she could come home to me because she doesn't want me struggling without the help of my wife," he says as if he could read my mind.

Hearing him referring to another woman as his wife hurts my heart, no matter how fake the marriage is.

"I should go get my things so I can drive to Mzumbe," he heaves a sigh.

"I'm sorry Ndondo, I didn't plan for any of this to happen,"

"Sure Dedani," I try to walk away but he pulls me back to him by my waist.

Can he just leave me to go cry in the bathroom in peace?

"Hlubi coming here doesn't change our relationship,"

"It already did Dedani, we didn't even sleep in the master bedroom because that's now your matrimonial bed," he closes his eyes.

"Don't hurt me Ndondoloza, you know this marriage to Nomahlubi is to secure a future for you and our future children," is he aware of how much he is hurting me right now? I have to leave his house for another woman.

"Its okay Dedani,"

"Listen, I know this is hard for you but I promise to be the best for you. I was thinking that you should move back to Durban so we can make this work," he caresses my face.

"My mom won't agree to that Dedani, the only time I'll leave home is when I get a job," he narrows his eyes.

"Then what are we doing? If you can't sacrifice for this relationship then we might as well just end this. Do what's good for your mom and stay in Mzumbe," he says angrily, stepping away from me.

"Dedani, don't say that please," he clicks his tongue.

"No, I am sacrificing myself. I'm married to a woman who is not you and wena you can't move to Durban to make this work? You are 25 but your telling me about your mother! Ndongoloza I am 37 years old, I need a woman not a child who needs permission from her mom," oh God.

"Baby, I am so sorry. I promise I will move to Durban." He smacks his lips.

"Forget about it," I hate it when he is like this.

"You know what, go up stairs and get your shit. I don't want to find you here when I get back," I gasp in shock.

"Baby don't do this to me," I try to touch him but he shoots me a fulminating gaze.

"I won't repeat myself, leave before my wife gets here," he says, unbuttoning his shirt. My tears aren't moving him because he just walks away like I'm not hurting right in front of him. This is a man who's supposed to love me, why is he doing this to me?

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 07

MAWANDE DUMA

I know my aunt only gave me money and allowed me to go shopping because of the whole situation with Qophelo. But I had a great day, it felt really good to be out of Mzumbe. I went from shop to shop and when I was done I sat down at a restaurant and had a nice meal. I got reminded of my parents and how we loved eating out and trying everything on the menu. We had such a beautiful life as a family and not a day goes by without me wondering how life would have turned out for me if they were still alive. It has been years since their passing but the pain is still there and fresh, I doubt I will ever heal.

Both my aunt's cars are in the driveway, it means Ndongoloza is back from Durban. I wonder if she knows that her twin brother is a drug addict, or did my aunt decide to keep it between her and Qophelo? I open the kitchen door and there's no one in here, I look at the stove and there are no pots. I guess I wasn't given a day off from that duty.

I hope aunt Nobantu is not mad at me for coming back this late. I walk into the lounge and gasp in shock when I set my eyes on Qophelo. His whole face is rearranged, he is battered for real. His mother is cleaning him up with the things from the first aid kit we keep in the house. What happened to him?

"Ouch!" He cries.

"Q just allow mom to take you to the hospital," Ndongondo says, sounding annoyed.

"I'm fine," he snaps at his sister.

I am afraid to ask what's going on but atleast they've noticed my presence.

"You don't want to go to the hospital, you don't want to tell me what happened. At least tell me how I should help you," my aunt says softly.

"Mama I got into a stupid fight. If you think I'm bad then you should see the other guy, I handled him very well," he says and I don't believe him one bit. He looks like he wasn't able to throw in a punch.

"Why do I get a feeling that this whole thing has to do with your drug use," Aunt Nobantu says and Ndongoloza starts coughing, looking at me awkwardly.

"Ma, we are not alone in the room," I guess my darling cousin doesn't know that her twin brother almost raped me when he was high as a kite and because of that incident I now know he's a junkie.

"Mawande already knows Ndongoloza,"

"You have to keep this to yourself, don't you dare breath a word to anyone about this," like mother like daughter.

"I won't Ndongoloza," Qophelo chuckles, looking at me like I am the reason he was beaten up.

And only then does it click in my head that Sgora might have done this. He was so mad after I told him what happened and he promised that Qophelo will not try this again.

"What should I cook," I ask.

"I'm not hungry," Nondo says.

"Don't cook sisi," oh thank God.

I turn and leave the room, I need to call Sgora and ask if he's responsible for this and if he is then I want to thank him. I lock my door as soon as I'm in the room then place the plastics on the bed

before settling down to make a call. His phone goes straight to voicemail, I guess I'll wait to ask him face to face tomorrow morning.

I'm in the kitchen doing what I do every other morning before leaving for work, making breakfast.

I hear a door creak and I wonder who is up this early, they all wake up around 8 am when I'm long gone. Foot steps approach and a few minutes later Qophelo walks in, my pulse leaps because I'm not comfortable being in the same room as him. His hand is placed over his ribcage and he is limping. I am happy to know that he is in pain and I'm not sorry about it.

"Good morning," he greets me and I just nod. Why is he standing there starring at me? He better not try anything.

"Uhm Mawande, I'm really sorry for what happened. I was high as fuck and I promise it will never happen again," to say I am shocked would be an understatement.

"I appreciate everything you do around this house and I think it's time I pulled my weight. You don't have to clean my room or do my laundry anymore, I'll take care of that myself. You have too many things on your plate and it's only fair that we help where we can,"
Haibo!

I think his brain shifted a bit, this is not the Qophelo I know.

"Please find it in your heart to accept my apology," he adds then turns back to leave the kitchen.

I'm dumbfounded, I never expected this to happen not even in my wildest dreams.

Sgora is standing under the tree near our gate, I finally get to ask if he did that to Qophelo or not. I get to him and he greets without looking at me, he's deliberately avoiding my eyes. I greet him back then he takes my bag and we start walking to work. I'm making conversation and he's giving me one word answers.

"Sgora," I should just get it out of the way and maybe he'll stop being so awkward.

"Mawande,"

I clear my throat, "Are you okay?"

"I'm okay. How is everyone at home? How is Qophelo?" He just gave himself away.

He's the one who beat Qophelo black and blue.

"Don't take my question in a bad way," he stops walking and looks at me.

"Don't ask me please, just know that I did what I had to do. He will not bother you again, you can bet your last money on that," he says and I take his hand.

"Thank you so much Sgora, thank you for everything," relief floods through him.

He probably thought I'd be mad at him for beating Qophelo up.

"I got your back Mawande," I am grateful for that. I feel less alone in this world because of him.

Today the pensioners got their social grant and the supermarket has been so busy since morning. I even had to eat my breakfast while running around the store to restock shelves and fridges. Days like

these I need an extra pair of hands because it can get hectic to a point of my head spinning. Sgora cannot help me on busy days because he has to be on the look out both in here and the tavern. Robberies happen on busy days so he cannot abandon his job to help me out.

"Hi, do you have sparkling water?" Someone asks as I pack maize meal on the shelf not far from the fridges.

I turn around to see the person that wants sparkling water in the village of KwaZulu-Natal. I gasp for air when my eyes land on a very beautiful man, I have never seen a man so clean and smells so nice. I never really liked bearded because most man around here don't take care of it but the bush on his handsome face is doing things to me. Things I never thought I'd feel for anyone but ke I know that this man is out of my league.

I have never been in a relationship, well I tried back in high school but he dumped me because I couldn't meet up with him outside of school. My aunt didn't allow me to leave the house on weekends. I'm grown now but I can't even start liking someone because my life has to revolve around Nobantu and her brats.

"Uhm hello," he snaps his fingers in my face and I come back to the now.

"I uhm, I'm really sorry. How can I help you?" I ask.

"Sparkling water? Do you have it?"

"Unfortunately not, it won't sell in this village," I say and he heaves a sigh.

He has beautiful big brown eyes.

I'll definitely be day dreaming about this one for a very long time.

"Okay, still water?" I want to laugh, where is this one from?

Does he think village people have money to buy water they can get from a tap.

"I'm really sorry. I can get you water from the tap if you'd like," I say.

"There you are," someone says walking in and we both turn to see who it is.

"I wanted to buy some sparkling water," he says to Nhlelo who looks absolutely gorgeous. This must be her man, they look great together.

"Can you believe that Mawande? Sparkling water in this part of the world?" We both laugh.

"I would sit with it in my fridge until kingdom comes," I say and she laughs, hitting the handsome man on the shoulder playfully.

"You're back in the village now, try and remember that," -Nhlelo.

"Forgive him Mawande, he has not set foot here in 5 years," WHAT!

So this is maMokwena's son, the one that works abroad.

"Oh this is your brother?" I ask and she nods. I can now see the resemblance, they took most of their features from their mom.

"Yes this is Msebe'yelanga, my favorite big brother," she says.

"Your only brother," handsome man says.

"Yeah that's right. Msebe this is Mawande, she runs the store," she introduces us and her brother holds out his hand to me and I take it. This man takes care of himself, his hand is so soft and his nails are short and glossy. He definitely has man manicure done each month.

"It's nice to meet you Mawande,"

"Likewise," he let's go of my hand.

"You are coming to his homecoming celebration right?" Nhlelo asks.

"Yes, my aunt agreed to give me the weekend off," I respond.

"Great then, we will see you on Saturday babe,"

"Are you done in the salon?" He asks and his sister nods. "Lets go then,"

NDONDOLOZA DLADLA

"Who keeps calling you?" My mother asks and I heave a sigh.

"It's no one mama," Dedani has been blowing up my phone with calls and texts and I haven't been answering any of them. He told me to leave his house because his wife was coming so what does he want from me? I love him with all my heart but I will not allow him to turn me into his door mat. He can't treat me like shit and expect me to stay.

"So how was your weekend with Londeka? I can tell that you are not 100 percent okay but atleast you're not closing yourself in the bedroom," mom thinks I was in Durban visiting my best friend. She doesn't have any idea of my relationship with Dedani. I honestly feared introducing them because of the age difference, I mean he is 12 years older than me.

"It was chilled ma," I put it to her simply.

I don't want to have this conversation.

"You still won't tell me what was happening with you Ndongdoloza?" She asks.

"Ma please let it go please. Lets talk about Qophelo," she exhales sharply.

"Yoh! Your brother is giving me grey hair. I honestly don't know how I'm going to deal with this. His drug use is going to set us back, he is going to destroy not only his life but ours as well," I nod in agreement.

"We need to take him to rehab," I say and my mom leans back on the couch, brushing her forehead.

"He won't go baby and if I push him too hard he will attack like a wild animal. I need him calm as I think of a plan," My poor mother, she doesn't deserve this at all.

"Where is he?" I ask because when I woke up he wasn't home.

"I don't know where he could be looking like that,"

"And how does Mawande know about Qophelo and cocaine?"

Yesterday I was shocked when she blurted it out in front of Mawande like that. My mom doesn't want anyone to know about this because then people will start to look down on us. My mother worked hard to get us the respect that we have now and we won't allow anything to take that away from us.

"Yoh Nondo, your brother was high and he tried to rape Mawande in this very house," she says and I gasp in shock, placing a hand over my mouth.

"No way! How could he try that? Qophelo is out of order mama and we need to get him in line before he does something more stupid," I am so disappointed in him. He has done a lot of stupid things but this one? Doesn't he know incest? Imagine the bad luck he would have brought upon himself.

"I'm still so numb because of that. Now he is all buttered and bruised and he won't tell us what happened,"

Claps once!

"Hopefully the person beat sense back into him," I click my tongue.

My phone rings and it's Dedani again, can he just leave me alone? Until he learns how to treat me then I won't bother with him. Love alone is not enough.

"Is it your boyfriend?" Ma catches me off guard.

A knock on the door saves me from mama's question, thank God for whoever is at our door step.

"I'll be right back," she gets up to go see who it is. I take my phone to type a paragraph for Dedani, he has to know that he can't mistreat me and expect me to run back to him. He can't use his fake marriage to hurt me when we don't agree on things.

"Ndondoloza, someone is here to see you," my mom says, walking in the lounge with Dedani right behind her. What the fuck is he doing here. I quickly get up from the couch and swallow hard, darting between my mother and Dedani.

"What are you doing here?" I ask this man who looks besides himself.

"You're not answering my calls and texts so I had to come see if you're okay," he didn't care about me when he kicked me out and I had to drive while emotional.

I don't answer his call for just a day and he's going out of his mind and even drives to Mzumbe.

"Ndondo who is this?" Oh dear God.

How do I explain this to my mom.

"His name is Dedani Mkhize," mom is not stupid, she can put two and two together.

"And what is he to you?" I know my mother loves and wants me to have everything, but I don't know how she will react to me having a boyfriend who happened to get married while he was still with me. I understand why he did what he did but my mom will not even want to hear it.

"Ma, can I see Dedani out then come back to explain," she nods and I put on my morning slippers.

"Nisale kahle," Dedani says to my mom before leading us out of the house.

His G-wagon is parked outside our yard, he keeps stealing glances at me as we make our way to the car. I just want to be in the privacy of the car and give him a piece of my mind, he had no right to show up here without my permission. I open the door and climb in as he rounds to the drivers side. He gets inside and find my eyes on him, ready to give it to him.

"Why are you not answering my calls baby?" He asks.

"Why are you here and not at home with your wife?" He closes his eyes as if pained.

"Baby please stop that. I can't be there with her when things aren't okay between us. Without you there's no need for me to stay with her, whose future am I trying to prepare for if you leave me?" He tries to hold my hand but I quickly pull away. I can't fold easily.

"I got mad because you refused to move back to Durban to be closer to me. I want you near me always baby, please forgive me for the way I treated you yesterday. You didn't deserve that at all," he lets his tears fall and a part of me hurts, I am tempted to take him into my arms.

"I tried explaining that my mom will not agree to me moving there without a reason," he nods vigorously.

"And I understand baby that's why I came up with a solution to get you to move closer to me," he says and I narrow my eyes.

"What solution?" He takes a deep breath.

"I made calls to my comrades and one of them agreed to give you a position," he says and I can't believe it.

"MaDladla I love you so much, I don't want to loose you. I'd rather die than watch you live your life without me," he says with so much

emotion my heart breaks, I love him too. So much sometimes I feel like it's unhealthy.

I watch Dedani place his forehead on the steering wheel and cry silently. After a few minutes he sits up straight and wipes his tears.

"I know I have to step up and treat you better and I promise I will. All I ask is that you leave room for me to mess up now and again because I'm only human," I can see and feel his sincerity. Dedani loves me but sometimes he doesn't know how to treat me the way I deserve.

"I will get you an apartment baby, I will support you in everyway possible. All I ask is that you move to Durban," he reaches for my hand and this time I allow him.

"A lot has to change with you Dedani," he nods vigorously.

"I agree and I will do anything just to get us back in the right path," I believe him.

Every relationship has its ups and downs and this phase will pass in our relationship and we will be okay.

"Tell me about this job you got me," I say and he offers me a sweet smile.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 08

NOBANTU DLADLA

I have been so stressed these past few days but being in Sqalo's arms cuddling after he made love to me feels very good. He knows what I need when I need it and that's something I appreciate about him. He never makes me feel like the other woman, he treats me so good

most times I forget that he's a married man. We have been together for so long and of course our relationship is no longer just sex, we have fallen in love with each other. He has told me countless times that he wishes he had met me first, I wish for that too. But at least we have each other, it might not be in a way that's acceptable by society but that's okay because it works for us, we are happy.

"Remind me to give you the application forms from DUT and UKZN before I leave," he says.

"Oh yes, I almost forgot about that," we decided to give Mawande application forms for her to think that I will be sending her to school. We won't be submitting anything, it's just for show. After a while Sqalo will send her fake sms's from those institutions of higher education saying she wasn't accepted. Hopefully after all of that she will stop making noise about going to university because it's not happening. If I let Mawande out of my side she will meet people who open her eyes and she will realize I have been lying and take everything from me. I know a lot of people will call me evil for what I'm doing but I deserve everything. There are two sides to every story.

"Now Qophelo," he says and I heave a sigh. Sitting up straight because this issue just takes everything from me.

"Baba, I honestly don't know how to handle that matter," I say and he nods, showing that he understands.

"You have me for things you can't do yourself," he says, caressing my face.

"I know and thank you so much for always helping me fight my battles," I lean in and peck his lips.

"He's refusing to go to rehab right?" He asks and I nod.

"Then he needs tough love baby,"

I shift on the bed, "what do you mean?"

"I mean show him that if he doesn't go to rehab and get clean you'll disown him," What? Disown my own child? Sqalo knows what I've been through with my children from the very beginning. He can't expect me to just cut my son off like that, there has to be another way to get through to him.

"I know it's tough Bantu but we've been here before. He almost died and promised he will stop but here we are again. He does this because you're soft with him," my eyes widen.

"Are you saying I am a bad mom?" He shakes his head then quickly clasp my hand.

"No, don't put words in my mouth. I'm saying you love your kids so much you let things slide most of the time. Right now Qophelo needs your toughness in order to make it, or I swear we are going to bury him sooner than you think," I blink and my tears fall. A part of me would die slowly if I bury any of my children.

"Have I ever misled you?" He asks.

I clear my throat to get rid of the dry lump clogged in my throat, "You have never baba, I'm sorry for offending you. How do you suggest I deal with Qophelo?" Sqalo tucks a strand of hair behind my ear affectionately.

"Take away the money he uses to buy those drugs, take away his privileges. That will make him stranded and he will bow down to your demands and go to rehab. He will realize that without you he is nothing," oh Lord it will break my heart to see my boy having non of the things he's used to.

"It seems cruel but right now it's the necessary evil to get your boy in line," that's very true. I tried doing things my way and I failed, now it's time I accepted help.

"I will visit my bank on Monday," I say.

"And start showering Ndondo with gifts and thank her for being a good child who doesn't give you any stress. Qophelo will be jealous and he won't have a choice but to fall back and be the son you deserve," I'll have to think of what to give my daughter, something extravagant and worthy of my princess.

I'm feeling lighter now that I have a plan on how to deal with Qophelo, I just pray it all works out in my favor. I called my daughter to tell her that I'll be sleeping at one of our lodges in Shelly beach. Sqalo made me happy when he said he gave his wife an excuse to not go back home tonight.

I sent one of my workers to go get us some food and champagne because it's going to be a very long night with this man of mine. The bathroom door opens and Sqalo walks out with a towel wrapped around his waist, he looks so sexy. Many must wonder how I manage to be so rejuvenated, they would get their answer as soon as they know the man I have to keep up with in bed.

"Are you eye fuckin me Bantu," he asks and I giggle.

"Do you blame me though?" He smirks with a raised eyebrow.

"Not at all baby," He says then bends down to kiss me passionately.

"I hope you ordered some food because I'm famished," I can never starve him.

In both ways.

"Yes, I sent someone to get us food and drinks," he is flipping through the TV channels.

"You're the best,"

"Baba, what do you know about Dedani Mkhize?" Sqalo knows every important person in Durban, what he has to say to me will determine whether I allow my child to continue a relationship with him or not.

"He's a politician and businessman, he's doing really well for himself in his career but the guy is a ruthless shark baby," I'm nodding my head. At least he has the means and resources to take care of my only princess.

"What do you know about him personally?" He frowns and I chuckle. Jealousy doesn't look good on him at all.

"I don't know anything about his private life hey, we don't run the same circles like that. Why are you asking me about another man Nobantu?" He is pissed off.

"Calm down, he just happens to be my daughter's boyfriend of five years. Ndongoloza only told me about him yesterday because he showed up at the house," I say and his shoulders sag in relief.

"Haibo! They have been together mos," I was just as shocked.

My daughter and I are very close and it hurt that she didn't want to share her relationship with me. She said she was afraid of my reaction seeing their age difference, but all I care about is if that man treats her right and loves her the way she deserves.

"But he will make a great son in-law with all his contacts and influence," that's very true. I always wanted to get into politics and maybe this will be my way.

"He has a lot to prove to me before we can get there," he chortles, shaking his head.

"Mother hen," he knows me very well.

"What time do you have to leave tomorrow?" He asks.

"My stylist, makeup artist and hairstylist will be here around 9 in the morning and once they are done with me I'm driving to Mzumbe," I answer.

"You want to make a grand entrance," I flip my hair back and he's thrown into a fit of laughter.

"I wouldn't be Nobantu Dladla if I didn't baba. I have to show all those village hags that I'm the one who runs the show,"

"That's why you are mine," he says and I'm left blushing.

NTUTHUKO BUTHELEZI

"What do you know about maMokwena's daughter," I ask Mawande as we walk home from the business center.

"Nothing much really. I went to school with her, she was in grade 12 when I was in grade 10. After high school I never saw her again, I'd only hear about her from maMokwena when she comes to the supermarket. She lives in Cape Town and she is successful," she explains and I nod my head.

"Why are you asking about Nhlelo," I look at her and she has a smile on her face.

"Sgora, you like her don't you?" Is it that obvious?

"Nah, I'm only asking because her attitude stinks. Remember the day she came in with her mother when I was leaving? She bumped into me then gave me an evil eye," I deny having any feelings for her even though my heart skipped a couple of beats the first day I saw her. Even though she looked at me like I disgusted her, I saw my wife and the mother of my children.

"Yeah, I saw that. I'm glad you didn't choke slam her," Mawande responds and I'm sent into a fit of laughter.

"I'm not a women beater," Mawande is the only person right now that can tap into the soft side of me. Exactly how a little sister would.

"I know and I'm glad," she says as we stop outside her house.

"Is Qophelo behaving?" I ask and she nods vigorously.

"Yes, he doesn't even look my way," that's good. It would have been another story if he was still giving her a hard time.

"I will see you on Monday, have a great time at the homecoming," I'm just happy Nobantu gave her the weekend off. She will be out having a great time like everyone else.

"Thank you, I'll see you on Monday," I hand her the backpack and she makes her way inside the yard. I only walk away when she's inside the house.

My phone beeps, alerting me of a new message. I take it out of my pocket and open the text. It's a business associate of mine, he is asking me to confirm our meeting tomorrow. I send him a message telling him that we are still on, same time and place. I have been growing and selling weed since I was 19 years old and my business is booming. I have had a couple of problems with the police along the way, but I've managed to get them on my payroll for them to look the other way and tip me when there's something going on.

I only took the job at the business center to keep myself busy during the day and I'm glad I did because I get to look out for Mawande.

I am passing by the bushes, about to take the pathway that leads me to my house when I hear a child crying. I don't even wait to make sense of what's happening, I just rush inside the bush to see what's going on. If it's anything I'm protective of it's woman and children, I would put my head on the chopping block to make sure that no harm

comes to them. I find a little boy sitting on a rock crying, he is a handsome little man. That hair cut and those clothes tell me that this child is not from around here.

"Ntwana, what's wrong?" I ask, kneeling in front of him. He looks around 4 or 5 so I know he will be able to tell me what's wrong.

"I am lost,"

"Where are you from?" He sniffs and wipes off his tears.

"Cape Town," haibo!

Now I am alarmed, how did he get to Mzumbe from Cape Town?

"How did you get here?"

"I was playing with my friends, we were just running around with my soccer ball. When it got a little dark one of them suggested that we play hide and seek, I went to hide but no one found me,"

Eeh! There's no way that they ran all the way from Cape Town.

"Who are you visiting here in Mzumbe?" I ask.

"I came with my mommy, we are visiting my granny and uncle," okay we are getting somewhere now.

"What's your mommy's name?"

"Nhlelozenkosi Ngidi, her cellphone number is 0671437625," my heart skips a bit at the mention of her name.

I didn't know she has a child, a handsome boy at that.

"Okay ntwana, what's your name?"

"Singabakhe, but you can call me Singa," MaHlomuka did a great job with our boy.

He has manners and he is well spoken, I'm proud of her.

"Okay, hop on my back. I'll take you to mommy ne?" He nods vigorously and I turn for him to climb on my back.

"Thank you malume," Aow mfana wami.

I get to the Ngidi homestead and it's chaotic, people are going up and down in preparation for tomorrow's ceremony.

It's mostly woman I see here, where are the men? I spot MaHlomuka talking on her cellphone, pacing up and down under the tent. I make my way to her and when Singa sees his mother he screams out for her, I watch Nhlelo drop her cellphone and running towards us. She takes Singa from me and hugs him tightly while crying.

"Oh my baby, oh thank you God," she must have been scared when she realized that her son was missing.

"I'm okay mommy," little man says and his mother holds him tighter.

"That's too tight mom, I can't breathe," Singabakhe says and I smile.

"I'm sorry boy, I was just so worried when your friends came here saying they can't find you," She wipes her tears.

"Where were you?" Her son explains everything to her and when he's done she stands up and attacks me with a hug,

she just made my whole entire year. I'm never washing this top.

"Thank you so much for bringing him home. He doesn't know his way around Mzumbe," she lets me go and I'm still trying to wrap my head around the fact that the woman who stole my heart at first glance just hugged me like that.

"Please come in for a glass of juice or water or whiskey whichever you prefer," she says meekly and I shake my head.

If I stick around her then I'll melt into liquid, no woman has ever affected me this way.

"I'm okay, I need to get home," I say and she smiles, holding out her hand.

Nhlelozenkosi is beautiful, perfect.

"Thank you uhm...I didn't catch your name," she says embarrassed.

"Sgora," the frown on her face makes me want to laugh.

"I'm pretty sure that's not in your ID," I look down and take off my cap.

"My mother named me Ntuthuko, Ntuthuko Buthelezi,"

"That's more like it. Since you can't stay can you atleast come to my brothers homecoming tomorrow,"

I have to go to Durban tomorrow to drop off my product but I can't disappoint this beautiful woman.

"I will come but I'll be very late," I say.

"Better late than never,"

"Okay then,"

"Thank you once again, I'll see you tomorrow," she says then takes Singa's hand. "Lets go find my phone and call your uncle to tell him they can come back because you're home safe,"

"Bye Malume," little man says, waving good-bye.

"Bye ntwana and don't play far from home tomorrow,"

"I'm not letting him out of my sight," Nhlelo ruffles his head and Singa giggles.

Tonight I will sleep like a baby.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 09

MAWANDE DUMA

I just arrived at The Ngidi homestead and it's buzzing with people. Expensive cars with different registrations are parked inside and outside their yard. They must be Msebe and Nhlelo's friends because we don't have such in our village.

The beautifully decorated tent is occupied by well dressed ladies and gents, some of our village elders are on the tables as well. MaMokwena went beyond and above for her son's homecoming, but I would have too because it has been so long since he set foot in his home. Where his umbilical cord was buried.

I greet people I know as I make my way to the entrance, I can't just sit down and fold my arms like a visitor. That's not how I was taught so I will go in and see where they need help.

I walk inside the house and gasp for air, it's absolutely breathtaking. MaMokwena's house is built in a modern way and it is definitely the most beautiful in our village, I should have known that the interior would match the outside.

They didn't get rid of the two rondavels but rather made changes to better suit the beautiful main house. Everything about this home is exceptional, kudos to the person that designed it.

I greet the two ladies in the kitchen busy finishing with the salads and ask if I can help with anything. They tell me I can just wash the few utensils so the kitchen can be neat.

"Oh my God," someone says as I open the tap to fill the sink with water for the dishes. I turn and it's Nhlelo looking as beautiful as always.

"Hi," I greet her.

"Mawande, hey, you look so gorgeous babe damn!" She says and I blush looking down. I'm not used to getting compliments.

"Not as beautiful as you," I say and she laughs.

"Stop it, you are definitely best dressed. Why didn't we think to wear our Zulu attire?" She says sounding disappointed in her lack of thinking on time.

I thought since this is a homecoming for a Zulu guy who hasn't been home in years I should just put on some Zulu spice to my outfit. I'm wearing a yellow flare dress that's above the knee with a beautiful Zulu beaded body necklace, headgear and bracelets. I paired my outfit with gold sandals and a little bag for my phone. I'm going to take a lot of pictures, away from my aunt and her daughters eyes so they don't see and confiscate it.

"Thank you Nhlelo," A little boy appears from behind her naked with maMokwena on his heels too. I guess that's the grandson she's always talking about.

"Nhlelozenkosi please prepare Singa. I tried but he is not listening," she says to her daughter, not noticing me standing here.

Nhlelo rolls her eyes and takes her son with her.

"Ahhh Mawande, is that you?" maMokwena asks and I just giggle.

"It's me ma,"

"Thank you for coming sisi and you look good, like a Zulu princess," I'm smiling. Someone calls for her in the other room.

"Oh Jehovah, the chaos that's in my house will make me faint," I agree, people are everywhere.

"Mawande please take this shirt to Msebe's rondavel, he will find it in there when he comes back from fetching his other friends in Port Shepstone. They couldn't find their way here," she says, handing me a just ironed white shirt.

"No problem mama, which one is it?" I ask.

"The one next to the Jojo tank sisi and please mind his door, close it softly," I nod and walk out of the house, careful with Msebe's shirt.

The door of the rondavel is closed, I push it open and turn to take my time closing it. I don't know why it has to be treated like a lady but I will do as maMokwena said to avoid the door falling or something.

"What the hell?" I turn and my eyes land on a very naked Msebe, I mean naked naked. Everything is displayed before my eyes. I run back to the door but I stupidly push it hard and when I try to pull the handle to open the door it refuses.

"We are locked in," he says and I close my eyes, with my back to him.

"I am very sorry. Your mom told me to bring the shirt in here, she said you were out. I would have knocked if I knew you were in here, I'm truly sorry," I say hurriedly.

I am so embarrassed, I didn't imagine my first time seeing a naked man to be this way. I've been fantasizing about Msebe but this is just so awkward.

"It's okay, she thought I was still out. I came back a few minutes ago," I just want to be out of this room.

"You can turn now," he says and I shake my head.

"No, I've seen enough," He chortles.

Why isn't he mad? A stranger just saw him bare in his personal space.

"Not to sound cocky or anything but woman would pay big bucks to see me naked," he says and I smile because I would too if he decided to showcase himself.

"But I understand the awkwardness, you didn't ask for this show. I'm decent now so you can stop starrng at the door," he says and I heave a deep sigh before turning. He's wearing his boxers, standing next to the door that leads to the bathroom.

"I'm sorry too, I shouldn't have walked out of the bathroom naked when I heard my door open," he can't apologize for being in his room.

"I brought this," I hold out his shirt and he walks towards me and takes it.

"Thank you,"

"It's a pleasure," I say and turn to leave.

I wish I could unsee what I saw, not because it wasn't beautiful because it was. I just want it gone because of the thoughts I'm having right now, inappropriate thoughts of him I mean.

"It's locked, we have to call someone to come and open from outside. I'll call my sister, you can sit down while we wait," he says, pointing to the two seater couch that's facing a big TV and a sound bar.

"I know you from somewhere right?" he asks as I settle on the couch.

"Yes, my name is Mawande, Nhlelo introduced us at the supermarket. The day you wanted sparkling water," I say with a smile and he laughs.

"You probably thought I am a snob," he says and I shake my head.

"Of course not, you didn't know," He's looking at me intensely and it's a little uncomfortable because I'm not sure what's going on in his head.

"You look beautiful," he says and my pulse leaps, I thank God that I'm not light skinned because I would have turned red right now.

"Uhm thank you," it comes out in an almost whisper.

Msebe clears his throat, "let me call Nhlelo to come open for you," he says, reaching for his phone on top of the bed. "I don't know why my mother hasn't fixed this door," he murmurs, placing the phone on his ear.

This is not a typical homecoming where you slaughter an animal and the people eat, drink and leave. They had a program and an MC, speeches were given and in between we served light meals so people don't go hungry. They even hired a local traditional dancing group that gave a beautiful performance.

Msebe just gave a beautiful speech, thanking everyone for coming to celebrate his return. He gave a special thanks to his mother for being supportive and being his biggest motivation. He appreciated his sister for being there for their mother in the five years he was working on his career abroad. It was really emotional, I personally got touched when they all shared a hug while crying. I craved that sense of belonging, I craved their love and bond.

I'm helping to take the main meal to the tent first and I bump into my aunt and Ndondo walking in. They look over the top with those silly outfits, the daughter even looks better. My aunt is the worst of the duo, she's wearing a ridiculously big hat, the kind one would wear to Durban July or events like it. They walk in between the tables, making their way to maMokwena and her children at their table. They came late on purpose, they wanted to make a grand entrance and that's achieved because all eyes are on them. I serve the people sitting at the first table and walk back to the house to get more plates. When I get back Nobantu and Ndondo are sitting down with their

sun glasses still on, atleast someone has already given them plates. The only people who need food are the Ngidi's, I serve Msebeyelanga first then his mom and sister.

Everyone ate and the plates and cutleries have been washed, the village woman made sure MaMokwena's house is neat before going out there for the festivities. Nhlelo asked me to help her distribute alcohol to the guests and what I'm looking at in this bedroom is shocking. My aunt doesn't even stock this much for the tavern. Three of her cousins are helping us and in no time we are done and the people are happy.

Now that there's no more work left I don't know where to sit, I don't have friends and that sucks. Nhlelo can't babysit me because she has to attend to other guests. I spot the ladies that work at the salon and sigh in relief, I didn't want to sit alone like a freak. I sit next to them and greet, they respond but pay no more attention to me. They are dancing to the beat that the DJ is playing and drinking free alcohol. My heart jumps for joy when I see Sgora walking in with a plastic in his hand, I didn't know he was coming through. I quickly get on my feet and rush to him.

"Mawande," he says, with his eyes wondering around. I laugh shaking my head.

"She's attending to some guests," he looks at me with a frown.

"Who?" I roll my eyes.

Now he wants to play stupid.

It's clear that he's looking around for Nhlelozenkosi, I can tell that he likes her. I'm sure a lot of woman have given him an attitude at the

supermarket and he has never asked me about any of them, or even showed up at their homes.

"Malume!" Singa, Nhlelo's son comes running towards Sgora and I'm left with a raised eyebrow. He is squatting to be his height and the little boy hugs him like they are best buddies. How do they even know each other?

"Ntwana, how are you? I hope you didn't give your mother a scare today," Singa laughs.

"I told you I won't be letting him out of my sight," the mother says and I'm confused further.

"Yes, you did MaHlomuka," haibo!

What am I missing?

"I'm glad you made it Ntuthuko,"

Claps once!

When did they get here?

"I brought something for Singabakhe, I hope you don't mind," he says nervously and Nhlelo shakes her head.

"It's okay,"

"What is it Malume?" the little boy asks excitedly. Sgora is such a big softie shame, just look at him.

Sgora hands Singa the plastic and he takes out a car set and goes insane.

"And we say Singa..." his mother says.

"Thank you ntwana," the little champ says before running off with his new toys.

"You just earned a place in his heart, he's obsessed with cars," Sgora has a lot of explaining to do. He went from not knowing anything

about Nhlelozenkosi yesterday evening but now he's bringing toys for her son and they are talking like old friends.

"Let me go get you a plate of food and some drinks, which alcoholic beverage do you prefer?" -Nhlelo.

"Ugologo MaHlomuka," he says, failing to look at her in the eye. It's like he's a high school boy falling in love for the very first time.

"I'll be right back. Mawande, you still don't want anything to drink?" She asks.

"Let's start with two dumpies of the weakest cider," I say and she walks away laughing. I've drunk alcohol before but it has been a while, I don't want to get drunk and embarrass myself.

"Explain please," I say and only then does he move his eyes from Nhlelo.

"Where are we sitting?" He asks, dodging the question. I'm not letting him off the hook that easily.

I ended up asking Nhlelo for more alcohol because for some reason I couldn't stand watching Msebe dancing with that ugly woman. Except she wasn't ugly but drop dead gorgeous with a beautifully sculptured body. I have never been so envious of someone in my life, she's having moments with a man I've been day dreaming about since he walked into the store to buy sparkling water.

I tried destructing myself by looking at Sgora and Singa busy on his tablet, the little boy made them play games and watch some cartoons on YouTube.

He told me what happened yesterday after he dropped me off and now I understand why Singa likes him. Truth be told Sgora has a big beautiful heart, I pray that Nhlelo reciprocates his feelings should he decide to tell her. I don't know his life story but he deserves some

happiness and it looks like he has found it in his crushes son, hopefully the mother joins the train too.

"Mawande, are you good," Sgora asks as I attempt to stand up from my chair.

I don't think I'm okay, my head is spinning a little. I just need some fresh air away from everyone.

"Yeah, I'm good. I just need to use the bathroom," he nods and looks back at his best friend Singabakhe.

I take a deep breath to compose myself then start walking towards the back of the rondavels. It's an empty veld and their neighbors are a distance away, so I have all the privacy I need. I balance my back against Msebe's rondavel and close my eyes as the early evening breeze hits my face.

I suddenly feel something rising from my stomach, my mouth is filled with saliva and I know I'm about to throw up. Oh did I really have more than I could stomach? All because of a man that doesn't even rate me. I bend down and start throwing up, I take out the food I ate and the alcohol I consumed. When I stop vomiting I start coughing violently, why did I do this to myself?

"Hey, are you okay?" Msebe appears fixing his belt. This day cannot get any worse, I saw him naked earlier on and now he finds me throwing up because I'm unable to handle my alcohol. Another round of throw up comes and I bend down to let it all out, he's behind me in a few seconds. Holding my straight back cornrows back so I don't mess them up, to say I am embarrassed would be an understatement. He will remember me as the girl who threw up behind his rondavel, I need to leave Mzumbe ASAP!

I get up, wiping my mouth and he's looking at me with worry.

"You better now?" He asks, tilting his head to one side.

"I don't know, my head is spinning," he heaves a deep sigh.

"Come lay down for like an hour and you'll wake up feeling much better," he says and I narrow my eyes.

"It's a party Msebe, I can't be sleeping when everyone is having fun," I argue and he presses his lips into a thin line.

"Mawande, do you want to black out in front of everyone and be the talk of Mzumbe?" He knows my name?

The butterflies in my stomach go a tad crazy when he takes my hand.

"Do you or you'd rather sleep a little and feel better before coming back to join the party?" I nod vigorously.

He chuckles lightly, "What are you agreeing to?" He has the most perfect smile, charming the pants off me.

"Sleep," he leads us to his rondavel and I'm following like a sheep.

I'm standing by the couch watching him remove the extra pillows on his bed then opening the covers.

"Go and rinse your mouth in the bathroom," he orders and I don't say anything but move to his adjoining bathroom. It's just a shower, a toilet and basin. I open the tap and rinse my mouth before walking out. He's standing next to his bed holding a bottle of sparkling water to me. I laugh and he gives me a lopsided smile, sparkling water is now our private joke. I gulp down half of the bottle and I'll admit that it tastes ridiculous.

"It will help calm your stomach," he's the sparkling water expert.

"Thank you,"

"Come," he says and I don't wait for him to ask me twice. I stop in front of him and he helps remove my crossbody bag then kneels

down to take off my shoes. He's such a handsome gentleman, I cannot find fault. Oh, except for the fact that he was dancing with that beautiful woman.

"You will wake up feeling so much better," he says as I get under the covers then bends down, my heart is thudding against my chest thinking he's going to kiss me but he was just reaching for something on the floor. I'm so stupid, just because I'm attracted to him doesn't mean he feels the same way. I saw the woman he was dancing with, I'm not anywhere near being his type. I should just bury this stupid crush I have on him because it will only hurt me in the end. Sgora and I are under the spell of the Ngidi siblings.

"Msebe, please tell Hlelo to inform Ntuthuko that I'm resting. If he doesn't know where I am then he will burn Mzumbe to the ground," I say giggling and he nods and walks out of the room.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 10.

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MAWANDE DUMA

My eyes open and I notice that this isn't my room, the paint on my bedroom wall is peeling off and my mattress is lumpy. I quickly sit up straight and realize that I'm still in Msebe's bed and the room is lit. Oh my God it's morning already? He promised to wake me up in an hour and now it's morning. How did I even sleep throughout? I am always awake before 4 am no matter what. Msebe is sleeping on the couch, he looks uncomfortable and I instantly feel bad for taking over his bed. He must be annoyed with me for real, from seeing him naked, finding me vomiting and now taking over his bed. I'm sure he

didn't have to deal with people like me overseas, I'm not representing Mzumbe well at all.

Msebeyelanga shifts then groans, making me freeze on the bed. I watch him rub sleep off his eyes and push the blanket down, he turns and our eyes lock but I quickly look away. He will think I am a freak that stares at people while they are sleeping.

"Morning," he says with a groggy voice.

I clear my throat, "Good morning," he gets up from the couch and I steal a glance only to find him in a boxer and socks.

"Would you like some coffee? I know I need one," he says, stretching his arms dramatically.

"Why didn't you wake me up yesterday?" I ask and he chuckles shaking his head.

"Trust me I tried but you didn't want to hear anything, you even pulled up the covers to avoid my face. It's like you were sleeping for the first time in a million years," he says and that's almost the truth. I haven't slept throughout or until the sun is shining in a very long time.

"So coffee and breakfast?" He asks and my heart drops into my stomach.

Shit! Shit! Shit!

I didn't make breakfast for my aunt and the twins, she's going to kill me for sleeping out. I quickly climb off the bed and look for my shoes with tears already burning my eyes. Today I'm going to pay dearly.

"Hey, Mawande, calm down," is he joking me right now?

"I need to get home Msebe, my aunt must be going out of her mind right now," I say, struggling to put on my shoes.

"Okay, okay. Let me give you something to change at least," he says, already going to the chest of drawers. He is taller and bigger than me, how will I fit into his clothes.

"It's okay, I just need to get home," I finally manage to clip my shoes. I grab my bag and this time I unlock the door and pull gently without accidentally locking us inside.

"Mawande..." I don't even wait to hear what he has to say to me. My mind is already thinking of what my aunt is going to do to me for not sleeping at home.

I thank my ancestors when I walk out and no one is on sight. I don't want to be seen coming out of a man's rondavel, villagers will start gossiping and spreading false information.

I am literally sprinting home with tears streaming down my face, my aunt is a very vile person and I'm scared of what is going to happen to me. She will not allow me to go anywhere again, I'll just be confined between the house and the supermarket. I shouldn't have drunk alcohol, I got sick because of it and ended up in Msebe's bed. I will never mention sleeping in his rondavel to my aunt because she will freak out and definitely drag me to the doctor to check if I'm pregnant. She has already made it clear that she will throw me out if I fell pregnant under her roof. As if I would be stupid to bring a baby into my miserable life, I can barely stand up for myself why would I bring an innocent life to this pain?

I get home and wipe my tears before taking a deep breath. I will tell the truth and omit the part of sleeping on a man's bed. Hopefully God will touch her heart and she will understand and leave it at that, but she will need to have a heart first so I'm screwed. I'll just take my punishment like a big girl and move on from this whole thing. I knock

on the kitchen door and Ndondo is the one that opens, she's still wearing her pyjamas and gown.

"And the prodigal daughter returns," she says with a raised eyebrow and I want to shit my pants. Her comment might make aunt Nobantu blow up even more.

"I can explain," she chuckles.

"Mama!" Oh Lord have mercy.

"Ndondoloza," my aunt responds.

"Come to the door," I allow my tears to fall, shit is about to hit the fan.

"What's wrong?" She asks then appears from behind her daughter.

"Get inside tikiline," she grabs my arm and pulls me inside. "Do you want people to see that you slept out? You want them to question my parenting?" She's furious.

I'm shaking my head no.

"Aunty, I'm sorry," I'm rubbing my hands together.

"Where did you sleep?" She asks, folding the sleeves of her night shirt. I'm about to get a beating of my life.

"I slept at MaMokwena's house. I got sick yesterday so Nhlelo took me to bed to sleep it off for an hour but I slept throughout. I swear I only woke up about 20 minutes ago,"

Ndondoloza huffs, can she just stop!

"Princess, please bring my whip," I close my eyes. It's been so long since she hit me with that thing, my skin is already burning by just imagining the lashes eating through me.

"Can you just chill out ma," we all turn and find Qophelo standing next to the vegetable rack with a bottle of beer in his hand.

"I also didn't sleep at home and you did not turn super saiyan on me with whips and shit. Leave Mawande alone," He says and takes a sip.

"Oh, so you want mama to let her bad behavior go unpunished?" Ndondoloza is the devil's toe nail. Her twin brother laughs.

"If you beat Mawande then you should beat your princess too," he says.

Sgora is protecting me even when he's not here. Whatever he said to Qophelo after beating him must have been scary, because before the beating he would have been the one running to get the whip.

"What did Ndondo do?" Their mother asks, with her hands resting on her waist.

"She was playing house with her boyfriend in La Lucia last weekend and lying to you about being with Londeka," he says and my aunt blinks rapidly.

"Go to bed Qophelo, you are drunk," aunt Nobantu says angrily.

"Mawande, go to your room," He says to me and I look at my aunt for confirmation.

"If you dare touch her I swear I'll get high and walk around Mzumbe announcing it to everyone who cares to listen," mother and daughter gasp in shock. Sgora must have really dealt with him more than I thought. He's literally going against his mom.

"Go take a bath and come back to cook," she says hurriedly.

I go to my bedroom to take my toiletries and head to the bathroom to refresh.

I need to find a way to get money and buy something really special for Sgora, he needs to know how grateful I am for having him in my life. Him handling Qophelo for trying to rape me has saved me from my aunt's wrath. He is a good man and I will always keep him in my

prayers, God really needs to give him something he has always longed for in his life and multiply it.

I'm done taking a bath in no time and hurry back to my room to put on a dress and head to the kitchen to start with the pots. Thank God my aunt and her evil spawn aren't in here. I notice a tray of oxtail in the sink, I guess that's what they want me to prepare.

"Cook that with steamed bread and vegetables," my aunt says, walking in with papers in her hand.

"Any Vegetables or you want something in particular?" I ask with my eyes cast down.

"Pumpkin, creamy spinach, beetroot, potato salad and chakalaka," she says and I nod my understanding.

"Okay aunty,"

"Qophelo will not always be around to save you with his threats, you'll slip up and I will be there to put you back in line," she says in a voice that sends chills down my spine.

"I'm sorry aunty," I'm fiddling with the dry dish cloth.

She clicks her tongue, "I would punish you by refusing to take you to school but I'll be accused of being the devil," I'm no longer putting my future in her hands. I have already applied online at three universities, Wits, University of Pretoria and University of Cape Town. I have great marks and I know I have a chance to make it to at least one of them.

"I got you application forms from University of KwaZulu-Natal and Durban University of Technology. Fill them in and give me the necessary documents so I can go submit on Tuesday," she says.

I am really shocked that she's agreeing to take me to school but I won't cancel my personal plans or tell her about them.

This woman has turned on me before and I don't want to find myself at her mercy once again. I need to be self sufficient if I want to make it out of Mzambe and free from her claws.

"Thank you so much aunt Nobantu, I really appreciate it," she clicks her tongue and leaves me in the kitchen to play chef for her and her brats.

NHLELOZENKOSI NGIDI

I'm grateful for my non alcohol drinking cousins for helping us clean around before they left for their respective homes yesterday. My brothers homecoming ceremony was a success, everyone had a great time and I'm just hoping that my father's spirit is pleased now that his only son is back home. My mom walks into my bedroom with Msebeyelanga behind her, they are laughing at something she probably said. Seeing my queen so happy pumps my heart with all the peace in the world.

"Oh thank you brother," I say, taking a cup of coffee from Msebe.

My mother gets in bed next to me and Msebe sits at our feet. This reminds me of when we were kids, on weekends we would wake up and run to our parents bedroom just to talk about what we would like to do and how our week went. We grew up in such a warm, loving and tight-knit home.

"Is Mawande still asleep?" I shouldn't have forced her to drink alcohol or maybe I should not have given her more than the two she initially asked for.

"Asleep where?" maMokwena asks, darting between me and her son.

"She slept in Msebe's rondavel yesterday," I say and my mom is shocked.

"Don't put it like that Nhlelo," he explains everything to our mom and only then does she calm down.

"You didn't try anything with her right? She's a good girl Msebe don't corrupt her please," Mama says to her son with a raised eyebrow.

"Of course not! You didn't raise me that way and have you seen her boyfriend? Do you want him to rearrange my handsome face?"

"She has a boyfriend? Who?" Mama asks surprised.

"The guy that brought back Singa. She told me to tell Nhlelo to inform him that she's sleeping because he'd burn Mzumba down if he couldn't find her," he says and I laugh.

"I also thought they were dating because of the message I was told to deliver, but it turns out they are not. He said Mawande is like a sister to him," Ntuthuko was quick to correct me. I would have sworn in that moment that his life depended on me knowing that Mawande is nothing more than just his sister. He explained it to me in three different ways.

"Any mother would be blessed to have a daughter in-law like Mawande," -MaMokwena.

"Yeah, she's a sweetheart," I say and look at her only to find her eyes fixed on Msebe like her previous statement was aimed at him. My brother didn't even catch that, he is busy on his phone.

"Papa, go and wake up Mawande so I can make her something to eat before taking her home. I need to apologize to Nobantu," mama says.

"No need, she fled my room a while ago," my brother says.

"Bathong! You're not a gentleman, how could you allow her to leave without us going with her to explain what happened? Nobantu must be shouting at her for something she didn't do on purpose. I need to

call her and apologize," she says, placing her cup of coffee on the pedestal then climbing off the bed.

My door opens and my son walks in rubbing off sleep from his eyes. He sleeps with my mom because she allows him to use the tablet until he falls asleep and I refuse. Mama spoils Singa and it's going to be worse because we will be around for a while. My boss agreed for me to work from home and I'm grateful because I want to spend time with my family.

My son is five and I don't want him missing school so I've organized for him to attend a good pre-school in Port Shepstone while we are home. There's a guy who drives schoolers from here and he will be transporting him too.

"Mommy," he says, climbing on my bed and snuggling closer to me.

There's no one I love in this world more than this little man.

"Uncle Msebe is not invisible baby,"

I'm trying to instill discipline and manners from a young age. The world doesn't need more unruly people.

"I'm sorry, good morning," he says shyly and his uncle chuckles.

"Morning buddy, did you sleep well?"

"Yes, I did thank you," Urgh! I'm raising a good one here.

"Mommy," he wants something and he's not gonna rest until I give it to him.

"Yes, Singabakhe,"

He yawns, "Please prepare me and take me to ntwana. He promised to teach me how to shoot a slingshot today and get a bird to eat," I narrow my eyes.

"Malume Ntuthuko?" I ask and he nods vigorously.

My son is warm and loving but he has never been drawn to a stranger this way,

he's not even this free and close with his father.

"Singa, we don't know him like that baby," I say and he shakes his head in disagreement.

"I know him mommy, he is my ntwana," Aow Jesu!

I look at my brother and he shrugs his shoulders.

"Baby, I know you like him but he's not your age mate. He has grown up stuff to do," I say and he starts crying, I mean heart piecing cry. What did that guy do to my son?

"Singabakhe no!" That only makes him cry even more.

"He must really like him mos," Msebe says, shocked.

"I don't even know the guy well enough to allow him near my child like this," I say.

I would be irresponsible for allowing him near someone we've only known for a day.

"Don't leave him alone with Singa, stick around while they shoot birds," he says with a chuckle.

"You're his uncle, you teach him how to shoot a sling," I say, looking at my son crying like I'm dead.

"He obviously wants to spend time with his ntwana Nhlelo, take him and stick around to make sure he is good. Kids get attached to people who have pure souls sis, let him go and maybe he will teach Singa things about this village we don't have a clue about," I roll my eyes.

"He's only five. Plus I don't even know where Ntuthuko lives," Singabakhe has now increased the volume of his cry because I'm not paying attention to him.

"Go and ask Mawande where he lives," I'm not sure about this. "His cry is not a melody Nhlelozenkosi, just take him to the dude," he says and his phone rings.

"I got to take this," he gets off the bed and walks out of my room.

"Stop crying or you'll never see him again," just like that he stops and wipes his tears with the back of his hand.

Ntuthuko what have you given to my son?

"When did you start crying for things Singabakhe?" I refuse to raise a brat, he won't resort to crying when he doesn't get his way.

"I'm sorry mommy," he says with an angelic voice that melts my heart.

"Malume Ntuthuko and mommy need to have a conversation first, then after agreeing on things you two can spend time together okay?" He nods vigorously.

He's even smiling.

"Today?" He asks and I heave a sigh.

"No, I will go talk to him tomorrow. Mommy is tired today," he sulks but I won't do things because I'm afraid that he will throw a fit, I am the parent and he is the child.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 11

SPONSORED BY ANONYMOUS

NTUTHUKO BUTHELEZI

I'm sitting at the back of the supermarket thinking about Nhlelozenkosi, I have been having sleepless nights thinking about that

woman. My heart is longing for her to be my woman but I'm afraid to tell her because I'm scared of rejection. She is a beautiful woman and obviously out of my league but I can love, protect and provide for the both of them in a way they have never experienced before.

I have been with a lot of woman in my life time, both old and young but non on them ever made me feel what MaHlomuka has made me feel without even trying. I know in my heart of hearts that she was made to be my wife, my biggest fear is her not realizing it. She has surely been with men who are handsome, educated and rich and that will make it harder for me to win her over because I look like a downgrade. I will not change even a hair on my head just so she can fall for me, I want her to love the real Ntuthuko and with time help him grow and improve as a man.

"Ntuthuko," her angelic voice calls out for me and I snap out of my thoughts and look around but she's not on sight.

See what I mean? She has taken over my entire existence, I'm even hearing her voice.

"Ntuthuko!" I quickly get on my feet because I really heard her, I'm not imagining it. She appears from the corner looking gorgeous, her body drives me and Shenge down there insane. I can imagine myself worshipping every inch of it and making her fall harder for me by simply sexing her like a God.

"MaHlomuka, unjani?" I take off my cap.

The respect I have for this lady is beyond what I know.

"I'm well thanks, yourself?" I quickly make my way to her, to help her walk on the uneven rocky ground so she doesn't fall in those high heels.

"I'm fine thanks," feeling her skin against mine is sending fire all over my body.

If holding her hand makes me feel this way then what will happen when I have her in my arms in our birthday suits?

"Why are you sitting here?" She asks, looking around.

"I have my lunch this side, it's peaceful," I say and she looks at the bottle of amahewu next to the crate of beer I was sitting on.

"That's your lunch?" She asks, laughing.

"Yeah," just look at how beautiful she is, I'm melting in her presence.

"You really need to get married so that your wife can make you proper lunch," I can already imagine her bare foot and pregnant in my kitchen.

"My future wife hasn't realized that she's in love with me, it will probably take me a while to convince her but we will get there eventually," I say with a huge grin on my face and she's nodding with her eyes twinkling.

"I hope she won't have a problem with your relationship with Singabakhe," she says.

I shake my head, "Trust me, she will be grateful to God that Singa and I have a great relationship," I watch her flip her long hair back, It's like I'm watching in slow motion.

Ngisemathandweni mina!

"Good because I'm actually here to talk about him. My son cried like I died yesterday morning and today before leaving for school he asked if he'll be seeing you today," my heart swells with happiness, "Ntuthuko what have you done with my son?" she asks and I chuckle lightly.

"I swear I didn't do anything, we just click," she heaves a heavy sigh.

"I see that, I just wanted to find out if you are open to having a relationship with him. I don't want you to feel forced or anything," she says.

"No, MaHlomuka, I would love to have a relationship with Singabakhe. He's a great kid and I'd be honored to be a part of his life," she smiles, nodding her head.

"I hope you don't mind me tagging along until you guys get the hang of things, he can be too much at times," even better.

God is this you working overtime for me?

"I don't mind that MaHlomuka,"

It will make me very happy to spend time with the both of them. She will get to know me and hopefully that will make things easier for when I finally tell her my feelings.

"We will be in Mzumbe for a long while, he started school in Port Shepstone today. He will surely want to tell you about it so I was hoping we could exchange numbers so you guys can communicate during the week, and spend some time on weekends," she says and I'm already holding out my phone for her to punch in her number.

The universe is making things so easy for me, the stars are aligning. She laughs and reaches for it, dials her number and a few seconds later her phone rings.

"I have your number too," she says handing it back.

"I will call you guys when I knock off," I say.

"Singa will be happy to hear from you but he will still make noise about seeing you and shooting birds with a slingshot," MaHlomuka says and I'm thrown into a fit of laughter.

"We can do that this Saturday," I quickly suggest.

"Thank you so much Ntuthuko. This is the first time my son wants to be this close to someone, I don't want to deny him that," I'm thankful that she's not trying to.

"I promise you won't regret it,"

She heaves a sigh, "I have to go back to work," she says and I frown.

"Cape Town?"

"Oh no, I'll be working from home. I turned my mother's dining table to my office," relief floods through me.

"I didn't even buy you something to drink," I feel bad.

"It's okay, you didn't know I was coming," even so, she can't just leave without eating or drinking anything. I take out clorets chewing gum from my pocket, tear the box and pop one gum in my mouth before offering her the other one. She's suppressing her laughter.

"You are very kind, thank you Ntuthuko," She puts the gum in her mouth.

"We will talk on the phone then," she says.

"I'll see you off," I say holding out my hand to help her balance as we walk.

The girls who work in the salon are sitting outside when we appear, all eyes are on us and I know they will be broadcasting the news of seeing me with Nhlelozenkosi with an added spice. People here live on other people's business, but you can't really blame them coz there's nothing much to do than to keep track of what the next person does. We get to her car and I open the door for her.

"Enjoy the rest of the day," I say.

"Thanks, you too," she looks behind me and waves, I turn and find Mawande waving back.

I watch her car until it disappears then walk back inside the yard. My lunch break is over, I'll just go get my bottle of amahewu from the back then go check if they are still good in the tavern.

Nhlelo showing up here has improved my mood. I'm overjoyed because I get to spend more time with her and Singabakhe, the two people who have made me excited about this life thing. I've been alone for so long now and the idea of living for other people gets my blood running. I don't really pray but I pray that God atleast gives me this one thing and I promise I'll take care of them.

Mawande is leaning against the door with her arms folded across her chest, I don't like that smirk on her face.

"Nhlelozenkosi and Ntuthuko sitting in the tree, K I S S I N G," she sings and I'm blushing.

"Don't be stupid," she laughs.

"You are so smitten, I never thought I'd live to see Batista be a softie," I never knew I had this side to me either but I'm loving every minute of it.

"I will be spending time with her and Singabakhe," I say excitedly.

"When are you planning on telling her that you like her?" She asks.

I honestly don't want to rush things but I want her so badly at the same time.

"Let's wait for her to get to know the real me first, if I tell her prematurely then she will think I'm only being close to her son to gain points and that's not the reason. I genuinely care for Singabakhe, him liking me back is an added bonus to make his mom fall for me," she's nodding her understanding.

"I hope she reciprocates your feelings, you deserve love,"

"Wena, anjani amashidi ka Msebe?" I ask and she looks away embarrassed.

"What are you talking about?"

I roll my eyes, "I saw how you couldn't take your eyes off him on Saturday. Your face turned sour each time he danced with that lady, you like him. I can tell because I look at his sister the same way," I put it to her and she heaves a sigh.

"MaMokwena's children are witches, they came here to turn our worlds up side down," I totally agree with her, but I'd feed myself Nhlelo's korobela.

NDONDOLOZA DLADLA

I drove to Durban this morning to meet up with Dedani, he called me yesterday telling me to come because we have an appointment with a real estate agent.

He got me a well paying job at a government department and now he's getting me an apartment to live in. Show me a man who invests in his woman's future if he doesn't love her or see her as a part of his forever. He has his flaws but I appreciate that he keeps his promises and tries to show me with each passing day that I mean a lot to him.

My mom approves of our relationship because Dedani loves me and he will be able to take care of me. That's all she wants for me, love and stability because she has always provided those for me. So it wouldn't make sense to her if I left her comfort to go suffer all in the name of love. I also wouldn't have fallen for a poor man, I saw how man who have no money treat woman. I wasn't going to live a life

my mother managed to escape, it would've been an insult to her and the fight she put up to better mine and Qophelo's life.

"We are here," Dedani says, sounding excited. He kills his engine and I look outside the window, this place looks really nice. I think I'm gonna like it here.

"Come, let's go see our place," I love how he included himself. He opens his door and climbs out and I do the same. I left my mother's car at the mall where we had breakfast before driving up here.

"I love it already," I say clapping.

He's getting me an apartment in Port Zimbali, how can I not get excited?

I mean I get to be closer to my man and be far from the small suffocating Mzumbe, I'll only miss my mom but at least she frequents Durban.

"I'm glad we are doing this baby," -Dedani.

I'm happy he showed up to my house and I was forced to tell my mom about him and our relationship. His courage led us here and I'll give him endless blow jobs because of it.

"I love you so much Mkhize," he kisses my knuckles.

"Come, the real estate agent is waiting," he leads us inside and we find an Indian woman talking on the phone but quickly ends it when she sees us. We exchange pleasantries and Dedani introduces us before the lady gives us a tour. This is my place and I'm in love with it, my mom is going to lose her mind when I tell her about it.

"So the deposit is R20000, monthly rent is R16500 and the lease is for 12 months," who spends that much on a woman he doesn't love?

"You want it babe?" I nod vigorously.

"Where do I make a payment?" That's my man y'all! He makes things happen and that's on period. I leave them talking about the finances and walk around my own damn place.

Dedani is happy that I'm happy with the place, he cannot wait to have me move here. I'll be moving at the end of the month and he'll make funds available for me to buy furniture. I'm not sleeping tonight, I'll be on Pinterest looking for ideas. He tells me that I can only start work mid month and that's okay with me, for as long as I have a job to go to. Everything of mine is coming along and I hope and pray that I keep this winning streak.

My boyfriend drops me off at the mall where I left my mom's car and promises to come to Mzumbe some time this week. He feels bad that we cannot do lunch because he has a meeting to rush to, but like a true gentleman he sends something to my account and tells me to go buy myself something nice then sit down to eat. We kiss goodbye and I climb and go to the waiting car.

I should just call Londeka and take her out then tell her about the apartment and my new job. She tells me that she just got back from an interview that went very bad and she wants plenty alcohol to numb her. I get out of the car and go inside the mall to get us food and drinks, I'll cheer my best friend up.

I get to her apartment building and take out everything I bought from the boot, I even bought her a handbag to lift her mood, Londeka is a collector so she will definitely appreciate it. I take the elevator to her floor and when the doors ping open I step out of the car and into the hallway. How does she survive living with immature university kids here? Its a Monday and yet they are drunk and making noise. Londeka has to get a job and move out ASAP! I don't greet these

rowdy kids as I pass by them to my friends door, I knock once then walk in but Immediately stop in my tracks. There's a guy in his boxers in here, what the actual fuck? I hope it's not her boyfriend, this guy is a low life! I'm sure there are hair mites in those dreadlocks because wow.

"Hey, are you looking for Londeka?" He asks and I nod my head.

Lord please don't let him snatch my handbag.

"She's in her bedroom," I push the door with my foot and hurry to her bedroom. She's laying on her bed, facing the ceiling with a quart of black label beer in her hand. Bathong! What has come over this one?

"Friend, you could have drank Savanna and I would have understood but black label? Are you trying to ruin your reputation and mine?" I ask, shocked out of my mind.

"Some of us can't afford to buy champagne and ice tropez Ndondoloza," she says bitterly and I roll my eyes.

"Good thing I brought quality alcohol and food, get up," I say and she groans before sitting up straight.

"I just want to get drunk because nothing seems to be working out for me," she sounds over it.

"What happened?" I hand her the plastic and she takes out a bottle of Hennessy and opens it, she takes a sip and wrinkles her face as it burns her throat.

"I had a shitty interview, I was really crossing fingers to get that job Ndondo. Things are tough, I don't know how I'm going to pay rent and food next week," she says and I frown.

"I thought your stepfather was going to help until you got a job," I say and she chuckles.

"Well, my mom called and told me to move back home because he now has to send more money to his own children," she says and my heart bleeds for her.

"Oh babe, I'm so sorry," she gets off the bed, she's still wearing her black suit pants and a white formal shirt.

"Let me get glasses and ice," she says.

I remember Bob Marley in the kitchen.

"Londeka, who's the guy in your flat?" I ask and she shrugs her shoulders.

"Emihle moved out, she got a job in Richards Bay. I had to find her replacement ASAP, I can't afford rent alone, now I can't even afford my share of it," this girl is my best friend, she helped me when we were still in school. She graduated cum laude, we all thought she'd be the first to get a job after we completed our qualification.

"I will pay your share this month and give you something for rent," I say and she gasps in shock.

"Ndondo, are you serious?" She asks with tears glistening in her eyes.

"You're my best friend Londeka," she attacks me with a hug.

"I appreciate you so much babe," she's the reason why I managed to pass in record time. Without her help I would have failed and failed until I dropped out.

"Go get those glasses," she lets go of me and exits to the kitchen. I take off my shoes and throw myself on the bed. I don't think I'll be driving back to Mzumbe today, I should just call my mom and Dedani to inform them.

The door opens and she walks back in. "What are you doing in Durban anyway?" She asks and I heave a sigh. Londeka won't like this one bit.

"I came to look at places, I'm moving back this side," I say and she narrows her eyes.

"How did you convince Nobantu to allow you back here without a job?" She asks with a chuckle.

"I have a job babe," she jumps around excitedly.

One thing about Londeka, she's a genuine friend. She will always celebrate the next person no matter what she's going through.

"Where? when?"

"Don't be mad at me please, I can explain," she narrows her eyes.

"What foolish thing have you done now?" she's bored and ready to chop off my head.

"Dedani and I are back together. He got me this job at eThekweni metropolitan municipality and he just leased an apartment for me in Zimbali port," I say quickly and she throws her head back.

"Fuck Ndongoloza! He is married," she's mad at me.

"It's just for her contacts babe, I swear he doesn't love her. As soon as he gets what he wants from her they'll divorce," she laughs and not because she's amused.

"You are smart when it comes to everything else, but your brain is shoved up your ass when you deal with this man. Why are you allowing him to do this to you?" She says, I'm sure fire is coming out of her ears.

"Londeka, please don't do this. Let's just get drunk and pass out," she's shaking her head.

"I'll just say this then we can drink," I nod.

"Dedani is a powerful and successful politician and businessman. What contacts could he possibly want from a mere nurse from Eastern Cape? He married the woman he loves and he's keeping you

on the side as his play thing. He's never going to leave that woman for you, I'm not saying this to hurt you but what kind of best friend will I be if I just let you give your life to him when you're not getting anything in return?" What does she mean nothing in return? I have a permanent job waiting for me and an expensive apartment to move into.

"I don't expect anyone to understand and trust Dedani, he's my man and he loves me. I appreciate your concern Londeka but I promise everything is okay," she's starring at me like I'm a big headed fool.

"I'll wait with a bucket of water after he has shown you flames. That's my job as a best friend, to wipe off tears I told you were coming," she's protective of me that's why I'm not taking this to heart.

"I got you a handbag," I say, trying to change the topic.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 12

MSEBEYELANGA NGIDI

Home sweet home, man it feels really great to be back here with my family. I have missed them so much and now that I'm here with them my heart is full and at peace. I don't think I will be taking the job offer in Italy, I don't want to be away from my family any more. I have been working in the middle east for the past 5years. I am a world renowned architect, my work speaks for itself, that's why I had three different offers before I even put in my resignation letter with my previous employer. One in Italy, London and Japan. Out of the three offers I am leaning towards Italy because it's such a beautiful country and their buildings and structures are to die for. It's basically heaven for a guy like me.

It has always been a dream of mine to be an architect and to work around the world and that I did for the past couple of years, but there's no place like home. I think I should start my own thing, be a consultant while working towards bigger things. I need to start drafting to see if it can work here in Africa. At least the Italians are not putting any pressure on me for an answer, they want me so bad but they don't want to look desperate, even though they are. So I have time to decide on whether I'm doing my own thing or joining them.

I am standing on top of a tree stump looking around my father's yard. I built his wife a beautiful house, something they never thought they'd see in this village. I doubt there's even anything like it in the rich suburbs of Durban. My mom still thanks me to this day for building her a dream home. I remember the photos Nhlelo sent me of the party she threw to show people her brand new home her son who is overseas built her. My mom is not a proud woman but like any other parent she will brag about us and our achievements.

She deserves to because that woman worked hard for this family, she wanted us to have everything so she gave up everything she had for that to happen.

My phone vibrates violently in my pocket, I reach for it and heave a sigh when I see who is calling me. We haven't spoken in two weeks and that's not on me, so I'm wondering why she is calling me after she made it clear that me moving away from Dubai is not going to work for her. She said absence doesn't make the heart grow fonder in her books. My heart is still aching from that, I don't think I'll get over being dumped like that. I was left wondering if it was ever real with her.

I clear my throat and answer, "Sauda," my voice is very calm.

"That's uhm, weird. You never call me by my name, unless you're mad at me," is she being for real right now? She dumped me, I can't be calling her with pet names.

"I guess it is," she chuckles nervously.

She's a confident woman so it's surprising that she can be nervous at all. I mean I dated her for two and a half years and there's never been a moment where she's unsure of something.

"I'm having lunch at our favorite restaurant, I thought about you and decided to check in," she can't do this to me, I'm trying to accept that we are done. Her calling to check up on me will only set me back, I was ready to marry this girl.

"I appreciate the call," I say, mopping my face with the palm of my hand.

"So how did your homecoming go?" She asks and I close my eyes.

"It was great, my friends from varsity came and those I worked with in Cape Town before Dubai also showed up. My relatives from Lesotho came too, it was amazing,"

This call is torturing my heart, talking to her like this is hurting my soul. She dumped me like I meant nothing to her, like I was just another pair of shoes she forgot after she bought another pair.

"I'll be home in Kenya month end. I was thinking of coming down there to see you as well," Sauda can't do this to me, I am a man with feelings. I can't turn them on and off because one minute she's saying all the right things and the next she's dumping me because I decided to come home.

"You dumped me, remember?"

She heaves a sigh, "Langa, please don't be like this," I'm shaking my head as if she can see me.

"I'm trying to accept that we are over, you can't be calling and confusing me. You made your decision so please give me space to process it and move on,"

"Baby..."

I quickly interject, "Sauda no," I say and hang up.

My ego and heart got broken so I don't need this from her at all. I get off the stump and sit down because my head is spinning a little. I was already planning a future with her as Mrs. Ngidi and when she dumped me everything came crumbling down. Now she wants to baby me like nothing happened, it doesn't work that way.

"Msebe, drive me to the supermarket. I want to get a few things," my mother says, walking out of the main house.

"I can rush there to get them for you ma, just write me a list," she shakes her head, looking in her handbag.

"No, I want to go see if Mawande is okay," she says and I close my eyes.

Damnit!

I was planning to go and check on her, I mean I am partly to blame for her not sleeping at home. Sunday I was tired and hungover, yesterday I had to go into town. She must think I am a douchebag.

"Let me get my car keys then," I get up and rush inside to get my keys and wallet.

I know I'll be the one paying for whatever maMokwena is going to buy. I find her in the front seat, strapping her safety belt. I hop in the driver's side and start the engine.

"Mawande is a very beautiful girl isn't she?"

What a random question, but she is a very gorgeous girl. A beauty that needs no make-up enhancements, I used to brag about Zulu women to my Arabic colleagues. Mawande would be the perfect face to show them as proof of my claims.

"Yes, she is mama," her smile reaches her ears, she's satisfied with my answer.

"Whoever becomes her mother in law will be blessed, she's humble and hardworking," I chuckle.

"Are you trying to play cupid with me and Mawande?" I ask, glancing at her.

"You're 33 years old Msebe, you need to settle down and give me grandkids. I don't want to join my husband before I welcome my daughter in law, I deserve that," she says and I want to roll my eyes. African mothers.

"Ma, Mawande is a beautiful woman but I don't see her like that," I don't want a relationship, I mean I got dumped not so long ago by a woman I truly thought was going to be mine forever. I was planning on introducing her to my family at my homecoming.

"She's not your type?" She asks and I lick my lower lip.

"I don't really have a type ma, a person's character attracts me to them," I explain and I can tell that I just burst her bubble.

"She's an amazing girl, Msebeyelanga. You'd be blessed to have her as a wife, a mother knows best," I heave a sigh.

I can't jump into another relationship before I completely get over Sauda. I would hurt Mawande or any other woman.

I stop the car outside the business center and climb out of the car, rounding it to go open the door for my mother. She gets out and we walk hand in hand to the supermarket. We greet the girls sitting outside the salon, they are ogling me with no shame.

Mawande is laughing at the top of her lungs with Ntuthuko when we walk into the store, that stops when her eyes land on me. She's always so shy and embarrassed in my presence.

We greet them and they respond, Mawande is avoiding my eyes and for some reason there's a smirk on Ntuthuko's face as he looks at Mawande.

"I called your aunt and apologized, she understood. I hope everything is okay at home," mama says and Mawande nods.

"All is well ma, thank you," she's soft spoken.

"I'm happy to hear that my baby," My mom is really fond of her, just look at that smile.

"I came to get a few things. Ntuthuko, come help me while you tell me what you have done to my grandson. We sleep and wake up to your name in my house," the guy laughs nervously as they walk away.

MaMokwena is not smart, it's clear that she wants to leave me alone with Mawande. Ngidi's wife is on a serious mission.

"Thank you for helping during my homecoming, I truly appreciate it. And I am really sorry for not waking you up when I said I would," I start off but she still won't look at me in the eyes.

I blow out a sigh, "Mawande look at me," I say and she takes a deep breath then looks up at me.

"You're the one who saw me naked but I can look at you," I say and she closes her eyes quickly.

"I'm really sorry ab..." I cut in.

"You've said that before and I said it's fine, you didn't do that on purpose," She finally looks at me for more than a few seconds.

"You can stop feeling embarrassed now and be able to look and have a conversation with me," she chuckles.

"I'll try," I guess my nakedness is imprinted in her memory forever.

"Are you enjoying being home?" She asks with a smile, a genuine smile, I can't help but return one.

"It feels really great, I don't even know how to explain it," She's nodding her understanding.

"Atleast someone is happy to be in Mzumbe," I frown at her statement.

"You're not happy here?" Sadness and pain flash across her eyes.

"I don't want to be here, there's absolutely nothing for me here Msebe. I need a new environment where I can build myself from scratch. To drive my own life," she says and I can tell that there are layers to this woman. I'm curious to know more about her now.

"To which direction?" I ask with narrowed eyes.

"Going to university, getting my qualification and living a life I know I deserve and helping others to do the same," she has ambitions.

It's great that she sees beyond this village and being a shopkeeper.

"What do you want to study?" I ask and she smiles.

"Law," that's impressive.

"Every career choice has a story, what's yours?" I ask and the same pain and sadness I saw in her eyes earlier on comes back. What's her story?

"Mawande, do we have instant yeast?" Ntuthuko asks from behind me, disturbing our conversation.

"Uhm, let me check," Mawande says.

NOBANTU DLADLA

I'm driving home from Margate with a big surprise for my daughter. I was initially buying this for her to get Qophelo in line but I'm now doing this because she has made me so proud. Ndongoloza is a smart girl just like her mother, she managed to get herself a very powerful and wealthy boyfriend who got her a job. Yesterday they went to look at places and my daughter called and told me he leased an apartment for her in Port Zimbali, everyone knows that nothing comes cheap that side. I want her to have this car to be a complete lady who works at a big municipality and lives in a private estate.

The car Ndongoloza used to drive to Durban yesterday is back. She decided to stay with Londeka because she was down, my angel wanted to cheer up her best friend. I press the hooter once I have parked and the twins appear with widened eyes, I climb out the car and start dancing for them. They are both confused, waiting for me to tell them what's going on.

"That's a sleek car," Qophelo whistles.

"You bought another car ma?" Ndongoloza asks with a smile.

"Yes I did baby," she's going to faint when I give the keys to her.

"It's beautiful, but not really your style," that's true, I love big cars that's why I have a Ford Ranger and an Audi Q7 to my name.

"It's not my baby, but it will look good on you," I say, holding out the key to her.

"No fuckin way!" She says, jumping up and down. My heart is overjoyed by seeing my only princess so happy.

"Ma, thank you so much," she attacks me with a hug.

"You're welcome my love," she lets go of me and goes to check out her new car.

Her excitement is everything.

"Oh my God! I can't believe it. I have a Mercedes y'all!" -Ndondoloza.

Nothing brings joy to a mother like seeing her child so happy.

"No! I'm the one who can't believe this," Qophelo says bitterly.

"This isn't about you but your sister," I say and he huffs out a humourless laugh.

I'm not ready to deal with his tantrums.

"You have two children Nobantu, you can't buy a car for one only," I raise an eyebrow.

"Why would I buy you a car Qophelo?" I ask, folding my arms across my chest.

"For the same reason you decided to buy one for Ndondo," I roll my eyes.

"My daughter got a job, she's making me proud by being a good and focused child. Wena you are a cocaine addict, your actions will send me to an early grave. Why would I reward bad behavior?" I say, with a straight face.

It's killing me to do this but he needs to fall back in line and stop using drugs.

"Mom, you are testing me right now," he's angry, he's even shaking.

"Qophelo, get a hold of yourself," Ndongoloza says, getting out of her car.

"Shut up wena! Would you get a hold of yourself if she bought me a car and nothing for you?" He sneers and my daughter heaves a sigh.

"If you want a car and everything I provide then you'll have to go to rehab and stay clean," I tell him my terms and conditions.

He clicks his tongue and walks away angrily, he will calm down and realize that he needs to stop using cocaine.

"Maybe you shouldn't have bought this for me mommy," I shake my head.

"Don't allow him to make you feel bad baby, you deserve it because you're a great child," she smiles.

Qophelo comes out of the house holding his jacket, he presses something and my Audi opens, he's not using my car.

"Give me my keys," I try to grab him but he pushes me so hard I fall flat on the ground. To say I am shocked would be an understatement.

"Qophelo! Have you lost your mind?" His sister screams at him but he doesn't even care.

"Do you want to find yourself down too?" He asks Ndongoloza.

My daughter helps me up as Qophelo gets in the car and reverses out.

"Are you okay ma?" She asks.

"I'm okay my baby, don't you want to test drive your new car?" I ask.

I won't allow Qophelo to ruin this moment for his deserving sister.

"Let's drive to Port Shepstone to eat," she suggests and I nod my head.

"Let's go and change then," she goes to close the door then lock the car.

I'm shaken by Qophelo's reaction, I didn't expect him to put his hands on me like that. The old me would have ran to the dealership tomorrow to get him a car so things can go back to normal, but he needs to learn a lesson; he needs to be good to me so I can be good to him. I love my son and I'm doing this because I want him to turn out alright. I won't live forever and I can't expect his twin sister to look after a grown man.

My phone rings as I put on my shoes, It's Sqalo, he probably wants to know how everything went.

"My love," I answer.

"MaDladla wami," I smile, wishing he was here to hold me and tell me everything will be okay.

"He freaked out Sqalo, he even pushed me to the ground," he gasps in shock.

"That brat! I would have knocked out his teeth for laying a hand on you. How dare he? After everything you've ever done for him?" Sqalo cares for me deeply and hearing what my son did just made him catch fire.

"He even drove out with my Audi, I don't know where he went to," I say.

"You cancelled the card you gave him right?" He asks.

That's the first thing I did when I got to town this morning.

"Yes, he has nothing but he's not aware yet," I answer.

"I hope he runs out of patrol in the middle of nowhere and takes that time to think about his life," I heave a sigh.

"I just hope this whole thing makes him think about his life and realize that he can do better than being a slave to drugs,"

I sacrificed a lot of things to be able to give my children a great life and what my son is doing is killing me, it's like a slap in the face.

"Everything is going to be okay sweetheart," he assures me and I wipe my tears.

"I hope so baba,"

"I will call you again later,"

"Ndondoloza and I are going to town to eat, she's test driving her car," I inform him.

"You girls should have fun,"

"Thanks baba,"

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 13

SPONSORED BY ANONYMOUS

DEDANI MKHIZE

"You're wasting my time now Mkhize, you know the terms and conditions. You agreed to them and now it's time to deliver," Madlabantu says over the phone.

I heave a sigh, "I was going to call you later on the day. The girl and I found an apartment where she's going to stay," I tell him and he laughs.

"Now you're talking, when should I come to do my job on the house?" He asks.

"She's moving in month end, you can come any day before then," I just want this whole thing moving.

"I will start preparing my things then, I will call to inform you of when I'm coming," he says. Five years moved so quickly, I was still breathing then boom! It's time to deliver my end of the deal. Trust me I don't mind because this man has helped me a great deal, Ndongoloza is a small price to pay.

"Okay then, I'll wait to hear from you," I say and we conclude our call.

I find Nomahlubi standing over the stove cooking, this woman is beautiful. When I look at her I see everything I never thought I'd have. She's smart, grounded and loving. I have never loved anyone the way I love my wife. When I met her early last year in East London my world was turned up side down, my heart has never lost its rhythm like that. I got into a car accident while we were attending a conference, I was rushed to the hospital where she worked. Little did I know I was going to meet the love of my life, the mother of my many many future children. When she agreed to marry me I was the happiest man on earth, I didn't understand my luck but I was very grateful for it.

I hate that I'm cheating on Hlubi with Ndongoloza but she's a means to an end. She's in my life only to keep it being this soft and amazing, my wealth and status would vanish without her in the picture. It has never been love with her, I was ordered to find a woman who will love me with all her heart and dance to my tune. I didn't even have to try hard, Ndongoloza literally fell on my lap and I smelled her innocence. That was five years ago, I was in a club with the gents and

she came with a group of girls. They were all new in Durban, first year university girls. A friend of mine invited them out to keep us company, when they arrived in our booth at the club she fell on my lap trying to make it to her seat. I spend all these years making sure that she believes that I am the only man who will ever love her. I groomed her to be what I want, she had to be perfect for the job she's about to do.

"Must you always stare at me like that baby?" My Xhosa Queen says.

"God, I love you so much," I say and she looks down blushing.

"Haibo! Mkhize, do you want me to lead you upstairs and ride you until you release every drop inside of me?" That's what I love about my wife, she has all the shades a man like me needs. She can go from Mary mother of Jesus to the wildest cat I've ever been with.

"Sthandwa sami, I have a meeting to get to and you know once we start we don't stop," she giggles, my favorite sound in the whole world.

She clears her throat, "So I'm going to stay the whole day hot and bothered?" She asks in a sultry voice.

"I'll be home as soon as I can, I promise mkami," She bites her lower lip on purpose.

"Hlubi!" I warn and she laughs out loud.

She knows that it affects me, my dick is already asking to be freed and buried deep inside of her.

"Sit down my love, I'm almost done with breakfast," she says and I place my phone on the island and pull out a high chair to sit down.

"I am thinking of sending you to Johannesburg, a shopping trip in Sandton," I say and she smiles widely.

"Hai Mkhize, are you serious?" She's giving me that shy smile.

"I'll book your flight and hotel then send something to your account," she claps excitedly. I live to make her happy.

"I'm married to the most amazing man ever!" She rounds the island and kisses me passionately on the lips.

"Can I take Qaqamba with me?" That's her little sister. I like that she's only friends with her siblings.

"What the Queen wants, the Queen gets. Should I book her a flight from East London to Johannesburg or you want her to come here and leave together?" I ask and she narrows her eyes, thinking about it.

"Let's not waste money, fly her to Johannesburg and we will meet there," she says. I also love this about her, she's not wasteful. She takes care of our resources, even though she knows money is not a problem.

"I love you baby," I say and she pecks my lips, her eyes are twinkling.

"I love you too Mkhize," We have such a beautiful marriage and life.

"She's going to be so excited," she's a lover of things so I can imagine.

I came to sign a contract with a big company. They gave me a tender to offer security and cleaning services for one of their new buildings. I need to send something to Madlabantu to show my appreciation, without him all of this wouldn't have been possible. We have been working together for 10 straight years and it has been amazing, all the promises that were made have been fulfilled thus far. I just need to deliver this one thing and continue this fruitful relationship.

I climb in my car and my phone starts ringing, I'm damn sure that it's Ndongolozza. She has been blowing up my phone since yesterday morning. I'm fuckin mad at her for what she did on Monday. She came to Durban to look at places with me, she was supposed to

leave immediately after shopping and eating like I told her to. But she decided to go visit her forward friend, Londeka isn't my favorite person. She's too observant and I'm afraid that one day she will succeed in turning Ndongolo against me. I have to find a way to get her out of Ndongoloza's life permanently. I've worked too hard to lose everything because of that girl.

"What do you want?" I answer and she heaves a deep sigh.

"What have I done now Dedani?" I roll my eyes.

"I don't have time for this," I know never to do too much with this one. She might be easy to manipulate but I still shouldn't push too hard.

"Baby please," I smile, shaking my head.

I've never seen a gullible girl like this one, but man like myself are grateful for such airheads, we need them to get what we want out of life.

"You decided to sleep at your friend's place without talking to me about it. Ndongoloza I am your man, you don't tell me such things via text then ignore my calls when I try to contact you," she sniffs and I know she's crying. I'll be honest with myself and the universe, no woman loves me the way Ndongolo loves me, not even my wife.

"My love, I'm really sorry. Londeka needed me that day, she's going through so much," she says with a shaking voice.

"We have been doing so good and you just had to mess things up for a friend who's jealous of you," I click my tongue.

She's probably shaking on the other end of this phone call.

"I will do anything to show you how sorry I am baby please," she says and I smile.

I get off hearing her being so scared and desperate for my forgiveness.

"You've shown me countless times that you're not ready for this serious relationship. For five years you've been showing me but my love for you won't allow me to let go," I put the call on speaker and start the engine. I have to be at another meeting in 15 minutes.

"I made a mistake, I'm sorry. Tell me what you want me to do," that's my girl, always ready to dance to my tune.

"You know how much I love you and how I don't want anything to happen to you. Ndongoloza I am a jealous man and you don't consider this. If you did then you'd tell me your every move and ask if I'm comfortable with you doing it or not," I stop my car at the traffic lights.

"From today onwards I'll do just that," I honestly have to be the main speaker at this year's men's conference.

"I appreciate that," I say in a soft voice.

She has to believe that I'll not always be mad at her so she never runs to anyone else to talk about our business.

"My mom bought me a car yesterday, a Mercedes-Benz A45," She should have bought her sense but we are not there.

"Congratulations my baby, when are you taking me for a spin?" I ask and she giggles.

"Just tell me when you're free and I'll drive up there," She's excited now.

Her mood depends on mine and that's a great thing for me.

"I will angel. Let me call you later, I have to step into a meeting," I say quickly.

"Okay baby, have a great day. I love you," she says.

"Let me know of your movements so I can be calm,"

"I will,"

"Okay bye." I end the call and take a deep breath.

MAWANDE DUMA

I had a very long day at the supermarket because my heart has been so heavy. I can't believe that my aunt told me she doesn't have money to take me to school, but had money to buy Ndongoloza an expensive car. The price of that Mercedes would have paid for my education and I'd still have something left to live on while trying to get a job. Aunt Nobantu has hurt me in everyway possible but this one just broke my spirit, this woman hates me so much and this just proved it. She put her child's convenience before my needs, how does my education come second to her daughter driving an expensive car for bragging rights? She already has two cars, the twins have been driving them with no problems.

Mother and daughter have been driving everywhere in the new car, they want the villagers to see Ndongoloza being in the driver's seat of a brand new car. My aunt cannot live without bragging and showing off to her imaginary haters, that's how she was engineered. I got home from work and they weren't here, an sms came through my phone shortly after and I was told not to cook. That was a relief because I'm not in the mood to do anything, at this point dying doesn't seem like such a bad idea.

My legs are spread out on the couch, I'm watching a soap opera and I'm finding it interesting. I never watch TV, I'm always working at the

supermarket and when I'm home I have to take care of them. I'm enjoying this time to myself, no one is calling my name asking for this and that.

The kitchen door opens and laughter fills the house, I quickly sit properly and check if everything is in place. I don't want to be shouted at by Nobantu.

"Oh Mawande," Ndongoloza walks in with so many shopping bags and her mother follows with just as many.

I want to break down and cry, just look at how they are enjoying life with my inheritance.

Why are my parents letting these people continue like this? Why are they silent when their only daughter is suffering?

"Sanibonani," I greet instead.

I try by all means to never shed tears in front of them, I don't want to give them the satisfaction.

"We had to get Ndongoloza new clothes for work, she has to get there and look better than everyone in that office," everything is a competition with Nobantu, it's sad that her daughter is following in those footsteps.

"They won't know what hit them ma, I mean I'll be that straight from varsity girl with an expensive car and deadly fashion sense," they high five and settle down on the couch.

"Make sure to never trust any of them baby, they will all be jealous of you for having it all," I wonder if she will last in that office, my cousin is a spoilt brat. I don't see her surviving a 9 to 5, phela there's no Mawande to order around.

"Dedani has already advised me against making friends in the work place," the princess says.

"That's why I love that man for you, he has absolutely sense," she has been talking about her influential and rich future son-in-law for days now.

We are startled by things breaking in the kitchen, we all look at each other before standing up to go see what is happening. Qophelo is busy taking things out of the cupboard throwing them against the walls, we are all watching in shock.

"What has gotten into this child?" My aunt asks, with her hands placed on top of her head. I have never seen him out of control like this, he must be high.

"How dare you clean out my account Nobantu?" He asks, pointing a knife he just took out of the drawer at his mom.

This is a movie!

My aunt is blinking rapidly, "I will call the police on you Qophelo," she threatens and he starts laughing, an evil challenging laughter. He knows she's bluffing.

"You'll never bring that kind of attention to yourself dearest mother," this is the work of her hands.

"Q, please calm down. You're scaring me," Ndongoloza tries to use her powers as his half but it doesn't work. He throws her a dirty look.

"Shut the fuck up wena! You are living like a princess while I'm being cut off from my own right," for some reason I am very happy to see my aunt and her children at loggerheads.

"I told you to go to rehab if you want to be treated like my son again," Oh, this is about his addiction? If she thinks cutting him off is the best way to go about this, then she's stupid. He will retaliate and become her worst nightmare and I'm here for that.

"I'm going to show you who I am, you will regret ever treating me like a piece of shit mom," my aunt is scared AF but she's trying to keep a straight face.

Kushubile!

Qophelo walks away angrily, I hope he breaks more things. His bedroom door is slammed a few seconds later.

"I need to make a call," -Nobantu.

Is Qophelo going to be her mother's karma? I cannot wait for the next episode shame.

"Who are you calling ma?" The princess is just as shaken up.

"Go fit your clothes or something Ndongoloza," She snaps at her daughter and I want to laugh.

I'm woken up by loud banging on the door, my bedroom is the closest to the kitchen so it's louder to me than the others. Who could it be? Qophelo never left his room after threatening his mother. I check the time on my small phone and it's 17 minutes after 1 in the morning. I push off the covers and climb out of bed, I bump into my aunt and Ndongolo in the hallway. They look at me with questioning eyes and I shrug my shoulders, how am I supposed to know who it is. Where's Qophelo? He's the man of the house. He should be in the front ready to protect his mom and twin sister.

"Sis Nobantu!" A male voice calls out.

"Who are you and why are you banging on my door at this time?" My aunt asks with an attitude.

"I live near your business center, it's on fire," my eyes widen and my heart starts thumping against my chest.

What does he mean my parents building is on fire?

"What's all this noise?" Qophelo appears, rubbing sleep off his eyes.

"What do you mean?" Is Ndongoloza stupid? The man was clear enough.

"Fire is eating away the business center, everything is burning," the man outside the door says.

"Oh my God!" My aunt starts crying.

"We called the fire fighters but they haven't arrived,"

"Get my car keys so we can go," she says looking at me.

I rush to the lounge and grab the Ford keys and hurry back to the kitchen, the door is open and they've walked out. I lock the door and hurry behind them to the garage.

There's a dark cloud of smoke in the direction of the business center, we can see it from here. It's really on fire, my parents' hard work is burning to the ground for real. My aunt is crying like one of the twins is dead, you'd swear she knows the hardships my mom and dad faced to build up that place. She's just crying because one of her cash machines is going up in flames right before her eyes.

A part of me is happy at this realization, at least they won't benefit from my hard work. But I have to wonder what will happen to me now that I don't have a job to go to every morning.

"The witches of this village had to burn down my business because I bought my daughter a car," she says, crying hysterically. At least she's not driving, Ndongolo is the one on the wheel.

"People are really jealous," her daughter adds. They are a tag team.

Qophelo laughs, he is sitting in the back with me and the man who came to tell my aunt about the fire. I'm grateful that he's between me and my drug addict cousin, I don't want him near me.

"Good thing you're going away my baby, because next they'll send lightning to kill you for being a blessed child," haibo!

Nepotism and being blessed don't go hand in hand. Someone deserving missed out on this opportunity because Ndongoloza is sleeping with a man than can pay his way through everything.

"Look at these foolish people standing with folded arms. Why aren't they putting out the fire?" My aunt says as Ndongolo kills the engine.

This fire is huge, these people wouldn't have been able to do anything even if they wanted to.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 14

NOBANTU DLADLA

The money I made from the business center was a lot, especially the tavern then the supermarket. The villagers didn't go to town to do their groceries because they avoided paying transport fares. And we all know that nothing can separate South Africans and their alcohol.

Now everything is up in smoke and I'm so stressed. I just bought my daughter a car and my account is a little low at the moment. I never thought to continue paying insurance when I took over after Mawande's parents died. I thought nothing will happen to the business center since this is the village, but I was so wrong and now I have to cough out so much money to rebuild it all. Yes, I need that center standing once again.

I suspect that someone burned down my business because of jealousy, I mean how could they not when I've been pressing their necks. Firstly, I threw my children a graduation party they've never seen before and now I bought my baby girl an expensive car. This must have rubbed someone off the wrong way and they decided to start a fire to cut my income stream. But I am Nobantu Dladla, I am a phoenix. They will see my business standing again and realize that they will never bring me down, no matter how much they try.

My phone vibrates on top of the bed, relief floods through me when I see the caller ID. I have been waiting on this call the whole morning. I left him a text informing him of the tragedy that fell upon me, I couldn't call because he was in bed with his wife.

"Oh thank God my love," I answer.

He heaves a sigh, "I'm sorry baby, so everything is burnt down to the ground?" He asks and I nod my head.

"Everything baba, I am so stressed. It feels like my head is going to explode," I hope Sqalo has a solution to all of this.

"Do you want to rebuild it?" He asks.

I nod repeatedly as if he can see me. Besides needing the money it makes, I want to shut these village low lives up. I want them to see that I have money and I come back from everything that's thrown my way.

"Yes baba, it contributed to my pocket. I need it up and running again. Plus, it keeps Mawande in check," If she's not preoccupied then she'll start thinking about her parents and her inheritance, I can't have that.

"Speaking of Mawande, Her investments just paid last month," I narrow my eyes.

Why is he only telling me this?

My sister and her husband made sure to leave this child with a lot of money, they left businesses and investments with so many different companies. I am in charge of everything until I hand it over to her. That can only happen if she obtains a university qualification or gets married. We all know I'm not going to allow that to happen while I'm still alive. I'll benefit from this as much as I can so that when I die and they reach out to her my children will be set for life.

"Write two affidavits, one where Mawande makes a request to make funds available for rebuilding the business center as she is the manager. Another one from you supporting the claims as her trustee," he says and my heart jumps for joy. I'm calling my police contact as soon as I'm done talking to him.

"I knew you'll have a solution," I only get money from the businesses I run and the hefty monthly allowance that was meant to go to Mawande. At least I'm allowed to either increase or decrease it annually and it has never been decreased. Why would I do that to myself?

"Bring them to me as soon as possible so I can get the train moving," I never ask Sqalo how he does it, I just do what needs to be done on my side.

"Thank you so much bab'Shozi. I appreciate you coming through for me each time," I'm yet to do something big for this man to show him my appreciation. He is a man amongst men.

He clears his throat, "Nobantu,"

Haibo!

Why is he calling my name like a school principal?

"My love," I answer meekly.

"Can you at least tell me that you've managed to connect the dots," he says and I frown. What is he talking about now?

"I don't understand,"

He chuckles lightly, "Your son threatened you and a few hours later your buildings are on fire," he says and my heart stops beating for a second.

"Qophelo would never do that," I defend my son. He is mad at me yes but he wouldn't do this.

"I know it's hard to..."

I quickly interject, "What will he benefit from taking food out of his mouth?"

"Have you forgotten that you took food out of his mouth? Cancelled his card and bought his sister a car?" My heart is drumming. "He pushed you down like you meant nothing, what is a building? He wanted to hurt you as much as you hurt him," he adds and I allow my tears to fall.

"Let me call you later Sqalo," I hang up before he can say anything.

This is a bitter pill to swallow. Do I confront him or pretend like I'm not suspecting anything?

MAWANDE DUMA

A knock comes through the kitchen door as I switch off the stove. I just finished cooking supper and I wanted to go to my bedroom to watch documentaries on YouTube. Hopefully whoever is knocking won't require me to make drinks and snacks. I wipe my hands with a

dry dish cloth and go open the door, my heart skips a couple of beats and the butterflies in my stomach go a tad crazy.

"I need a plate of whatever it is you're cooking Mawande, Msebe's stomach even growled when we parked," maMokwena says after we exchange greetings. I laugh, avoiding her son's eyes.

"Good thing I made more, I will definitely dish up for you. Please bring back aunt Nobantu's Tupperware," I whisper the last part and she's thrown into a fit of laughter.

"You're such a silly girl. Anyway, I came to check on you and your aunt, I heard about the fire," she says and I shrug my shoulders.

"I am doing okay ma. My aunt has been in her bedroom since we came back from the scene earlier on," I say and only then do I remember my manners.

I stand to the side, "Please come in," They walk in the kitchen and pull out the high chairs then settle down.

"I will go get my aunt for you," I say and hurry to her bedroom.

I knock and she gives me permission to come in, I tell her that maMokwena is here to see her. She rolls her eyes and calls the sweet woman a gossipmonger before telling me to go give them something to drink as she changes. I get back to the kitchen and mom and son are having a casual conversation. I tell maMokwena that aunt Nobantu will be out soon then ask what they would like to drink. Msebe asks for a glass of water and his mom settles for a cup of tea, she asks me to leave the teabag in. I rinse a glass and pour bottled water for Msebe, Ndondo only drinks bottled water because she doesn't trust Mzumbe water. I hope she won't freak out when she realizes that one bottle is missing, she's a drama queen like that.

"Sanibonani," she's only coming out now, maMokwena is almost done with her tea.

She had to come out looking like the president's wife. I don't see why she had to change the dress she had on to wear high heels and suit pants.

"Oh Nobantu, we heard sisi. How are you?" This woman is genuine, she didn't come here to gather information so she can broadcast to the whole village.

My aunt chuckles, "I'm okay yazi. This just shocked me because I didn't expect it to happen. The business center will be up and running again, I just got off the phone with my insurance company," She says.

"I'm glad to hear that," -MaMokoena.

"Good thing you came with Msebe. I wanted to meet and have a conversation with him. I want to upgrade my house and I'd like him to work on it," She means my house, this belonged to my parents. I'm actually wrong, it belonged to my paternal grand parents. My father just inherited it because he was the only child too.

"That's nice mosadi, it's good to move with the times. My son will do a good job," Mrs. Ngidi says with a proud smile.

Aunt Nobantu was trash talking MaMokwena's house after the homecoming, now she wants to use the same person who designed her house. My aunt is a bitter leaf. I don't know anyone who is as jealous and competitive as my this woman. If only her heart was as beautiful as her face.

"Did you have anything in mind maka Qophelo?" Msebe asks and my aunt smiles.

"I want something that is out of this world, I have a few inspirations on my phone. You'll incorporate everything and give me a palace worthy of a Queen," she says excitedly.

The business center was burned to the ground, her focus should be on rebuilding it not redoing this house.

"Come to the lounge. Mawande, please give them refreshments again," my aunt says.

"I'm fine thanks," Msebe says without looking at me.

I'm sitting on the bench outside, listening to the birds chirping. For some reason they remind me of my mother and her angelic voice, that woman could sing. She once told me that she wanted to become a professional singer, but after she met my dad everything shifted. She said she didn't regret choosing my father and their life over that journey because it fulfilled her more than anything. I pray that I find a love like theirs, they were lovers, best friends and business partners. They did everything together and when one had to attend something on their own the other would sulk. They raised me with such warmth and hopefully one day I can be more than what they were to me for my children. More importantly, to live longer for them.

"What a view," I am startled.

It's Msebe, I swallow hard before taking a deep breath.

"It really is," I say, fanning my face with my hand. Msebeyelanga makes me so nervous, I honestly don't know how to get a hold of myself in his presence.

"Can I?" He asks, pointing to the space next to me.

"Please," he settles down.

I instantly feel a fire through my entire body when his arm brushes mine.

Oh Lord have mercy!

There's some awkward silence for a few seconds, I don't know what to say to him. I'm afraid I'll open my mouth and unintentionally tell him that he's my crush.

"Now that the supermarket is down what are your plans?" He asks and I heave a deep sigh. I've been thinking about this the whole day.

"I guess I'll just focus on getting funding and research more about the field of study I want to be in," I say, without looking at him.

"You said Law right ?" He asks and I nod.

I'm glad he still remembers the conversation we had.

"There are many bursaries out there Mawande, focus on getting company bursaries but apply for NSFAS too," he advises and I nod.

I want to apply for as many as possible.

"I'm going to do just that. I also want to find someone who is practicing and have them tell me about the field so I'm prepared you know," I say.

"Well, you're just in luck. A cousin of mine is coming to visit for a while and he happens to be a lawyer. He can tell you all about it and maybe hook you up with a bursary from his firm," he says, nudging me with his elbow.

"Are you serious?" This time I'm looking at him with a huge grin plastered across my face.

"Did you die?" He asks with a lopsided smile and I frown.

"Huh?"

"You looked at me so I'm asking if you died?" I chuckle nervously and look away but he cups my chin and makes me look at him again.

"I am not an ugly man Mawande so please look at me," I'm not looking at him because I'm scared he will see that I have feelings for him. He is definitely not ugly because his handsomeness gets me weak at the knees.

"Yes, you're not ugly Msebe," I agree to that visible fact.

"So why can't you look at me?" I lick my lower lip.

"I'm still embarrassed Msebe," I lie.

He is suppressing his laughter, "Am I the first man you've ever seen naked?" How do I admit that I am a 25 year old virgin?

"There's nothing wrong with that, it's impressive if you ask me," he's just saying that to make me feel better about myself.

I probably have cobwebs down there.

He gasps in shock and only then do I realize that I just said that out loud.

Can the ground open and swallow me whole, I am so embarrassed right now!

"I can definitely tell that you didn't mean to say that out loud," he says.

"Yeah," it comes out in a whisper.

He chuckles.

"Don't worry about it. Matters of your honeypot will stay between us," he drapes his arm over my shoulder and I swear this simple act intensifies my feelings for this guy.

Msebe is the first man to ever ignite a spark inside of me as an adult, it's a welcomed feeling but also scary as hell.

Scary because Msebe might not even see me as his type, he might just see a village girl who happens to be liked by his mom.

"Langooo," maMokwena calls out for her son. He slowly removes his arm and we both get up and find his mother smiling like a cheshire cat.

"I'm sorry to disturb you kids but we have to go now. I need to cook for miss independent Nhlelo and the unmarried Msebe," she's dropping bombs.

"Really ma?" Msebe is shaking his head.

"Did I lie?" They have such a beautiful relationship.

"I'll see you Mawande," he says and walks towards his mom who's waving me goodbye.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 15

NHLELOZENKOSI NGIDI

"Mommy can we please go," After God fear Ntuthuko and whatever he did to my son.

Singa was the first one to wake up then he woke my mom and asked her to give him a bath. He was dressed and ready to leave when he came to wake me from my beauty sleep. He even watched me take my bath, moisturize my skin and put on my clothes. He doesn't want to eat anything, he just wants to see himself at ntwana's place.

"I'm packing some food baby, be patient please," I don't want to inconvenience Ntuthuko, I know how demanding Singa can get.

"You'll find me in the car," he says and my mother laughs.

"Your grandson is something else mama,"

He's out the door, he won't even wait for Msebe to wake up and say goodbye. My brother even complained this whole week, he says he feels like Ntuthuko is slowly replacing him as an uncle.

"Hopefully this friendship between Ntuthuko and Singabakhe won't cause problems with that piece of shit," mama says vehemently and I heave a sigh. I know the next time Daluxolo calls to talk to his son, Singa will definitely tell him about Ntuthuko and he will blow a fuse.

"I can't keep my son away from someone he feels connected to, his child is even happier around Ntuthuko than him," my mom nods. I honestly don't know how I fell for that arrogant guy, he's everything I despise.

"I just want him to try his drama around me and watch me give it to him. Ke ngwanana wa mosotho nna, ke tla moruta hore ntja ene roballetswang kante," my father's wife says and I'm thrown into a fit of laughter.

"Mommy," Singa screams from outside and I roll my eyes.

"Just go before your rat starts crying Nhlelo," I take the food and my handbag before walking out of the house.

Singabakhe is sitting in the front, seat belt already strapped. He's pissed that I'm taking my sweet time when he just wants to find himself at his ntwana's place. I know Ntuthuko said we can come in the Morning but I honestly feel like it's too early to be at someone's house. I take the key from my son then start the engine and I notice Singa's face softening, I'm afraid Ntuthuko might replace me in my son's heart. He has never gotten excited over anyone, not even me.

Ntuthuko lives far from everyone else, I know village homesteads are at a stretch from each other but not like this. His yard is surrounded by a high wall, you'd swear he is guarding something very important.

This is uMzumbe's very own Alcatraz because wow! I park outside the yard and climb out then round to go open for Singa, I'll come get everything in a jiffy. I'm walking behind my son who's running towards the door, we don't even know if there's a dog here.

"Singa!" He can't just open the door without knocking. This child is embarrassing me, Jesus Christ!

Ntuthuko is lifting him like weights when I walk inside, my son is giggling. I can't help but smile, Singabakhe has always been a happy child but I've never seen this side of him. It looks like he has found something that he has been missing.

"Hey," I greet, looking around the house.

I wasn't expecting this at all, this place looks good. It's neat and decorated minimally. The kitchen and lounge are an open plan, he has wall units in the kitchen and a mirror fridge. The lounge is cute, it's an L-shaped couch with a glass coffee table in the middle, on top of a nice gray and black rug. The flat screen is mounted on the wall and the sound bar is on the TV stand with a picture of an old man next to it and a scent defuser.

"MaHlomuka, unjani?" No one has called me with my clan name but him and it's kind of nice.

"I'm good, what about you?" I ask as he places Singabakhe down.

"I'm great. Please take a sit," he says, pointing to the couch.

"Thank you. Ntuthuko you have a beautiful home," I compliment and he looks around like he hasn't realized this before.

"Thank you, I try to keep it nice," well he nailed it.

"Ntwana, let's go shoot birds," Ntuthuko laughs.

"I made breakfast, you have to eat first," I shouldn't have brought food then, but I just didn't want to inconvenience him.

"Okay," he's sulking but I'm happy to see that Ntuthuko isn't giving in to that, Singabakhe can be manipulative.

He clears his throat, "MaHlomuka, coffee or juice?" He asks, avoiding my eyes. Why is he suddenly shy?

"Coffee please, I need caffeine to kick start my day. Singa wouldn't even allow me a cup, I like it black and strong with three teaspoons of sugar," He nods his head and reaches for the remote to turn on the TV, he flips through the channels until he finds an animated movie.

"Yeiiii! Thank you ntwana," my son says, leaning back on the couch. If you want him to stay in one place then give him cartoons or animated movies.

"I'll be right back," he goes to the kitchen and I watch TV with my son.

I'm impressed with Ntuthuko, he made us a delicious English breakfast. The only thing that I fault is the eggs, he went hard with the salt but other than that I enjoyed the food. I was more impressed when he reprimanded Singabakhe for shoving food in his mouth so that he can finish quickly and they can go shoot birds. I can trust him to keep my son in line without fearing to loose points with him. Singa needs to know who's the adult and who's the kid.

The boys managed to shoot down two doves, Singabakhe is over the moon. Ntuthuko is really good with him, my baby has been laughing all morning. They have removed the feathers and opened the birds to take out the insides. I'm not a part of that drama, I'm sitting pretty on the camp chair watching them as they roast the doves over the fire

they made. I've been taking pictures and videos, my mom and brother have to see how joyous my boy is.

Ntuthuko is a clown, he came with a small portion of pap and tomato gravy so we can eat with the meat they roasted. This whole thing is very funny because these birds don't have meat, we are just forcing matters here. I just have a taste then go sit back down to allow them to finish their hilarious food.

"I will warm up the KFC I bought in town yesterday for lunch," he says and I offer him a lopsided smile. He really went all out for my son.

"Oh, so your meal didn't do the job?" I tease and he chuckles.

"It was just a play meal for Singa, MaHlomuka. I have to give you both a proper meal," Urgh! He is so sweet.

Whoever has a baby by this man will surely be blessed.

"I hear you, so you too are done playing hunters and chefs?" I ask.

"Yes, do you want to eat now?" He asks.

I look at my wrist watch and it's only 12:30.

"Let's eat at 1 pm," he nods.

"Ntwana, can I please watch something on Netflix," Singabakhe asks and Ntuthuko looks at me with narrowed eyes.

Shit! I should have brought his tablet.

"What channel is that MaHlomuka? I only watch soccer so I don't know these things," he says and I'm dead with laughter.

"Hawu mama, why are you laughing?"

I clear my throat, "I'm sorry, sorry. Netflix is not a DStv channel. It's a subscription based service," I explain.

"How do I get it for him?" I furrow my forehead.

"Ntuthuko no, you just lost your job because of the fire. You need to save everything you can," he chuckles.

"MaHlomuka, I am a man. I don't have one income stream. Tell me how do I get this Netflix for my ntwana,"

I heave a sigh, "You firstly have to get wifi and then pay the subscription,"

"Tell me how much it all costs and I'll send you the money to help me set it up," I nod.

"Watch something on DStv baby, malume Ntuthuko will only get Netflix next week," I say to Singabakhe and he runs inside the house. It won't be long till he's out and asking Ntuthuko to play something else with him.

"He says he's enjoying his new school but not the transport that takes him there, did he tell you this?" He asks and I nod.

"He did, but that's the only scholar transport around here. I can't drive him myself because I'm expected to be on a virtual meeting at the same time as he's supposed to be in school,"

He pulls up his nike tracksuit and settles on the rock next to me, "I can help with that if you don't mind,"

"How?"

"Well I don't have a car but I have a license and I'm a good driver. I can take him to school in the morning and pick him up later on. That's if you're comfortable with that," I gasp in shock.

"You wouldn't mind?"

He shakes his head, "Not at all, I would really love to help out," relief floods through me.

"Thank you so much Ntuthuko. He has to be at school at 7:30 am and be picked up at 2:30pm,"

"I got it,"

"He's going to be so excited," I say with a smile.

"Don't tell him yet, I want to see his face when I show up on Monday to get him," yeah, I'll get the camera ready.

NOBANTU DLADLA

I will get the money to rebuild the business center next week but the contractor I found told me we can't start building immediately. He gave me a reason but I wasn't really paying attention to what he was saying. He will be coming in due time to clear the debris and assess the foundations and the standing walls. I'm looking forward to rebuilding so these villagers can be left without anything to gossip about.

"Mama," Ndondo walks into my bedroom.

"Yes baby," she has a worried expression on her face. What's going on?

"Uhm, did you remove my handbag from the lounge?" She asks and I shake my head.

"No, you can't find it?" She nods vigorously.

"Yes, it's not where I left it. I checked my bedroom and the car too and it's not there," tears are glistening in her eyes.

"Don't cry my baby, I will help you look,"

She's shaking my head, "Where is Mawande, maybe she removed it,"
I climb off the bed.

"Mawande went to Port Shepstone in the morning, she's visiting her parents' grave,"

We both exit my bedroom and she shows me where she kept it, I look everywhere in the lounge and there's nothing. We go and look in her bedroom and it's not there either. That's strange, a handbag cannot just disappear in the house.

"Mama Dedani bought me that bag, he will be disappointed to know that I lost something that cost him an arm and leg," she cries.

"Let's ask your brother, maybe he saw it," she leaves me in her room, rushing to Qophelo's room to ask. I am following behind her.

My son is not in his bedroom and it's a mess, dirty clothes and shoes everywhere. He didn't even make his bed. He told Mawande to stop cleaning his room or washing his clothes because he will do it himself. But look at the mess he's leaving in here, bloody spoilt brat!

"What if he stole my bag mama? He knows he can make a lot by selling it," Ndondo says and my heart stops for a second. He asked me for money yesterday and I refused, he might have stolen his twin sisters bag.

"Check if all the car keys are in the drawer," I say and she hurries to check.

"The Audi keys aren't there, he took my bag ma," she says, walking back in Qophelo's room. My knees are wobbly so I settle down on his bed.

Ndondoloza's phone chimes in the pocket of her gown, she takes it out and a second later she lets out a scream.

I'm startled, "What? What's wrong?" My poor heart is thumping against my chest.

"Someone just withdrew R3000 from my account in Durban," she says.

"Let me check where the Audi is," I say, hurrying to get my phone so I can check on the app.

"Where is he mama?" Ndongoloza asks from behind me.

"Wait," I close my eyes when I see the location of my car.

"It's your brother, he took your bag and he just withdrew your money," I say in a low voice.

"That bastard! I'm going to show him crazy when he gets back," Ndongoloza says then leaves my room.

Why is Qophelo doing this to me? Why is he allowing cocaine to control him like this? Now I believe Sqalo when he said Qophelo could have been the one who burned down my business center. If I allow him to go on like this then he will destroy me, I need to cut him down before it's too late. I don't want to do this but I can't sit back and watch, he needs tough love and I'm giving him exactly that.

I dial Sqalo and it rings until voicemail, I really need him right now. I place my phone on the bed and it rings after a few minutes.

"Sqalo," I answer.

"I told you that I'm attending my wife's family gathering," I know, but I need him more right now.

"You know I wouldn't be calling if it wasn't important baba," I respond.

He heaves a deep sigh, "What's going on?"

I explain everything to him and he chuckles.

"The last time we had a conversation about Qophelo you hung up the phone on me," I close my eyes.

"I'm really sorry about that, but I need you to call your police contact and tell them to arrest him for taking my car and stealing Ndongolozza's bag and money," I know this is extreme but it needs to be done.

"Where is he right now? I'll make the call,"

"I'll text you his location,"

"You won't change your mind angithi?" He asks.

I take a deep breath, "I won't my love,"

I didn't want things to get to this point but desperate times calls for desperate measures.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 16

NTUTHUKO BUTHELEZI

It's 6 in the morning and I'm locking my door, this time I'm not going to pick up Mawande but Singabakhe. I thank God that Nhlelozenkosi didn't refuse my offer to drive the little man to school. I enjoy spending time with him and the fact that I'll be seeing the woman I love everyday sweetens the deal. We had such a great time on Saturday, they even left my house around 7pm. She couldn't stop thanking me for showing Singa a great time the old school way. I wish I could thank her for making me feel the way I do, but I'm not ready to make my feelings known to her. I'm scared she'll pull away

from me and take my ntwana with, loosing them both would leave a huge void in my heart.

I need to go see Mawande when I get back from Port Shepstone. I just want to find out how everything is going at home since the business center burned down. I know emotions are running high so I want to make sure that no one is taking their frustrations out on her. I will not hesitate to put whoever in their place, that girl is the closest thing I have to a sibling. I can't wait for next year so she can leave Mzumbe to go and chase her dreams, she deserves more than this village and those toxic people.

My phone rings in the pocket of my tracksuit, maybe it's Nhlelozenkosi asking me if I'm awake. I roll my eyes when I see who it is, I'm in no mood to talk to her. I don't even understand why she's calling my phone, I made it clear that we cannot continue with whatever we were doing. She knew from the beginning that I don't want a relationship, I just wanted someone to take care of my needs. I made sure that she benefited from it too, I mean I gave her money to support her children.

I get to the Ngidi homestead and Nhlelo's car is already parked outside the garage. I got to drive it on Saturday just to test it and it was comfortable enough. She told me she would kill me if I scratched her second baby - the car. Hopefully soon it will be the third baby because I want the second baby spot.

I knock on the kitchen door after fixing my clothes and clearing my throat.

"Sawubona ma," I greet as soon as Mrs Ngidi appears in front of me.

"Ntuthuko, good morning. Please come on in," she says and I remember my cap. I quickly take it off before walking inside.

"How are you ma?" I ask politely. This woman has to like me because she's a potential mother in-law.

"We are very well son, what about you? Your parents?" I swallow hard.

I never want to talk about family because I don't have it. I just have a woman who gave birth to me and her husband who abused me so much I wanted to die.

I clear my throat, "They are well ma," I lie, I don't know how they are. My mother lives in this very village with my stepfather and I never go to see them, until she leaves that piece of shit I'll never have anything to do with her.

"Nhlelo is still preparing Singabakhe, I'll make you coffee or tea while we wait, how do take what you prefer?" She asks, switching on the kettle. I never have coffee or tea, I just buy them for the sake of having them in my house.

"I'll have coffee ma. I like it black and strong with three teaspoons of sugar," that's how Nhlelozenkosi likes it, I will drink it that way too.

"I baked some cookies on Friday and Msebe ate half of the 5liter I filled, have some before he wakes up and finishes everything," I chuckle.

I love cookies so I won't say no.

"Thank you ma,"

I'm eating my cookies and drinking coffee when Nhlelozenkosi walks in wearing pyjama pants and slippers, a white shirt with a black blazer. She's wearing one of those expensive wigs and her lips are glossy. What an awkward outfit this is, but even so she looks beautiful.

"Don't mind my outfit please, during virtual meetings they only see my upper body," she explains and I laugh, that's very smart.

"I understand MaHlomuka. How did you guys sleep?" I ask.

"Very well thanks. What about you?" She opens the fridge and takes out a bottle of juice and an apple. She puts them and a lunch box that was on the kitchen counter in a spiderman backpack.

"Just okay," I finish my coffee. "Thank you ma, the cookies taste very good," Mrs Ngidi takes the coffee mug and saucer and puts them in the sink.

"You're welcome and thank you for helping Nhlelo with Singabakhe," I bow my head.

"It's only a pleasure ma. Where is ntwana MaHlomuka? I don't want us to be late," I say.

"Singabakhe! Come see who's taking you to school baby," his mother yells for him and a few seconds later he's running towards the kitchen, I get on my feet to receive him.

"Ntwana!" I will never forget the happiness on his face right now. Whatever good I did to deserve this kind of love from a little boy must be big that God saw it and he's blessing me.

"Ntwana yami, from now on I'll be the one taking you to school and fetching you," I say, picking him up.

"Is it true mommy?" He asks the smiling Nhlelozenkosi who is taking a video of us.

"It's true baby, are you happy?" She asks.

"Very happy, thank you," he envelopes his arms around my neck and my heart is filled with nothing but love.

"Promise to listen and respect malume Ntuthuko," his mother says.

"I promise, I promise mommy,"

"That's my boy, now come kiss mommy goodbye," I place him down and he hurries to his mother, hugs her tightly around the waist.

"I love you Singz," Nhlelo says, kissing his forehead.

"I love you too," he turns, grabs his backpack and rushes to take my hand.

"Let's go ntwana," his excitement is contagious.

"Haibo! You're not kissing grandma goodbye?"

"Hai shame Ntuthuko you have bewitched my grandson. I have never seen anything like this, ka Bakoena ba ntswetse," -Mrs Ngidi.

NOBANTU DLADLA

"If you go back on your word I'll never help you with your kids again," Sqalo says and I swallow hard.

"I'm doing this baba, I promise," there's no going back now, this has to happen. Qophelo is doing this my way or he's out for good, I can't beg him to take his future and his life seriously. I'm not dealing with a junkie and today I'm letting him know.

"Okay then, let's go inside," he says, opening his door and climbing out.

We walk in the police station and he asks for a police officer who arrested Qophelo. There's no case opened against my son, we just wanted to scare him a little. He slept in the holding cell since Saturday and now it's a Monday morning. I just hope he saw how cruel life can be and act like the son I raised, not the drug addict who steals from his twin sister to feed his addiction.

The policeman leads us to the holding cells where my son is. It's a little dark and it smells some type of way. He opens and Sqalo is the first to walk in then I follow in. My son is looking at me with anger visible on his face, if we weren't in a police station he would have pounced on me. The cop tells us that he will wait upfront and we should call him when we are done. Sqalo looks at me and nods when it's just the three of us.

"Qophelo," I start off.

He chuckles, "You had me arrested mama," I'm trying to hide how nervous I am.

"You forced my hand when you stole your sisters bag and withdrew her money," he rolls his eyes.

"I wouldn't have done that if you didn't cancel my card," he argues.

"And I wouldn't have cancelled your card if you didn't use my money for drugs. I have done the unspeakable to give you and your sister a great life but you're an ungrateful brat who doesn't appreciate anything," I say with a shaking voice. This child has hurt me so much.

"You make it sound like I am a junkie, I don't take low grade drugs mama. I use quality cocaine and I know when I've had enough, I'm not a kid," he's not being serious right now.

Sqalo clears his throat, he wants me to do what we agreed on.

"This back and forth is unnecessary Qophelo. You are not a child and I will not force anything on you when you have your own money and house. But for as long as you depend on me then you'll do everything I say," he narrows his eyes.

"What are you saying?" He asks.

"I'm saying, if you want my money and the life I provide for you then go to rehab. Get clean and stay clean or you're out, permanently!" He gasps in shock.

"What?"

"You're not deaf. I have the rehab center people waiting for you outside, you'll go with them if you want to remain Nobantu's child. If rehab is unnecessary for you then I'll leave you here and not drop the charges against you. You'll serve whatever sentence and live your life the way you want. I don't want to see you anywhere near me and my daughter. Are we clear?" I say with a stern voice.

"You're kidding me right?" I keep a stoic expression.

"Young man this is no joke. Make a decision, we don't have all day," Sqalo snaps.

"Who the fuck are you?" Qophelo still has an attitude.

"Not important. What is your decision? You have five seconds,"

"Mama," his voice breaks my heart but I can't back down from this.

"I guess you have made your choice," I say after a few seconds. "Let's go Sqalo," I turn to leave.

"Fine! You win mom, I'll go to rehab," he says and I close my eyes.

"Good then, I'll go get the police officer," Sqalo says.

NARRATED

She has been nothing but a loyal and loving wife. She takes care of him, their children and home. She accepted that he will always cheat on her, she knows of his mistresses, all three of them. She believes that her husband cheats because she's not enough, because she has gained so much weight along the years. She's not as beautiful or

active in the bedroom so he was bound to loose interest at some point. She was okay with him having all these women because they keep him happy and in turn he doesn't ask much from her in the bedroom. He doesn't complain but rather he's always happy and loving to her and their children.

She was going to leave everything as is, she was never going to ask him about his affairs and the money he spends on these women because they kept her home happy and peaceful. But today as she was doing the laundry she found something in the jean he was wearing on Saturday at her family gathering. She could recognize the phone number that was written on the small piece of paper, but wasn't sure who it belonged to. She decided to dial the number and it appeared to be saved in her phone book. Her eyes couldn't believe what she was seeing but her heart was done with him that instant. She could allow any other woman to keep him happy just not her own niece. She refuses to share her husband with a girl she takes as her own child. If Sqalo can sleep with her niece then what will stop him from sleeping with their daughter?

After she found the piece of paper with her nieces cellphone number she decided to get in the car and drive to her sisters house to tell her everything. She also wanted to confront her niece with her mother present in the room. Her sister appreciated this and helped her to get the truth out of her 19 year old daughter. She admitted to giving him her number and talking to him on the phone last night. She said they made plans to meet at a hotel in Umhlanga.

She has been back from her sisters house in Kwamashu for hours and she hasn't shed a single tear. Her heart is broken yes but she has cried enough tears for this man before and she's just done. She

packed everything that belongs to him in black refuse bags and put them outside the front door. She just wants to tell him that she knows everything and tell him to leave her house without putting up a fight.

It's 10pm and he's only arriving home, he has been with Nobantu the whole day. Fuckin her brains out at the same hotel he promised to take his wife's niece. He's a filthy man like that, nothing will change him. He lives for money, sex and power.

He's still with his wife out of obligation, it makes him look good in public. He's with Nobantu because she provides financially and allows him to do whatever he wants to her in the bedroom. The two university girls are just for his ego, to brag to his friends who are just like him. Its safe to say he loves no one but himself.

Sqalo is pissed by the trash on his door step. He kicks a few out of his way and takes out the key to the door. He cusses under his breath when his key won't open, he then presses the door bell without worry. He knows his wife will never ask him where he is coming from. She's not a troublesome woman, he should get her a big gift for being so peaceful. His head would've long exploded if she was anything like Nobantu, that one calls at the smallest inconvenience and asks him to deal with it. If he wasn't getting money from this relationship he would have long dropped her.

The door opens and his wife appears holding a bottle of champagne, he's shocked. This is unlike Vivian, she hardly ever drinks alcohol so to find her drinking straight from the bottle on a Monday is worrying.

"What's wrong?" He asks and Vivian shrugs her shoulders.

"Nothing much, I just want you gone from my house," he is taken aback by her statement.

"Why would I leave our house Viv?" She takes a sip.

"Because this marriage is over," he wasn't expecting that at all. She was happy when he left for work this morning so what is this now?

"If this is some drunk joke I suggest you stop it," Vivian chortles.

"I'm not playing with you Sqalo, we are done and I want you out of my house," What has gotten over Vivian he wonders.

"Okay, where do you expect me to go? What did I even do?" He asks and folds his arms across his chest.

"I don't know, go to your cougar in Mzumbe or maybe one of the university residences. Wait, you can also try my sister's house because you wanted to sleep with her daughter right?" Viv says with an attitude and Sqalo's world comes crumbling down.

He's asking himself how she came to know all of this.

"Baby, I don't know what you're talking about," she rolls her eyes.

She might have been playing stupid all these years but she's not.

"I know everything Sqalo, I know you've been sleeping with Nobantu Dladla for years. I know of every other woman you've had along the years," he's blinking rapidly.

How the fuck does he fix this? She wouldn't be doing this if she didn't have concrete proof.

"Baby I can explain," he says, with tears glistening in his eyes. He's wasting his time, the tears trick won't work on her.

"I'm not interested," she shuts the door in his face.

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CHAPTER 17

MSEBEYELANGA NGIDI

"Langooo," my mom calls out for me.

"Cheri ka Ngidi," I hear her laugh outside my door. It's nice how she still blushes to my father's name.

"When are you planning on waking up? I want to send you somewhere," she says, I was planning on leaving my bedroom after this episode of Grey's Anatomy.

"I'll be right out ma," I say, pausing the TV and climbing out of my bed. I will lay it neatly when I come back from wherever she's sending me to.

I remove my boxers and step into the shower, in a few minutes I'm out and drying myself using a towel. I put on a blue pair of jeans, sneakers and a white golf t-shirt after moisturizing my skin.

Mama is standing over the stove when I walk in, it smells divine in here. I go and kiss her cheek before going to greet my sister. She's busy talking on the phone, sitting in front of her open laptop. She has turned my mother's dining room table into her makeshift office. I wave at her and she blows a kiss to me then I leave her to work.

I go back to the kitchen and pull out a high chair then settle down. Mom places a plate of breakfast in front of me and a tall glass of cranberry juice, my favorite.

"You spoil me mama, thank you," I say and she smiles sweetly at me.

"I'm making up for the five years you weren't at home, but I'll soon be tired. It will be a good move to get married," oh here we go again.

"MaMokwena, we spoke about this," she holds out her hands in surrender.

"I will give you a daughter in law and grandkids mama, I promise. Please give me a little time," she rounds the kitchen island and kisses my forehead.

"Okay, I'll respect your decisions,"

"I appreciate that my love," I pick up the knife and cut my sausage.

"When you are done here, I want you to go to Port Shepstone to get me things on this list," she takes out a paper from her pinafore and places it in the counter.

"I want to bake and cook a feast for my brothers son," she says excitedly. I also cannot wait to see my cousin, it has been a long while.

"It will be really nice to have him around," she nods.

"Mmhhh, it will be like the old times when you two were little boys running around with my beloved husband. God bless his soul," I remember those days vividly. My dad taught us so many things, especially herding the cattle. He must be proud to see how his kraal has multiplied, we even had to take most of them to a white farmer who's looking after them on our behalf. I pay a hefty amount for that but atleast they are safe there. We only left a few in the kraal here in the yard and our herd boy is doing a great job.

"Now, before you drive to Port Shepstone I want you to pass by Nobantu's house and give these cookies to Mawande," she says and I smile. Another attempt to bring me and Mawande in one place, my mother is sly.

"And please tell her to visit so we can do some girly things," Nhlelo says, walking into the kitchen.

"I will let her know,"

"That's a good idea, she has never had a life outside that supermarket," -MaMokwena.

I see her aunt's Ford Ranger driving out as I approach their house. She's going the other direction, thank Goodness. I haven't started working on the blueprint of her house and I'm sure she was going to ask about it. I kill the engine outside the yard and climb out with a tupperware full of cookies. The yard is very clean and there's laundry drying on the washing line.

I knock on the door and wait for someone to open up for me. I'm about to hit my knuckles against the aluminum door again when I hear footsteps approaching.

"Msebe hi," it's Mawande, she's wrapped in a towel. It's short and her thighs are exposed. I am a man and I appreciate good looking things hence my junior down there is getting excited. Plus, it has been long since I danced with a woman under the covers.

I swallow and move my eyes from her thighs, "Wande, how are you?" She gives me a shy smile then looks away.

"I'm well thanks, what about you?"

"I'm okay, Mama asked me to bring you these cookies then go to town to get her a few things. Wena all refreshed, Are you going somewhere?" I ask and she shakes her head.

"I just took my bath, I'm not going anywhere. I'll just be here bored out of my mind," she says and chuckles.

"Then let's go to Port Shepstone," her eyes widen and I'm shocked that I just suggested that. MaMokwena will start planning a wedding because of this.

"Are you sure?" She asks and I nod.

"Yeah, I can do with the company,"

"I just need to find something to wear and I'll be done. Please come on in," she says, standing to the side so I can pass through. I place the Tupperware on the table and settle down on the chair.

"I'll be right back," she disappears into one of the other rooms

I'm glad I brought Mawande with me to the shops, I was going to buy the wrong stuff. That would have given my mom more reason to make noise about getting a wife. Mawande has been laughing at me in the supermarket for mistaking instant yeast with baking powder. I'll admit that it's nice seeing her so carefree, she's always so shy and embarrassed around me.

I'm pushing the trolley and she is throwing in the last things on MaMokwena's list.

"Take some treats for yourself," I say and she pouts.

"I'm okay, thanks," I stop pushing the trolley and place both hands on my waist.

I thought we weren't shy anymore.

"Wande, take some treats,"

She heaves a sigh, "Okay, thank you," she says and takes a packet of wine gums and one bag of lays chips.

"You're kidding right?" I say and she frowns.

"Do you want me to take the whole store?" She rolls her eyes and I give her a lopsided smile. Okay, she can have a little attitude.

"I am a lover of junk so I know that's not enough," I say and start throwing everything I set my eyes on in the trolley.

"Msebeyelanga! I would open a shop with those things," she complains and I chuckle.

"iDrama Wande," she pulls me so I can stop taking things.

"Okay I'll stop," I say and continue pushing the trolley.

Her arms are around my waist from the back, holding me in place so I don't try anything.

"Straight to the till," she orders.

"Yes ma'am,"

DEDANI MKHIZE

"What's that smell?" Ndongoloza asks, covering her nose. I will admit that it's a strong smell, Madlabantu came this past weekend to work on this place.

"I couldn't allow you to move in here without burning some muti for your protection. I would have failed you as your man," I say and she turns around with a wide smile on her face.

"Oh baby, you are the sweetest man ever. I love you Mkhize,"

"You know what is in my heart for you nana," I say to her and she blushes before getting on her toes to peck my lips.

"I could show you my appreciation before the furniture guys arrive, bend me over the kitchen island," oh no! That would be suicidal. Madlabantu made it clear that I shouldn't sleep with this girl until I am told to do it. I won't jeopardize all of our hard work because of pussy that's not even great. If I want sex I'll go to my wife and get it.

"No nana, I want our first time in this house to be special. I want to take my time on top of you, not just hump for a quick release. You're my woman, I respect your body," I say and watch as she melts into liquid. It's honestly very easy to manipulate Ndongoloza.

"Since I'll be done with the decor and setting up the house by the end of this week, I think I'll bring my clothes and move in this Saturday," she says and I smile.

Now the train will get moving.

"That's great baby, this is our new beginning," I kiss her this time.

My phone chimes in my pocket, I break the kiss and let go of Ndondo and reach for the phone.

Mkami: baby, please get home soon.

A text from my wife reads, I smile because I know how naughty Hlubi can get. She probably just slipped into a lacy number and now she wants me to peel it off her. Our sex life is everything, she allows me to do everything and anything to her in the bedroom. She is everything I could have ever wanted in a woman. I text her back saying I'm rushing to my car and coming home to her.

"Baby, it's work. I really have to go," her smile fades.

"Kodwa Mkhize, you promised to help," I don't have time to be dealing with a big baby. My woman is waiting for me.

"I'll make it up to you," I say, pulling her towards me.

"How?" I have a smile again.

"You told me that your brother took your bag and you couldn't get it back right?" She nods, the smile on her face disappearing.

"I am sorry Dedani, I know how much you spent on that bag. My mother said she'll replace it," I shake my head.

"No need for that, it's not your fault. Your junkie brother is the one to blame for this. Tell my future mother in law not to worry about it. I'm your man and I'll get you another expensive bag, for as long as you behave," she's jumping up and down.

"Are you serious baby?" I nod.

"For as long as you behave Ndongoloza. No going anywhere without telling me, no doing things without asking me first. I am your man and I'm responsible for your safety,"

"I promise,"

"And lastly, you better not get with another man. Do you understand me?" My voice is deep and steady. I need her to understand that she can't cheat on me, that would make this whole thing useless. I'm the only man allowed to sleep with her and soon isilwane sami will take over and I'll be told when to sleep with her and when to avoid touching her.

"Baby, it's only you. I will never look at another man. Dedani, you give me everything I need," Good girl.

"I'm leaving now, I'll call you later okay?" I say.

"Okay," I kiss her lips and head to the door.

I drive out of the estate and give the security guard a thumbs up. I had a conversation with him, asking that he keeps an eye on Ndongoloza when she moves in. He has to report to me when she has a visitor and when she leaves the apartment and comes back. He was skeptical at first but as soon as I handed him a brown envelope we were speaking the same language. Money makes the world go round, some of us sold our souls to be able to get loads of it.

I get to my house and my wife's Range Rover is parked in the driveway, she must have went out. Hlubi doesn't like leaving the house, I always encourage her to go out there and have fun. People need to see who Mrs. Mkhize is, she must be the envy of all women. I will provide her every need and want so that when she steps out the world can tell whose wife she is.

I park next to her car and climb out, literally running inside the house. That's how crazy I get when I think about being buried deep inside of her mini heaven.

"Hlubi, baby I'm home," I say as soon as I step inside.

"Lounge babe," she shouts back and I smile. Sex on the couch, okay tiger.

I get in the lounge and she's sitting on the single couch wearing a white dress and holding a small box. Okay I wasn't expecting this but that beautiful smile on her face is everything.

"Hey, are you okay?" I ask and she gets up.

"I have never been happier," her smile is infectious.

"Dedani Mkhize, you are my dreams come true," she says and my heart is alright.

"Oh Nomahlubi baby, you are my dreams come true. I'm blessed to have you as my wife," she hands me the box.

"I'm praying that what's inside that box makes you happy too," my pulse leaps, what's inside here?

"I love you so much, open the box," I take a deep breath and open the box.

I find a positive pregnancy test, tears blur my vision.

"Are we?" I ask and she nods vigorously.

"Oh my God, baby come here," I say, allowing my tears to fall. This is the best news ever!

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 18

SPONSORED BY ANONYMOUS

MAWANDE DUMA

A few days ago when I went to Port Shepstone with Msebe, he told me that his sister asked me to come visit so we can do some girly things. I'm not sure what girly things are in this day and age, I mean I last had friends when I was still in high school. I'm looking forward to chilling with a girl around my age and one that is successful in her career, she will be a good influence on me.

I know what I am about to say is wrong considering the fact that the business center was started by my parents, but I believe the fire was a blessing in disguise.

When I went to visit my parents grave this past Saturday I decided to go to the internet cafe to apply online for NSFAS and a couple of company bursaries. Now I'm crossing fingers for positive outcomes, I truly need this.

I created a vision board and it got me excited, I thank God that my aunt didn't kill my spirit entirely. I'm grateful that I can still look forward to life and the good it can bring.

"Where are you going?" My aunt asks as I step in the kitchen.

"I have already cooked supper aunt Nobantu," I respond and she rolls her eyes.

"That was not my question," she snaps, narrowing her eyes.

"I am going to see Nhlelozenkosi, she asked me to come visit her,"

She is thrown into a fit of laughter. I don't know what's funny there.

"Do you think I was born yesterday?" She asks and I shake my head.

"Of course not aunty,"

She places the pen down and removes her eye glasses, "You are going to MaMokwena's house hoping that her son will notice you isn't it?" I swallow hard before shaking my head.

Can she tell that I have the biggest crush on Msebe? Is it obvious to everyone?

"No, Msebe is way out of my league. I know my place, Ndongoloza has the highest chance of being with a man like that," I say, looking down on myself so she can let it go. She thrives in reminding me that I am a nothing and her daughter is a princess that deserves everything.

"It's good that you know, don't go around breaking your heart. No man will ever look at you and feel a fire burning inside of him. Except for Sgora, he suits you because you are both low lives," I nod my head.

Her hurtful words don't hurt as much anymore. I've grown a thick skin along the years.

"And if you must know, Msebe is a small boy compared to my future son in law," she says with a smile.

"I hear you aunt Nobantu, can I please go now?" I ask and she looks around the kitchen.

"Uhm, pour me a glass of wine before you go," she just wants to see me serving her, but at least she's not refusing me to go see Nhlelozenkosi.

Msebe is sitting outside with his mother, she's peeling some potatoes and he's just being his handsome self. I have been dreaming about him more after I went to town with him. I hear his voice when I'm alone in my room and I get intoxicated each time I remember how good he smells. Eating my food reminds me of him sitting across me in that restaurant asking me about the life I hope to live. Tuesday has to be the best day of my life since I lost my parents.

"Sanibonani," I greet and maMokwena is already smiling from ear to ear. She's such a happy soul.

"Mawande, you look so beautiful sisi," I blush, looking away. This is one of the dresses Ndongoloza gave me. It's very pretty, I love it too.

"She really is mama," something is doing back flips in my stomach. Compliments from this man leave me weak at the knees.

"Thank you so much,"

Msebe gets up, "Have a seat pretty lady,"

"Ngiyabonga," I settle down next to his mother.

"Get Mawande something to drink and a light snack. I want her to leave space for the meal I'm cooking," her son doesn't wait for her to ask twice, he leaves us and heads to the kitchen.

"He's a handsome boy isn't he?" Her question is unexpected, I laugh nervously.

"He is ma," I say, avoiding her eyes.

"Would you marry him?" I choke on my own saliva. What a question.

I clear my throat, realizing that there's no way to dodge this question, she wants an answer, "I don't think I'm his type mama," she smacks her lips then places a hand on my shoulder.

"Never ever say that again. You are an amazing girl, beautiful and strong. You are not their type, it's them who aren't in your league. A man who wants you must kneel at your feet and be ready to treat you like a queen, no matter how important he thinks he is," she says and this is the first time someone has contributed positively to my self esteem.

"I hear you ma,"

"Don't just hear me, believe what I'm saying to you Mawande," she's serious.

I appreciate her words.

"Now, how many grandkids would you give me?" She asks and I giggle.

"As much as you like ma," I say and she laughs so loud, pleased with my answer.

"Wande, what did you say to my father's wife?" Msebe asks, holding a tray with a glass of juice and a side plate that has crackers, biltong, cherry tomatoes and cheese. It look really fancy.

"Just girl stuff," I say and his mother is really pleased.

"Before I forget Mawande, please join us for lunch tomorrow. Msebe's cousin is visiting us, he took leave from work to be with this big head. They've always been close, I'm sure they'll give me a headache now like they did growing up," I smile.

"I would love to mama but please call my aunt and inform her," I say and she nods in agreement.

"You're right, after what happened it's better I ask you from her," I'm glad she understands.

"Is Nhlelo home? I came to see her," I ask.

"Right here babe, I was just wrapping up some work. I'm all yours now," she says, appearing from inside.

Does she have basic clothes? She's always looking amazing.

"How have you been," I ask.

"Good now that you've finally come to see me. I thought I'd die of boredom in this village. Msebe is always on his phone and watching endless series', mama is always cooking in the kitchen and my son is obsessed with Ntuthuko," she says and I laugh.

"Haibo! Nhlelozenkosi, you're always working nawe mos," she rolls her eyes.

"Why did you give Mawande juice? I have some left overs from your homecoming,"

MaMokwena claps once!

"Homecoming alcohol? No thank you," they all burst out laughing.

"I'll make sure to give you water after every glass babe, I promise," She's giving me puppy eyes.

"Let me leave you kids to it then," maMokwena says, getting up from her chair. She takes her potatoes and disappears inside the house.

Nhlelo comes to occupy the chair her mother was on a few seconds ago.

"Bro, there are bottles in the wodrobe mama keeps her blankets in. Please bring one with mixers and ice. Don't forget glasses Msebe,"

"Am I welcomed to this young chillas?" He asks.

"You are," I say quickly.

I hope I didn't sound too desperate.

"I'll be right back then,"

Nhlelozenkosi's car drives in the yard and I furrow my forehead, who's driving it because the owner and her brother are here? The

person parks outside the garage and a few seconds later her son, Singabakhe appears wearing his school uniform with a packet of chips in his hand. Sgora appears right after holding his school bag and the car keys. Haibo! What's going on here?

"Mommy!" This boy is cute.

"Hey baby, how was school," you can tell she's an amazing mom because of how happy her child is.

"It was great, lunch break was longer," he tells his mom.

"Sanibonani," That's Sgora.

I wasn't aware that his relationship with both Singabakhe and his mom has gotten here.

"Hey, I hope he didn't give you problems," Nhlelo says.

"MaHlomuka, he's a great boy. You really need to stop worrying about us," haibo! This one is gone gone.

"Thank you, what you're doing for Singa and I will not be forgotten," he blushes.

Is Nhlelo not aware that this man is insanely in love with her?

"Mommy, can I please sleep over at ntwana's house?" it's like I'm watching a movie. Sleepovers have become a casual conversation here, Sgora's train is moving.

"Now you want to abuse ntwana's kindness, he has his own things to do," Nhlelo tries to put her son right but his face shows that he wants to cry.

"Don't you dare me, I told you to never cry when you don't get your way," she says, wagging a finger at him.

"MaHlomuka, calm down," I bite my biltong.

We can already tell who will be the disciplinarian in their house.

"You want to take him home with you?" She asks shocked.

"I don't mind, it will give you a break. You've been working hard this whole week," I look at Nhlelo and I don't know how to explain the look on her face.

"Ntuthuko you are just... I don't..." She heaves a sigh.

"I'm okay with it but my mom has the last say. Let's go ask grandma Singabakhe," she gets up from the chair and takes her son's hand to go talk to maMokwena.

"I'm in the darkest dungeon," I say with a snapped eyebrow.

"I know and I'm sorry. I wanted to come see you on Monday but something came up. What you just saw is what has been happening this week and I've never been happier," he says and his words mirror his facial expression.

"I'm glad you're happy, you deserve it,"

Nhlelo comes out alone, "My cousin is coming tomorrow so mama says you'll have him some other time," she says and I can see how disappointed Sgora is.

"I totally understand, where is he?" He asks.

"Crying in the lounge," that's accompanied by an eye roll.

"Can I go calm him down and convince him that next time will be more fun?" Nhlelozenkosi laughs.

"Ntuthuko, you spoil him too much. Come talk to your little monster,"

I see this thing between them growing into something so beautiful.

"I guess I should bring another glass," Msebe says, placing everything down.

"Are you good?" He asks, cupping my chin.

"Uhm I...mhhh...I'm okay," I say and he smiles.

"Don't worry, I won't let you drink too much. I'll personally take you home,"

"I appreciate that,"

SQALO SHOZI

I have begged and begged Vivian to hear me out but she won't give me the time of day. I've been living at a hotel since Monday night and it's nothing like my house where my wife and children are. She texted me last night, telling me that she wants an out of court divorce settlement. She said she wants the house, the savings in our joint account and half of everything that's in my name. I am going to give her everything because of the threat she made. If she goes public with what she knows then I'll kiss my career goodbye and say hello to life imprisonment. I am still trying to figure out how she found out everything that she knows, I never shared much about my work. Especially my illegal dealings because I wanted to keep her away from everything.

My parents and siblings have been blowing up my phone, trying to get ahold of me. My big brother even came to the office and I told my PA to tell him that I haven't been coming to work. Vivian definitely told them everything and now they are out for my blood. Everyone in my family loves my wife, I understand why because she's a sweetheart.

I have decided to take some time off work, my boss didn't have a problem for as long as I answer my phone and reply to emails.

I just drove into Mzumbe, Nobantu is the only person who will welcome me with warm open arms. I'm grateful that it will be the two of us, Qophelo is in rehab and his twin sister left for Durban this morning. I wouldn't have survived with those brats in the same space, they drive their own mother crazy so imagine what they would have done to me.

This place has no life, I'm used to the vibrant city. But it's the perfect place to clear my head and come up with a plan to make things right with Viv. She might be angry right now but there's still some love in her heart and I need to find a way to tap into those feelings.

Nobantu's cars are not in the driveway but the kitchen door is open. I last spoke to her when I left Durban, she doesn't know what happened between me and my wife. I'm not planning on telling her the truth because then she will start seeing me as nothing. I'll tell her something that shows her that I am not afraid to leave a relationship. That will keep her on her toes, ready to do anything and everything to make me happy and keep me satisfied.

I climb out of my car and lock it, I'll take out my clothes when we have had a conversation and she has invited me to stay with her.

"Koko," I say because there's no one in the kitchen.

"I'm coming," Nobantu shouts from somewhere in the house.

I take a deep breath and wait for her.

"Baba," she says with narrowed eyes.

"Hey love, can I come in?" I ask.

"Of course, come on in my love," she wasn't expecting me but she won't send me back at all.

"I'm sorry for showing up here unannounced, I just wanted to come and say goodbye before I leave," her eyes widen.

"Goodbye? Where are you going?" She sounds so worried.

"I don't know yet, maybe Swaziland or Lesotho. I need some time to clear my head," she's shaking her head, all confused.

"I don't understand baba, why are you leaving, what happened?"

I blow out a sigh, "I asked Vivian to give me a divorce on Monday and she has been trying to track me down to beg me not to do it," A shocked gasp escapes her mouth.

"A divorce? Why Sqalo?" She asks, clutching at her chest.

"Why continue living with a woman when your heart and soul is with another?" A twinkle flashes across her eyes. I know her heart skipped a bit.

"My heart couldn't take it anymore. When I got home after leaving you at the hotel I told her and packed all of my things in black plastics and left. I just didn't want to be there anymore. I want to leave because I don't want her tracking me down, I promise I'll be back when the divorce is finalized,"

She takes my hand, "You don't have to leave baba. Stay here with me, she won't find you here," she offers and my heart is smiling.

"No baby, I don't want to inconvenience you and your children,"

She pouts, "Sqalo, don't be silly. You chose me over the mother of your kids, inconvenience me however you want. You have been there for me through thick and thin, I will stand by you through this too," I close my eyes.

"You see this? This is the reason why I am madly in love with you Nobantu," she gives me a wide smile and smooches my lips.

She breaks the kiss, "I love you too baba,"

"Let me run you a bath with salts and oils then dish up for you," she says.

"I would love to eat you before I eat the food," I say and she giggles like a high school girl.

"That can be arranged, let's get your things inside my love,"

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 19

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MSEBEYELANGA NGIDI

"Who are you avoiding?" Nhlelo asks, trying to look at my phone.

I heave a sigh, "These telemarketers have been on my case since I woke up," I lie through my teeth. Sauda has been calling and calling, I don't want to talk to her. All she does is confuse me, one day she's done with me and the next she wants me. I cannot be her play thing, I am a human being and I have feelings. I obviously don't want us to be enemies but I also cannot allow her to string me alone.

"Knock knock," we both turn and I gasp in shock when my eyes land on Mawande, damn this girl is beautiful. I have never seen her with her natural hair, I must say that it's perfect. What a crown she has on her head.

"Babe! Look at your afro, damn girl it's beautiful," that's my sister.

"This dry pot scourer?" One thing I've realized about Mawande is that she cannot take a compliment. She says something bad about herself as a defense mechanism or just says thank you quickly to end it. I am interested in knowing more about her many many layers, I want to know what happened to her that shaped the person she is today.

"Don't be silly, you look absolutely gorgeous Wande," I say and she offers me a sweet smile. If only she saw herself through our eyes.

"Thank you guys. Do you need me to help with anything?" Nhlelo is tapping her lips with her index finger, trying to think of what Mawande can do to help around.

"Everything is alright babe, thank you,"

"Did you wake up okay? No hangover?" I ask and she giggles.

"Fortunately no, I woke up feeling good. Maybe it's the water I drank," I'm glad to hear that. We had a great Friday afternoon and around 7 pm we drove her and Ntuthuko home. My nephew wanted to kill himself because he wasn't allowed to leave with his Ntwana, I have honestly never seen anything like this.

"That means I can mix you a drink yes?" She rolls her eyes.

"Don't make it strong," I wink at her and go mix a drink for her and Nhlelo.

I am in my rondavel changing out of my shorts and vest, my cousin will arrive any minute now and I'm so fuckin excited to see him. We have a lot of catching up to do, I missed out on so much of his life.

I take a sip of my drink then bend down to tie my laces. My phone rings once again and I don't bother looking at it, I already know who it is. I don't know why she can't read between the lines and leave me be, I don't want to end up blocking her and being an asshole at the end of the day.

My mother starts ululating and I know he has arrived, my excitement goes way up now. I grab my phone and put it in the back pocket of my jeans, I rush out the door and his car is driving in. He stops under

the tree and climbs out, look at how tall he is. But he will never gain weight this one, he's still as skinny as the last time I saw him.

"Oh ngwana abuti waka," that's my mother, dancing for him.

"Rakgadi waka," he takes her hand and joins the dance.

Nhlelozenkosi is taking a video of their moment while laughing, I look around and Mawande is not on sight. Singabakhe is standing awkwardly next to his mother, he's probably wondering who this is.

"Msebeyelanga Ngidi!" He finally comes to me with the biggest smile on his face.

"Mafube Mokwena!" I say and we start laughing hard while sharing a hug.

"You were living soft with those Arabs ne? Just look at your pot belly," he teases and I choke down my laughter.

"You know what they say, a pot belly gives good lovin'," I say and my mother claps once.

"Which pot belly? He has a guitar underneath that top," trust my mother to call my six pack a guitar.

"My Zulu princess," he opens his arms for Nhlelo.

"Bhut'wam," they share a warm embrace.

"Look at how grown the little champ is,"

Mafube says looking at Singabakhe.

"Grown and stubborn,"

Our cousin squats to be Singa's height.

"Hey buddy, you don't look happy. What's wrong?" He asks.

"Grandma doesn't want me to visit ntwana," oh here we go again. Ntuthuko must just adopt this boy and live with him full time.

"Your friend?" Mafube asks but he doesn't get an answer. The champ is mad.

"Long story but you'll soon find out for yourself," Nhlelo says.

"Nhlelozenkosi call Ntuthuko and ask him to come if he has no plans, I don't want my grandson to hate me," maMokwena says.

My sister dials on her phone.

"Voicemail, he's probably busy,"

"Your mother will keep trying okay?" Grandma tries to save the day but Singa is not having it.

"Continue eating nails boy," Nhlelo says, she's over the tantrums he has been throwing since morning.

"Mafube come, your aunt prepared you a meal fit for a king," mama says and that excites him. He has always been a foodie this one, but gains absolutely no weight.

"Please rakgadi, I am famished and I've missed your cooking," he says and mama pulls him to the house and we all follow.

"You and Msebe don't want to get married, so you'll always miss my cooking," I laugh because the daughter in-law she wants is in the house. I wish she could give me some time to heal and a chance to chase after Mawande all on my own without her interference. I don't wanna get into anything prematurely and bleed on that innocent soul. Hurt people hurt people and I don't want to do that.

"Baby girl, come meet my nephew," mama shouts and when we walk into the dinning room she's already on her feet.

"Oh wow!" Mafube says, letting go of my mother's hand and approaches Mawande on his own, I narrow my eyes, waiting to see what he wants to do.

"Hao Rakgadi, it looks like I've found a wife. Kgosatsana ya Kweneng," he says and my mother laughs.

I won't lie, I feel a pang of jealousy.

"She's beautiful isn't she?" Mama asks with the widest smile on her face, I thought she wanted Mawande for me. Why is she entertaining Mafube.

"She's the epitome of beauty," I don't appreciate how Mawande is blushing.

"Ngwana batho, nna ka lebitso ke Mafube, mora wa Bakwena. Your beauty has caught my eye and it's making it's way to my heart. What is your name?" He has always been the charmer but he has to hold his horses, this is not Maseru.

"Thank you, my name is Mawande Duma," her soft voice says.

Mafube takes her hand and kisses it, I can't watch this.

"Okay bro, don't make her uncomfortable," I say, pulling him away from her.

My mother is thrown into a fit of laughter, she's enjoying this.

"You're still smooth with the ladies," Nhlelozenkosi says and I'm glad that it came from her. I would have been seen as jealous by cupid maMokwena.

"I am a gentleman my Zulu princess," alright.

"How was your drive bro?" I ask as we all settle down around the table.

"Tiring, I had to drive from Bloemfontein to Maseru on Thursday and then here. My body is sore, I would do with a good massage," he says.

"My aunt owns a lodge in Margate, they have a spa facility. You can go there," Mawande says and I raise an eyebrow.

Why can't she be this way with me? I'm honestly offended.

"Would you mind driving with me there? I don't really know the south coast very well," my eyes widen, the lie.

Wande looks at me nervously, "I'm sure Msebe won't mind going with you. He must need a massage himself," Good girl!

"Yeah, we can go together," in my mother's head she's watching a movie unfold right before her eyes. She's enjoying this.

"I guess that will work," he says with a smirk on his face.

"Msebe, is this the lawyer cousin you told me about?" Mawande asks and I nod reaching for the casserole containing steamed bread.

"Yes, this is Mafube the lawyer," I already hate where this is going. Maybe I should find a lady lawyer who will help Mawande. I love my cousin but he will be trying his luck with Mawande more than telling her about the law and what it entails.

"Oh, so I've been a topic of discussion?"

Mawande laughs nervously, "Msebe just mentioned you because we were talking about me and my plans of studying the law next year," she explains.

"Oh that's good, I'd love to help you with whatever you need,"

I look at Wande and she's excited, why didn't I study law?

"I'm happy to hear that you'll be going to school Mawande, I am proud of you sisi," my mother says.

"It's really great news, nothing gingers me like seeing a sister move on to greater things," -Nhlelo.

I love the friendship that's forming between her and Wande, it will definitely benefit them both positively.

"Thank you, I'm really excited," Mawande says.

"So bro, what's the plan now that you're back from Dubai?" He asks, dishing for himself.

"I am caught in between starting my own thing here or taking a job offer in Italy,"

Mawande drops her fork, "Italy? so far?"

Okay, I wasn't expecting that reaction from her.

"It's also giving me sleepless nights Mawande, my son wants to leave me for another five years," my mother cries.

"Yeah bro don't move away again. Work on your own thing, something that will benefit your kids in the future," Mafube says.

My mother is nodding in agreement, "That's very true, staying here will give him a chance to find a wife and start his own family,"

"I'm all for whatever you decide bro but I would honestly love for you to stay in the country. You can do international consultations if you want to work in different parts of the world," I've been thinking about it too. I want to be home and I want international work on my portfolio.

"Guys, whatever I decide I'll surely take you all into consideration," I say.

My mother has been reminding me and Mafube of the chaos we used to cause while growing up and everyone has been thrown into a fit of laughter. She even went to get the album to show Mawande, most of the pictures in there are embarrassing but they hold amazing memories. When I finally have kids I want to keep a physical album and show visitors when we are sitting like this.

"Should I bring the drinks now?" I ask and they all agree. The four of us are going to have gin and tonic and my mother is having dry red wine, Nhlelozenkosi managed to get maMokwena hooked by telling her that it's good for the heart.

I get up from my chair and leave them laughing at the top of their lungs, family is everything man.

I get to the kitchen and take out glasses from the cupboard and rinse them. The ice bucket is filled with ice and mixers, I need to go get sparkling water for Mawande. I don't want her drinking too much, we are going to do it like yesterday. I exit the main house to get the water from the fridge in my rondavel. I notice a stain on my white shirt and decide to just take it off before I make it worse.

They are no longer laughing when I step back in the kitchen, I just grab the bottle of gin and everything else then head to the lounge where we had moved after eating dessert. I stop in my tracks when my eyes find Sauda standing awkwardly next to the single couch, what the hell is she doing here?

"Surprise," she says and I look around the room, they all want answers. The only person I've ever told about Sauda is my sister and that was at the beginning of our relationship. Nhlelozenkosi must have forgotten about her.

"How did you find this place?" I ask.

She clears her throat, "I looked at your files at the office," I cannot believe this.

"What are you doing here?" I have to ask, the last time I checked she dumped me for coming back to this very place.

"I told you I'll be in Kenya month end so I decided to come see you before going home," she says.

"I've been trying to call you to inform you of my arrival but you're ignoring my calls,"

My mother clears her throat, "Langooo," she says in a low voice.

"MaMokwena," Lord let my mother not release bombs on me.

"Who is this?" She's very calm and that's something to be worried about.

"Uhm, her name is Sauda," I respond.

"Where is she from?"

"She's originally from Kenya, her family is still there but she works in Dubai," I explain.

"Oh so she's your former colleague or is there more?" I look at Mawande and she has her eyes cast down.

"Eish ma, Sauda is a former colleague and it used to be more,"

"Hao sisi, you flew all this way for something that used to be?" She's only being rude because the girl she's rooting for is in the same room witnessing all of this.

"Uhm, Mrs Ngidi, there's really a lot your son and I have to discuss," I place the drinks down on the table.

"May we please be excused," I say.

Mafube laughs, he's always going to remind me of this day.

"Sauda, come please," she leaves her luggage and follows me out.

I lead her to my rondavel, she shouldn't have come here. When she realized that I was ignoring her calls she should have texted me. I would have driven to wherever she was so she could tell me what she wants.

"This house is top notch for this village, your mother must be the envy of all the women here," she says as soon I close the door.

"What are you doing here?"

I am really not impressed by this

"Baby, we really need to talk,"

I shake my head, "Sauda, you broke up with me. I'm not playing these games with you, I refuse,"

She exhales sharply, "Langa, I'm sorry. I was just scared that you'll come back here or go to Italy then meet someone else," bullshit, she's a confident woman. I've travelled the world leaving her in Dubai and she has never had a problem.

"You destroyed what we shared,"

She slowly walks towards me and wraps her arms around my neck, "It's not too late to fix things, I want my man back," I close my eyes.

"Sauda," she's grabbing my dick.

"Shhhh, let me make you feel good baby," she teases with her tongue.

"Langooo!" My mom shouts from outside my door.

"Ma," Sauda rolls her eyes.

"Tell your guest to come eat, we don't want her telling her people that Zulus are stingy with food and drinks.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 20

MAWANDE DUMA

I tossed and turned the whole night, soaking my pillow wet. I feel so stupid for falling in love with Msebe, all along I thought it was just an intense crush but seeing that woman made me realize that I've fallen for him. My heart is broken and I'm responsible for it. He has never told me he likes me, nor has he given me any impression that he might want to start anything with me. I am such a fool, living in my

head with all these stupid dreams of a future with him. Aunt Nobantu was right, I am just a village low life. Msebe is out of my league and I have to accept that. That Sauda girl showed up right on time to remind me that I have no business crushing on successful man while I am a nothing. My focus should be on getting into university next year and working on myself and my future.

"Mawande," Aunt Nobantu is knocking roughly on my door.

Can she just give me a break, only for today.

"Did you see the time? Where's the breakfast?" She's shouting, I don't need this from her. I want to be in my feelings all day today.

"Remember that Qophelo is not here, I will get in there and whip you until you bleed," she threatens and I heaves a sigh of defeat.

"I'll be right out," I say, loud enough for her to hear me.

"Breakfast better be ready when we are done taking a shower," she says and I frown. Who is we? The twins aren't home, Ndongolozza is now a Durbanite and I was told Qophelo won't be home for a few weeks.

I climb off my bed and remove my pyjamas before sluggishly making my way to the kitchen to make breakfast. I take out the ingredients from the pantry and the fridge and start cooking. I should have just been stubborn so she can beat me black and blue until I bled, it's better to feel physical pain than emotional one because there's just no way to make it better. There are no painkillers or ointments for a broken heart.

Who is my aunt giggling with in the bathroom? Don't tell me that this woman brought a man into my grandparents house. What kind of

disrespect is this? Wasn't it enough that they took over everything with her twins? The lightning that will strike this woman is still doing pushups. Or is it jealousy speaking right now? Am I mad that my aunt has a love life and I don't? Mad that I fell in love with a man who has a beautiful and successful woman, a woman I cannot compete with even if I tried. From today onwards I have to steer clear of Msebeyelanga Ngidi for the sake of my fragile heart. I honestly need to get over him and fast.

I'm washing the pan and the utensils I used to make breakfast when my aunt walks in with a tall guy, they are even holding hands. Aunt Nobantu has the biggest and brightest smile on her face. The guy is definitely younger than my aunt, she might take care of herself with all these expensive products and make-up but they can't hide that the years have gone by.

Wonders shall never end, my aunt has a Ben ten. Do the twins know about their step father?

"Why are your eyes red? Did you get drunk at MaMokwena's house?" She asks with a raised eyebrow. I didn't even drink, I remembered what happened the last time I got drunk because I was jealous of Msebe and a woman. My eyes are red because I cried almost the whole night.

"No Aunty, I think I'm coming down with the flu," I say and she clicks her tongue.

"Anyway, from now on we will be living with my partner here. You will take care of him like you do the rest of us, prepare his meals, do his laundry and every other thing he will ask of you," Wow, just wow.

He's her boyfriend, let her take care of him.

"You will address him as bab'Shozi,"

Kahle bo!

I'm not calling her toy boy that, she must just forget about it.

"Baba, Mawande is at your service. Please feel at home," she says and the guy smiles before leaning down to kiss her lips.

"Thank you my love,"

"Bring our breakfast to the lounge," she says and I nod, watching them walking away. When did that guy get here? I haven't seen a car I don't know but maybe it's in the garage because the Ranger has been parked under the tree. Does he even have a car? Maybe he's in a relationship with a woman who is older than him to milk her off every cent. Hopefully he grates her heart like cheddar cheese.

NHLELOZENKOSI NGIDI

Yesterday we went from laughter to awkwardness because of the unexpected guest. My brother looked pissed that this girl showed up without telling him, I would be too. I mean she disturbed the perfect afternoon with my family, Mawande even left early to give us space. I wish she didn't leave because nothing was discussed, myself, mama and Mafube left the lounge and came to drink outside.

I'm helping my mother clean the beans outside, she wants to cook samp and beans, beef stew with a variety of vegetables and salads. She's going all out with her meals because Mafube, her brothers son is here.

A full house would have been nice this morning if miss Sauda didn't show up, we'd be in the kitchen making breakfast while laughing and being crazy. Now they are all still asleep, Msebe in his rondavel

alone. Mafube took the spare bedroom and I had to leave my room for Sauda and share with my mom and Singabakhe.

The kitchen door opens and my mom and I turn to see who will walk out, it's Sauda. She's wearing her silk nightdress and a matching gown. She's not aware that we are sitting outside, she's making her way to Msebe's rondavel. I look at my mother and she's narrowing her eyes at her, she's not about to allow that girl in my brothers rondavel.

"Good morning," mama says and I press my lips into a thin line. Sauda turns, startled. She wasn't expecting anyone outside, it's probably still very early in her books but this is the village. We don't sleep until the sun is out.

"Oh, good morning. I'm sorry, I didn't see you there," she says, standing on the same spot.

"How did you sleep?" I ask and she heaves a heavy sigh.

"The mattress wasn't really comfortable but I managed to sleep non the less," she says and my mother scoffs.

"Mmhh it's not Dubai mattress, you should have tried the hotel, they also have Egyptian cotton sheets there," Sauda just poked a snake in it's hole.

"Oh, I'm sorry Mrs Ngidi, I didn't mean to offend you," this girl looks and sounds spoilt.

What attracted Msebeyelanga to her? My brother is very humble.

"Where were you going?" Mama asks.

"Uhm, I was going to wake Langa up. I want a cup of coffee," she says.

"The ingredients are in the grocery cabinet and the mugs in the top cupboard, you know how to switch on the kettle right?"

Sauda swallows hard, "Yes I do. Can I just say good morning to Langa?" She asks and my mother shakes her head.

"He's still sleeping, he will come find you when he's awake," haike!

The poor girl takes a deep breath and walks back to the main house.

"What?" My mom asks when she finds me starring at her.

"You don't really like her ne?"

She nods without hesitation, "I don't hate her, I just don't like her because she's going to confuse my son,"

"Confuse him how?" I ask, I'm the confused one right now.

She rolls her eyes, "You're still a child Nhlelo, you won't understand," haibo!

I am 27 years old and I have a child.

My phone rings in the pocket of my dress, hopefully it's Ntuthuko. My son has been sad and sulking since yesterday, his phone has been on voicemail. I quickly take it out and click my tongue when I see the caller ID. He hasn't called since we arrived in this village, which hole did he crawl out of?

"Daluxolo," I answer.

"Nhlelozenkosi, give my son the phone," this bastard!

"I will hang up this phone if you continue giving me that stinking attitude," I say and he chuckles.

"I didn't call to talk to you, so I want you to give my son the phone," I don't have time to be dealing with this arrogant son of a bitch.

"I'll go check if he's awake," my mother is looking at me as I stand up, she probably wants to take this phone and tell him where to get off. She's thirsty to give him a piece of her mind.

"If he's not wake him up, he hasn't spoken to me in a while," he says and I laugh.

"More like you haven't been calling him in a while," that shuts him up.

I pass Sauda making her coffee and make my way to my mother's bedroom. Singabakhe is playing on his tablet, my baby woke up and didn't come to find me. He's really mad at me for keeping him away from his Ntwana.

"Singa, daddy wants to talk to you," I say, handing him the phone. He takes it but doesn't even smile or at least pretend to be excited.

Singabakhe is giving Daluxolo one word answers, he is not interested in this call and he's not trying to hide it at all.

I don't blame Singa because that bastard only plays dad when it suits him, he thinks sending a huge monthly upkeep for him and posting pictures he demands from me makes him a great father.

"Mommy, here you go," he hands me back the phone. I look at the screen and the call is still active.

"Daluxolo,"

"What did you do to him? He's not himself," Oh can you believe this!

"You can't expect him to get excited for you when you call him once in a blue moon," I snap.

"Nhlelo, I work,"

"Guess what? I work too," I say and hang up the phone.

"Mommy," his sweet voice calls for me.

"My baby boy," I say, climbing on the bed.

"Can Ntwana be my daddy?" He asks and my heart shutters, now it all makes sense.

"Why baby?" I ask, one thing I never do is dismiss my son. I want to know what's going on in his head at all times.

"Because he plays with me, he makes me laugh. He fetches me from school and buys me ice cream then tells me not to tell you," he says and I laugh at the last part.

Ntuthuko is in so much trouble.

"You also laugh and smile when ntwana is with us, but with daddy you're always sad and shouting," It breaks my heart to hear my 5 year old son talking like this. Every child deserves to feel loved by both parents.

It's sad that my son feels love from a man who's not his father, so much so that he wishes he was his daddy.

"Mommy will always be happy for as long as she has you and ntwana can be your best friend forever," I say, tickling him. He is laughing uncontrollably.

"Can we please go and see ntwana," he asks and I heave a sigh. Ntuthuko's phone is on voicemail, we should just get in the car and go see him.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 21

NHLELOZENKOSI NGIDI

Now I'm really worried about Ntuthuko, this is unlike him. His phone has been off and he hasn't even tried to reach out to me and Singa this entire weekend. I mean in the short period of time that I've

known him he calls frequently to check if we are both okay or if we need anything.

I couldn't wait for tomorrow when he comes to pick Singabakhe up for school, I just had to put on my shoes and go find him and make sure he is okay. We are driving to his place now, the smile on my son's face is everything. He is happy that he finally gets to see his ntwana, someone he wishes was his daddy. My heart is still aching from that conversation we had earlier on, I wish Daluxolo would make time for his son so he doesn't feel this way.

I leave the car outside the yard and my son is the first one to jump out of the car. He can't even hold himself, look at him sprinting towards the door. Hopefully Ntuthuko is home, I don't want to deal with a grumpy child again today.

Singa is busy knocking on the door when I stop behind him, Ntuthuko is here because the windows are open and we can hear the TV playing, why isn't he opening for us? Did I maybe do something to offend him?

"Ntwana, open. It's me Singa and mommy," my baby says, sadness laced in his voice.

"Maybe he is not home baby, we will come back again later," he's shaking his head, he's not buying this. He wants Ntuthuko and he wants him now. What am I going to do?

"Who is knocking like a mad man," an angry female voice says from inside.

My stomach knots immediately, his phone has been off because he's busy playing house with his damn girlfriend.

The door opens and a big woman appears, she looks too old to be Ntuthuko's girlfriend. Maybe it's his mother but that outfit chile!

I clear my throat, "I'm sorry ma, my son is just impatient. Is Ntuthuko home?"

She laughs and claps once, "So you're the Ngidi girl he has been running around with? You're the one who has taken all his attention? Do you have any idea what you've taken from me?" Haibol!

What is going on here manje?

"I'm sorry, what are you talking about?" I say, pulling my son back. She might just pounce on him.

"Sgora is the reason why my children have everything. Now he wants absolutely nothing to do with me because of you," this is all confusing, I honestly cannot make sense of what she's saying.

"I'd be lying if I said I knew what you're talking about. I'm just here to see Ntuthuko and make sure he's okay," she's getting angry, I don't want to find myself under this woman unable to breath so I take a few steps back.

"Go back to wherever you came from, leave Sgora alone," What! is she with Ntuthuko?

"Mommy, where's ntwana?"

I close my eyes, "Lady please just tell me where he is, my son really wants to see him," she places both hands on her waist.

"Take your brat and leave this place, I don't want to see you anywhere near my man," she says and I gasp in shock.

Her man? As old as she is? I cannot believe this, I'm angry and disappointed.

"MaHlomuka," I look to the side and it's Ntuthuko, where did he come from?

Singabakhe is running towards him, Ntuthuko looks scared but he still smiles for Singa then picks him up. My baby envelopes his arms around his neck and places his head on his shoulder comfortably. I watch Ntuthuko kiss his forehead and my heart melts, he is absolutely great with him.

"Sgora, where have you been the entire weekend? You left me here alone," the woman asks, mad as hell.

"MaHlomuka, is everything okay?" He asks me instead, walking closer.

"Your phone is off and you know how Singabakhe gets when he doesn't see or speak to you," he closes his eyes as if pained, I didn't mean to make him feel bad. I know he has a life besides my son.

"My phone is broken, I wanted to come to your house but I thought maybe you're still busy with your cousin. I didn't want to disturb," he says softly.

"Are you both going to pretend like I'm not standing here?" I raise an eyebrow at Ntuthuko and he quickly looks away ashamed.

"Thembi, you need to leave," he says to the woman and she chortles with an attitude.

"I'm not going anywhere," Singabakhe hasn't changed position on Ntuthuko.

"I'm not asking you now. You broke my phone on Friday and decided that you want to be stubborn. I have been sleeping in the shack at the back because I didn't want to manhandle you but now you're pushing my buttons. Get inside that house, pack your shi... Your things and leave my house before I make you," his tone sends shivers down my spine. I would have ran out without my things if he gave me that look.

"You think this barbie girl will love you back? You are a low life for someone like her, you'll miss all of this and wish you never treated

me like shit!" She says and my eyes widen. Ntuthuko is in love with me?

I look at him and this time he holds my gaze, oh Lord!

"Leave Thembi," he says, his eyes still fixed on me. I cast mine down because it's too intense, I am trying to wrap my head around the fact that he's in love with me.

I don't know how that makes me feel.

We are still standing outside, waiting for that Thembi woman to leave before we can get inside. She's making noise, cussing and laughing all at once. She's obviously pissed off that this man is kicking her out for another woman.

Dogs start barking from the side he appeared from and I quickly run to him for protection.

"They are locked in MaHlomuka, don't worry," he says with a smile.

"I didn't know you have dogs,"

"I have two pitbulls," I'm sorry what!

I shake my head, "Are you insane Ntuthuko? Those things are not pets, I can't allow Singabakhe here while you're keeping those vicious dogs," I am half shouting.

"Calm down mama, I promise I'll get rid of them. Your safety and comfort are my priority," he says and relief floods through me.

Thembi walks out with a bag and plastics with groceries. Ntuthuko is just watching her, saying absolutely nothing. He just wants this woman gone.

Thank heavens she just leaves without saying anything to the both of us.

"Let's go inside," he says, leading the way with Singa still in his arms, quiet as a mouse.

The house is spotless, it's obvious she cleaned up while waiting for Ntuthuko to come back.

He places Singabakhe down on the couch and takes the remote on the coffee table and finds something for my son to watch.

"Ntwana, mommy and I will be right back okay?" He says to my son who just nods. He is happy to be here with him, nothing else matters.

"MaHlomuka, this way please," I'm following behind him nervous as hell. He stops outside a door and takes out a key from his pocket then unlocks the door. He walks in first and I follow behind, it's his bedroom, it's nice and neat. I love how clean he is.

He is leaning against the wall and I'm folding my arms, standing awkwardly in the middle of the room.

"I know you heard what Thembi said and you must be asking yourself if it's true or not," he says and I know exactly what he's talking about.

"Are you close with my son to get points with me?" I ask. My baby is too invested in this man, I need to ask this question first.

"No, I'm in love with the both of you. If you don't reciprocate my feelings I will understand and obviously be hurt, but I will definitely stick around for Singabakhe because I love that boy MaHlomuka," he says and tears well up in my eyes immediately. I have had at least two boyfriend's after Daluxolo and they ended things with me because they couldn't deal with me having to be a mom first.

So hearing Ntuthuko say he is in love with both me and Singabakhe just touched me.

"I know I don't work the fanciest job, have a house like those that appear in the magazines. I don't have a car and the best fashion sense but I have a lot of love and respect for you. I can provide, protect and make you and that little boy very happy. I fell in love

with you the first day you bumped into me in that store and gave me an attitude. You make my heart beat abnormally everytime you are close. MaHlomuka, I have been with women of all ages, sizes and everything else but non of them made me feel this way. You're so special and I would be blessed to call you mine," I allow my tears to fall.

He's saying all the right things right now.

"Ntuthuko," it comes out in a whisper.

"Sthandwa sami," he comes towards me and stops just a few inches away from, we are so close.

"I don't know what to say, I wasn't expecting this," he takes my hand and brushes my knuckles with his thumb.

"I know, I wasn't expecting to tell you too but I'm glad I did,"

"Can I hug you," did I just say that?

He looks shocked too.

He nods, "Please," he is so handsome, rough around the edges but handsome non the less.

He circles his arms around my waist and I snake mine around his neck, he is so gentle and warm, I close my eyes.

"You can take your time, think about what I just told you because I'm really serious Nhlelozenkosi," this is the first time he's calling me by name. I hate it, it's MaHlomuka to him.

"Don't call me Nhlelozenkosi," I complain.

He chuckles, "It's your name though," he's ruining this moment.

"I know but not to you,"

He kisses my shoulder and I feel fire.

"I'm sorry MaHlomuka," that's more like it.

"Mommy," his soft voice says from behind me. I let go of Ntuthuko and turn to find him standing at the door.

"Yes Singa?" He looks at Ntuthuko then back at me.

"I'm hungry," I roll my eyes.

He refused to eat at home because he thought Ntuthuko was gonna fly away and leave him.

I look at the man who just told me things, "You don't have food in the house because someone decided to leave with the groceries," I say and he chuckles lightly.

"I saw that, we can go to town to eat at a restaurant and do some groceries if you don't mind," he says.

"Yes, I want a burger," my son exclaims excitedly.

"Okay, we can go but you're driving mister,"

"I'm okay with that. I just need to shower and then we can hit the road," he says.

I nod, "We will be waiting in the lounge," I say and walk out of the bedroom.

MSEBEYELANGA NGIDI

"Your mother doesn't like me Langa," she says. We are sitting in my car because mama won't allow us to be alone in a closed room. I'm thankful for that because she's saving me from myself, Sauda knows my weakness and I haven't had sex in a while. I don't want to find myself under the sheets with her, it will blur the lines and take me back ten steps.

"It's not that she doesn't like you Sauda, you just showed up to her house unannounced and she has never heard of you. Plus, we do things differently on this side of the world," I say and she huffs.

"You never told your mom about me? I thought you said you wanted to marry me,"

I heave a deep sigh, "I was planning on introducing you to my family at my homecoming but you dumped me before then Sauda so don't please," this is getting tiring. She's pretending like I'm the one who ended this relationship.

"Can we just let that go Langa, I made a mistake and I flew across the world to show you how sorry I am and how much I want to make this work,"

I shake my head, "You can't just erase that. You hurt me so bad, I wanted a future with you but it was very easy for you to dump me. I can't look pass that, I can't and I'm sorry,"

Her lower lip is quivering, "Please don't say that. I am begging you to give me another chance,"

"It's not going to work, we will just break up again because when you decided to dump me I lost something for you and I don't think I'll ever get it back," she gasps in shock, I'm not sure why because we are here because of her.

I want to heal, to get her out of my system and move on to something else.

"Langa l...I have to tell you something," she says with a shaking voice.

We are disturbed by a knock on the window, it's Mafube.

"Excuse me," I say to Sauda and climb out of the car.

My cousin is standing at the gate, talking to someone on the phone. He's looking really good, he didn't mention anything about going out,

he even has sunglasses on. I stop in front of him and wait for him to conclude his call, he stays on the line for another minute or so before hanging up with a smile on his face. That was definitely a woman.

"Where are you off to?" I ask.

He removes his sunglasses, "I'm going to see the beautiful Mawande," he says and my heart threatens to leap right out of my mouth. What business does he have with Mawande?

"What for?" I'm not liking any of this.

"She wants to be a lawyer and I am already one, I'll be like her mentor," he says with a smirk and if he wasn't my brother I was going to punch him in the face.

"Mawande is not one of those woman you play with Mafube, this better be about helping her understand the field she's interested in only," he chuckles, holding out his hands in surrender.

"Whoa! Relax, I'm only taking her out for a drink at some local place and talking about the law," he says.

Just the two of them? I can't have that.

An idea hits me, "Have your sessions or whatever here at home," at least I will be able to keep an eye on them.

"I tried asking her to come here but she said she doesn't want to impose," I frown.

Why would she say that? She knows she is always welcomed here. I'll have to talk to my mom to convince her to come here when she and Mafube have a mentoring session.

"Behave yourself around her Mafube or I swear," he laughs at me.

"If I didn't know better I'd say you have the hots for Mawande bro," he says and I swallow hard.

"Asking you to respect her doesn't mean I have the hots for her. She's a good girl and she doesn't deserve any shit and we both know you have a lot of that," he rolls his eyes.

"A girl like Mawande can make any man change,"

I click my tongue, "Just fuckin behave yourself or you're dead, I swear,"

"Msebe go deal with your snob,"

I don't want to deal with Sauda, I just need to book her a flight ticket back to Kenya and be done with her.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 22

SPONSORED BY ANONYMOUS

MAWANDE DUMA

I met with Mafube and I have been in the best of moods. He told me about his time as a law student and how he navigated through it and managed to pass with cum laude. He attended school in Bloemfontein, the University of Free State. I came to learn that his mother is a South African from Ficksburg, I've never heard of the place but he said he will take me to some annual event they have called the Cherry Festival. I just agreed to be polite, I won't be going anywhere with him. Imagine from falling in love with one brother to going to festivals with another, I'm not capable of being that girl. The only time I will spend with Mafube is when he's mentoring me, anything beyond that isn't happening. I'm still very much in love with Msebe, I know I have to get over my feelings and I will. I didn't feel this way for him over night so it will take me time to move on and forget about being with him.

"Mawande," I turn and find my aunt's boyfriend standing at the door in nothing but his boxers. I honestly don't feel comfortable with being alone in the house with him, that's why I'm sitting outside.

"What can I do for you?" I ask and he signals for me to come. I heave a heavy sigh and get up from the bench, what could he possibly want from me?

"Do you know what I'm craving?" he asks and I shake my head. I'm not a psychic, how does he expect me to know.

"I am craving steamed bread, beef and sweet beans," he has been making requests like he's at a five star hotel, but he might as well believe he is because my aunt allows him to. I thought I'd have it easy now that the twins aren't here but Nobantu just had to bring me another big baby.

"I don't think we have sweet beans here at home," I say, I'm not in the mood to make steamed bread. "But please call aunt Nobantu and tell her to bring some on her way back home and I'll cook the meal tomorrow," he looks really disappointed but I don't care. Today he will eat what I prepare, he's not my guest therefore not my responsibility to make happy.

"I'll text your aunt. Make me something light to eat while I wait for you to make supper," haibo wenja!

Who cut off his hands now?

"Okay," he walks in first and I follow behind him and get annoyed when he pulls out a chair and settles on it. I don't need him watching me as I play his house girl, preparing his food like he pays my salary.

"I noticed you sneaked out yesterday and came back pretty late," he says and I swallow hard, thankful that I'm facing the open fridge and not him. They can't find out about my plans.

"Do you have a boyfriend Mawande? Is that who you went to see?"
What an inappropriate question.

"With all due respect, that's non of your business," I say and he chuckles.

"You're not so timid after all, I like that," what is that supposed to mean? Couldn't my aunt go play cougar and toy boy somewhere else? Her boyfriend is making me super uncomfortable in my own home, maybe I should tell Sgora and let him deal with this nuisance.

I decide not to entertain him and this stupid, inappropriate conversation he's trying to keep going. I don't want to be accused of trying to sleep with him by my aunt, I'm sure she's the type of woman that blames the woman and not the horny boyfriend.

"We can be friends you know, good friends,"

I clear my throat, "I don't want to be your friend, can you stop trying to talk to me?"

He has this smug of his face, "I am just trying to be nice, we live in the same house you know," he licks his lower lip and my mind rushes back to when Qophelo tried to force himself on me. What if this one also tries that and this time succeeds? I have to find a way to disappear when my aunt is not home.

"Haibo! And then?" We both turn and find my aunt walking in, she's holding a plastic of food and her handbag, her eyes are darting between her boyfriend and I.

"And then what?" The toy boy asks, getting off his chair.

"Why are you naked in the kitchen?" She's asking that question looking at me. I am fully clothed so why am I receiving the ugly look?

"I'm not naked Nobantu, don't be that insecure woman," he says then pecks her lips. My aunt is trying to keep calm but I can tell that she's boiling with anger, he just called her out in front of me.

"Mawande, go get the plastics from the car," I drop the knife and hurry out, I know she wants to tell him never to undermine her in front of me.

I unload the plastics from the boot of the Audi, she did the groceries without asking me to write a list. I take a few inside and she stops talking when I walk in, I knew that his comment made her catch fire. I go and take the rest and she's now finishing up the sandwich her boyfriend asked me to prepare, he's no longer in the room. I'm sure he was told to go and put on some clothes, I doubt he knows the kind of woman he's dealing with. I am told that I don't have to cook dinner because she brought takeaways, that excites me because I get to be on my phone with no disturbances.

I walk out of the house to go sit back down on the bench and watch YouTube documentaries, I discovered this channel and I'm obsessed out of my mind.

Nhlelo's car stops outside the yard and I smile, I haven't seen her since Saturday. She climbs out and like always she's looking beautiful as hell, I don't know anyone who does it like this girl shame.

"Hey babe," she greets me with the widest smile, Nhlelo has her mother's warm smile.

"Hello beautiful," we share a hug, "What a nice surprise,"

"I just wanted to check up on you friend, it has been a minute," she just called me friend, now that's exciting.

"I've been good, what about you?" I ask and she looks away blushing.

I raise an eyebrow, "Out with whatever it is," she giggles.

"Did you know that Ntuthuko is into me?" She asks and I nod smiling.

Did he finally tell her how he feels about her?

"You're putting it lightly Nhlelo, he is in love with you and Singabakhe. I have never seen that big bear so gentle in my life, you have that effect on him. He is a great guy, he would make you and your boy very happy," I have to put in a good word for my boy. At least I'm not throwing Nhlelo to the wolves, Ntuthuko, as she calls him is really genuine.

"I wasn't aware of his feelings for me but on Sunday when he told me my heart skipped a couple of beats. I have been praying for a man who will love me and my son like his own and to finally know that I wasn't asking for too much was really amazing," she says, I can see her emotions through her eyes.

"Do you reciprocate his feelings?" I ask.

She takes a deep breath, "He is something different, something I haven't tried before and maybe that's what I need. I am not as crazy in love as he is but I feel something and it's been keeping me awake these past few days. I like how I've been feeling, how happy my son has been all because of this man. It won't take me time to completely be head over heels with Ntuthuko," I attack her with a hug.

"He's going to cry tears when you tell him that you want to do this with him," I say and let go, she's smiling widely.

"That would make us even because I cried when he told me," I chuckle.

They are made for each other, I can already tell.

"One thing I know is you'll never regret allowing him into your lives," I assure her.

"Promise to come see me this Friday. Ntuthuko has Singa for the entire weekend,"

"Your son is going for a sleep over before you?" She laughs and hits my arm playfully.

"Our time will come, soon!"

"I will be waiting to hear all about it,"

"You're so silly babe, I have to bounce. They are both waiting for me, I dropped them off at his house coz I had to drive my mom somewhere. Msebe disappeared in the morning, I think he wants the Kenya snob gone but he doesn't know how to tell her," that somehow makes my heart jump for joy.

"Why does he want her gone? Are they not dating kante?" I ask and she shrugs her shoulders.

"Msebe says she broke up with him before he left Dubai so he doesn't understand why she's here," okay, that's uhm, okay.

MSEBEYELANGA NGIDI

I woke up early in the morning then got into my car and drove, I didn't have a destination in mind. I just wanted to be away from the nagging Sauda, she doesn't want to accept that I'm done with this relationship. She keeps on trying to convince me to give it another shot but it's not going to work, I lost something for her when she decided to dump me because I wanted to come home. We could try a million times to revive this relationship but it will still die coz I no longer hold the plans I had for us in my heart. It will be about having fun and crazy sex, no future at all. I don't want to waste her time so it's better this way, for the both of us.

On the other hand I have to deal with Mafube always talking about Mawande, he is driving me completely insane. If it was up to me I'd

cancel this whole mentoring bullshit and get her a lady lawyer who won't try anything with her. Mawande is a special girl, she doesn't need the stress man like Mafube bring. My cousin is a womanizer of note, he has three children with some girl but doesn't plan on marrying her. That should tell you about the kind of person he is with women. I don't want that for Mawande, she deserves a man who will love her and show her how a queen is treated. I don't know why maMokwena is not putting her nephew in place and telling him not to mess with that amazing woman.

Anyway, I ended up at the beach in Durban after purchasing a ticket for Sauda, her flight leaves Saturday morning. I cannot wait to have her out of my hair, I need to move passed this stage in my life and start planning for my future. I am not getting any younger, it's time I find a woman who shares my hopes and dreams, a woman who will bare me lots and lots of cute babies that will keep my mother on her toes.

"Never disappear like that then switch off your phone," my mom says, hitting me with a broom.

"Ouch ma!" Jesus Christ, this woman.

"I've been worried sick about you Langoo, where did you disappear to?" I take a deep breath.

"I just needed a minute to myself mama," she takes my hand and leads me to the lounge, I know we are about to have a serious conversation.

"I had the opportunity of marrying a man that I love and that loved me just as much. I gave up so much for your father, I went against so many people to be his wife and I don't regret anything to this day. I

want you and your sister to be happy baby, it doesn't matter where you find that happiness," she says and I clasp her hand.

"You taking Mawande as your wife would make me the happiest mother in the world, but I don't want to choose for you son because I chose for myself. If it's mantsho you want to be with then I will respect that, she needs to be taught a lot of things and I am willing to do it for as long as she makes you happy my baby," I love my mother more than anything in this world.

"I appreciate you saying this mama, but Sauda and I are done. I don't want to work on this relationship, I just want something new," I say and she smiles wider.

"Thank God, it was going to be chaos," I laugh, but she just said, you know what it's maMokwena so I'll let it slide.

"I bought her a ticket to Kenya, I'm going to give it to her and make sure she understands that I don't want this relationship anymore," I say and mama cups my face.

"For as long as you're sure about everything,"

"At least I will tell our child that I tried to make this relationship work Langa, I can't say the same for you," Sauda says, appearing from the corridor.

I look at my mom and her eyes are as wide with shock as my own.

"What are you saying Sauda?" She chortles.

"I will go pack my bags and be out of your house," oh God no, this is not happening.

"Hei wena nopopi, sit down and explain what you've just said," my mom says and she comes to sit down. My life cannot be taking this direction, at least not like this, not with Sauda.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 23

MALETSATSI MaMOKWENA NGIDI

I love my children more than anything in this life, when I look at them I am reminded of my darling husband. I am reminded of how much that stubborn Zulu man loved me and them. I was blessed enough to meet my soul mate and have a beautiful life with him and our children. I gave up so much but that didn't matter because I had him and that was enough. He loved and cherished me until his dying day, losing him was hard but I am comforted by all the beautiful memories we made together and our beautiful children. I want Msebeyelanga and Nhlelozenkosi to be happy and to experience real love, a love that will stand all the tests of time. My daughter already had a bad experience with love, but I'm happy she didn't allow Daluxolo to take away her hope of finding someone who will love her and Singabakhe genuinely.

Now I am worried about my son, I don't think this girl is telling the truth about being pregnant. Maybe she really is but I don't think it's my son's child, I'm not saying this because I want Mawande for my son. I am saying this because I am a mother and I can tell when someone is trying to take my child for a ride.

I had a conversation with Msebeyelanga and asked if he believes that the baby is his and he couldn't answer. I have never seen my son so conflicted, he has been locked up in his rondavel. The girl in question has also been in the bedroom she has been using since she arrived here, Nhlelozenkosi has been serving her food in there. She only comes out when she needs to use the toilet or take a shower. We can't continue like this, we need to find out the truth and I know the perfect way to do it.

I knock on the bedroom door and she gives me permission to come in, I push the door open and step inside. She's on the bed, busy on the laptop. It must be nice being her, we bring her food and wash her dishes because my house is her personal hotel. She closes the laptop when she sees it's me and stands up to cover up properly. She's a little nervous, we've never had a one on one so she must be wondering what I have to say to her.

"Sauda," I say softly.

She clears her throat, "Mrs Ngidi,"

"You said you have only taken home pregnancy tests right?"

She nods vigorously, "Yes, I haven't been to the doctor," that's very weird.

I would want a doctor's confirmation before flying across the world to tell my child's father about the baby, especially if I dumped him.

"No problem, Msebeyelanga will drive us to Port Shepstone tomorrow and we will find a good doctor who will confirm and tell us how far along you are," She's nodding her head.

"I would appreciate that," there's a smile on her face, let's see if she'll still be smiling after this.

"Have you told your parents yet?" She swallows hard.

"Not yet, I'm really scared of their reaction," that's expected.

"They will be very mad at first but once the baby is born they will be overjoyed. Trust me I know because it was the same thing with me when Nhlelo told me she was pregnant with Singabakhe," I say with a smile and she giggles, relaxing a little.

"Do they follow traditions in Kenya? Your parents I mean?" She nods vigorously.

"My father is a deep rooted African man,"

I sigh in relief, "That's great, at least they won't mind me doing what needs to be done," she frowns.

"I'm not following ma?" Her eyes are narrowed.

"The Ngidi's have a way of doing things to confirm that a woman is carrying their grandchild. Every women who gave birth to a Hlomuka has gone through it, even me," she swallows hard.

"What? What happens?"

"Well, you'll be taken to a cave with me and your mother present. The cave is where our ancestors are, we will stay there for the entire weekend. If the child is not a Ngidi then you will miscarry by the end of that weekend, but if you are indeed pregnant and the baby is truly a Hlomuka then it will rain hard and we will see black ants in the cave," her eyes are about to fall off.

I want to laugh but I have to make this lie believable, I'm not about to allow my only son to be taken for a ride.

"Talk to your parents and let them know about the pregnancy, once they have cooled down I'll make contact and explain to them how we do things here," She cannot believe her ears.

"I will do just that ma, thank you," okay, she's taking it. Let's just wait and see how far she's willing to ride it.

"I'll start cooking herbs for you to drink, my grandson has to be protected in there," she's very uncomfortable right now.

"I appreciate it,"

"Nhlelozenkosi will bring your supper, or will you be joining us today?"

"I will come out Mrs Ngidi,"

"Good," I turn and walk out.

Both Nhlelozenkosi and I didn't hear the alarm go off, if Mafube didn't wake up and realize that we are still asleep then we would be extra late. Ntuthuko is already here waiting to drive Singa to school, my daughter is still trying to put him in his uniform. They should be on their way right now, imagine a child that gets to school late on a Friday. Finally they come out and Nhlelo grabs his backpack, I have already parked his lunch box and extra fruits to eat while on their way to Port Shepstone. My poor grandson can't sit down and have proper breakfast.

"Msebe and I should be taking Singa to school. We don't want Ntuthuko to ask for a discount during lobola negotiations," Mafube says and I frown.

"He's just being a great uncle to Singabakhe, there's nothing going on between them," he chuckles.

"You've always had a sharp eye rakgadi, but it looks like you're loosing it," I smacks my lips.

"Do you know something I don't?" I ask and he shrugs his shoulders.

"The guy is head over heels in love with your daughter, it looks like my sister is also falling for him. Didn't you see how they smiled at each other a few minutes ago?" I didn't see this relationship coming. Maybe because Ntuthuko is different from Singabakhe's father and that one boyfriend she introduced after Daluxolo. I thought maybe she was into these city boys who are well educated and rich.

The door opens and she walks back inside.

"I don't know what I would do without Ntuthuko," I can see the smile Mafube was just talking about.

"Nhlelo," I say, placing the packet of cheese down.

"MaMokwena," her eyes are narrowed.

"Is there anything you want to tell us?"

"With regards to what?" She asks confused.

"I don't know, any changes and additions to your life,"

Mafube is giving her a curious look too, "Mama just come out and ask because I don't get what you're trying to say,"

She gave me the ropes so here it goes, "Nhlelozenkosi are you and Ntuthuko sneaking around?" The corners of her mouth curl up and Mafube chuckles.

"I told you rakgadi," he says and Nhlelo hits his shoulders.

"You're so forward, Jesus,"

"Weren't you going to tell us?" I ask.

"Mama, Ntuthuko told me on Sunday that he's in love with me and Singabakhe. I haven't told him how I feel yet, I was going to let everyone know when I had told him that I'd love for us to give it a try,"

"I never thought you'd fall for a village champion but hey, love is love," Mafube teases and Nhlelo clicks her tongue.

"Mawande is also from the village," Nhlelo throws back.

"Atleast she can dress, your boyfriend is always in tracksuits, different colors. Does he have shares at Nike?" I am thrown into a fit of laughter.

"Urgh! Go jump Mafube. There's more to Ntuthuko than his clothes,"

"Oh but baby he needs to change his style, I also had to clean up Ngidi," It was a job and a half but when I was done with him he was turning heads.

"You too ma? Really?" I laugh then continue making breakfast.

The door opens and my handsome son walks in looking good. He's dressed up, it looks like he's going somewhere because he has his car keys and wallet in his hand.

He greets us and we respond, I hate seeing him so down but soon everything will unfold and we will know the truth and make decisions from there.

"Where are you going?" Mafube asks then drinks his coffee.

"I want Sauda and I to go see a doctor. I want to be sure that she's pregnant and how far she is. I know exactly when I last slept with her, the days better be exact. I won't just agree to being the father," he says.

"This is a messed up situation," -Nhlelo.

"You can say that again sis, I didn't want to have a child under such circumstances,"

My poor baby.

"Trust me I understand. I wish I had waited for Mawande to mother all my children, that girl is worthy of the ring and my surname," I watch my son squirm.

I love how Mafube is frying him, I didn't even ask him to play with Msebeyelanga like this. But I did ask him if he's serious with wanting to pursue Mawande and he said no, he's just being a flirt. He promised not to try anything with Mawande and I trust him, that one is my sons wife.

"Let me go wake Sauda up," Msebe walks away and Mafube laughs.

I suspect that my nephew has realized that my son has some feelings for Mawande and he's being in denial about it. If this is true then he's doing a good job in tormenting him.

"Let me go lay the bed and take a shower. I have to be in front of the laptop in 20 minutes," Nhlelozenkosi says then yawns.

"After your meeting come in here to make your boyfriend something to eat, I'm no longer touching his food," I say and she laughs. We normally give Ntuthuko breakfast when he brings the car after dropping Singa at school.

"Did any of you see Sauda this morning?" Msebe asks, walking back in the kitchen.

"No I haven't," -Mafube.

"Nope," -Nhlelozenkosi.

"Did you check the bathroom?" I ask.

My son nods, "Yes, I did ma. I even checked all the rooms in the house,"

"That's weird," my daughter says and I laugh.

"Do you know something rakgadi," I shrug my shoulders.

"I need to check something first," I say and make my way to the bedroom she was using, Msebe left the door open so I just walk in and my children are on my heels. I need to see if her bags are still here.

"Where could she have gone to?" Nhlelo asks worried.

"Back to Kenya," I say for sure when I see a letter on the bed addressed to Msebeyelanga.

"How do you know," My son asks.

"I didn't believe that the girl is pregnant, if she is then that child isn't my grandbaby. I told her about a non existent ritual we have here at the Ngidi's..." I explain exactly what I said to Sauda and my nephew is laughing.

"You're savage rakgadi,"

"I couldn't allow her to mess with my son, I would do anything to protect you kids,"

"Wow, so she ran away,"

"Read her letter son, find out what she has to say," I say and he settles down on the bed and grabs the letter on the bed.

"Let's give him a minute," I say to Nhlelo and Mafube then we walk out to give Msebe some privacy.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 24

MSEBEYELANGA NGIDI

I have been sitting on the bed in my rondavel for hours now, wondering if I should read this letter or shred it. A part of me wants to move on and forget everything about Sauda, but another part of me wants to know why she flew all the way here and said she was pregnant with my child then fled in the middle of the night. I deserve answers and maybe I'll find some in this letter she wrote, maybe this is the closure I've been looking for. I take a deep breath and open the page.

My dearest Langa.

I don't even know where to begin, I mean there's so much I want to say but I will surely run out of paper and ink. Plus, I don't have time. I need to be out of here before any of you wake up and ask me to go to the doctor. I know you are going to hate me but I was just so desperate to get you back. I am not pregnant, I never was. I was hoping that a baby would make you want to try again with me and revisit the plans you had for us. I didn't have a plan from there, but I know myself I would have thought of something. Your mother scared me when she spoke of pregnancy cave rituals so I knew I had to leave before I was exposed. I didn't want to see the disappointment and disgust on your face when you realized that there's no baby.

I deeply regret breaking up with you, I just have issues and a lot of them. When you told me you're leaving I panicked, I thought you'll meet someone else and forget about me. So I broke up with you hoping that you'll change your mind and stay in Dubai but that back fired. I love you so much and I hope after reading this you'll understand me better and maybe give us another chance. I promise to tell you my life story, to tell you why I am this way. I will work on myself because you deserve it. I will be waiting for you to come back to me, to the life we can have together. Please don't worry about me, I will get to Durban safely and leave for Kenya ASAP.

Love, your dark beauty.

She said a whole bunch of nothing and didn't even apologize, she shouldn't have bothered writing this letter. A text on WhatsApp telling me she's not pregnant and she left would have done the job.

I am thankful to my mom for coming up with this non existent ritual to get this girl to tell the truth. I am relieved that I'm not having a child with Sauda, she's right when she says she has issues and a lot of them. Now I realize that I ignored her red flags when we were

together because I loved her genuinely and wanted to make it work. For some reason I thought my love will fix parts of her but I was wrong.

I get up and take off the clothes I had on and find something comfortable. My problems are gone, I should rejoice and thank God that I dodged a bullet. Sauda will be someone else's headache now, I don't have to worry myself about anything that concerns her. I'm going to use this time to work on myself and my career.

A knock on the door startles me, I'm sure it's my mom. She must think I'm depressed or something.

"Come in," I give permission to the person and my heart skips a beat when Mawande walks in. She's holding a tray with food and a glass of wine.

"Wande," it has been a minute since I laid my eyes on her.

"Hey, your mom asked me to bring you some food," she's not looking at me again, I thought we are past this.

"Thank you. How have you been Wande?" I ask and she shrugs her shoulders.

"Good I guess. How are you? Your mom just told me about Sauda," she asks, looking at me this time.

I heave a heavy sigh, "I'm good, relieved actually. I didn't want to have a baby with her, I just want to move on from that part of my life," I say and she settles down on the couch.

"You don't have to act strong you know," she says softly and I join her on the couch.

"I'm really not trying to act strong Wande, I loved Sauda but our relationship wasn't really rosey. I won't miss out on anything, I'm

ready to start on a clean slate, to find someone who shares my hopes and dreams. I am ready for a wife and best friend," I say and turn to look at her. I am tempted to touch her hair.

"I hope you find what you're looking for Msebe," It comes out in a whisper.

"Can I please touch your hair,"

She giggles, "uhm...okay,"

"You have beautiful hair Wande, I love it," I say, touching it.

"I hate it, it's too much work and now that there's no salon here it's a nightmare for me," she complains.

"Let me take you to a salon in town tomorrow," she frowns.

"No Msebe, it's okay,"

I shake my head, "I insist Wande,"

"Okay fine, I'll tell Mafube that we cannot have a session tomorrow,"
The fuck? A session on a Saturday? I have to be present at these sessions, I might not have studied law but I can give my two cents.

"What do you discuss at these sessions?" I ask.

"We only had one session and we discussed university, how to navigate through it to be able to pass with impressive marks. Serious mentoring will start when I'm registered with a university," she explains.

"Are you comfortable with him?" I ask.

"Yeah, I am. Mafube is funny, smart and very informed about the law," she says and my stomach knots. He makes her laugh and she's always so tense and reserved around me. That hurts hey.

"You don't want me to get you a lady lawyer?" I ask and she laughs, shaking her head.

"No, Mafube will help me," I was honestly hoping for a different answer. I don't want her spending more time with Mafube.

"Let's eat," I say, uncovering the plate.

I'm not spending another minute with her talking about another man.

"Oh no, that's only enough for you but thank you for offering," she says and I frown.

"Mawande, eat with me,"

I furrow my forehead, "Did you just roll your eyes at me?" I ask and she pouts.

Just look at how cute she is.

"Should I get some hot sauce?"

"Nope," she quickly says and I smile, I am going to get her addicted to hot sauce, trust me.

"Mawande, I mixed us a drink while you wait for Nhlelo to finish with work," My brother says, pushing my door open. This guy doesn't have timing, I'm having my moment with Mawande here. Can't he just leave us be?

"Oh bro, we are eating. We will be right out," I quickly tell him.

"I can see that," he says with a lopsided smile.

"Wande tell him about tomorrow before you forget," He has to know that she's choosing to be with me and not him.

"What's happening tomorrow?" Mafube asks, folding his arms across his chest.

"Can we please postpone our session to Monday," She says, with her forever soft voice that serenades.

"Is everything okay?" Everything is fine dude, she'll be with me. Far away from your flirtatious self.

I say to myself.

"Uhm, Msebe and I will be going into town tomorrow,"

He's nodding slowly, looking at me, "That's alright, we can do it on Monday. Have a good day tomorrow guys," I wasn't expecting him to let it slide that easily. He is very competitive.

"Mawande, babe where are you?" Nhlelozenkosi calls out.

"My friend is done guys, let me go. Thanks for the food Msebe and I'll see you tomorrow," she says, getting up from the couch.

"I'll call you later on to confirm the time we are leaving," I'm planning to have a great day with her tomorrow. I want to see her laughing, being care free like she was in the supermarket that other time. Wande seems to relax around me when we aren't in Mzumbe.

"Okay then. Thank you for understanding Mafube, I'll see you on Monday," Couldn't she just ignore him?

We both watch her exit my rondavel.

"Wanna go out? It's a Friday," He asks and I nod vigorously.

"I'd love to unwind bro, let's hit some cool places in Margate," a boys night out will definitely do. We have a lot of catching up to do, we haven't had a one on one because Sauda showed up and caused chaos. I love my cousin and I'm happy he's here but I want him playing far from Mawande.

NOBANTU DLADLA

I came to Durban to see my children, I tried to call Ndongoloza but her phone has been off since last night. I'm sure she's having the time of her life with Dedani, she cannot stop talking about how he's treating her like a queen since she moved to Port Zimbali. At this rate

I won't be surprised to receive a letter from the Mkhize's asking to come and negotiate lobola for my princess. That will be the day, I would organize a wedding of the decade. Mzumbe would be on fire, those jealous gossip mongers would have something to talk about.

I should go to maMokwena's house, Msebeyelanga needs to work on my house before I receive that important letter from my future in-laws.

"Why did you come here if you're just going to sit there and stare at me?" Qophelo asks annoyed.

The doctor said this behavior is expected, he is experiencing withdrawals.

"It just hurts to see you this way," I say, with tears burning my eyes.

"If that's the case then take me home mama," he says and I shake my head.

"That would be me killing you Qophelo. Staying here is hard and I know that but it's to help you get back on track. Don't you miss being clean?"

He chuckles, "No ma, I miss being high! I'm doing this because I don't want you throwing me in jail,"

I gasp in shock, "Are you saying you'll go back to drugs once you leave this place?" My heart is thumping against my chest.

I am paying a lot of money for him to be here only to go back to cocaine when he comes out.

"No, Nobantu. I'll stay clean because I don't want to go to prison, I don't want to find myself being some gang members girlfriend on the inside," he says and I sigh in relief.

"One day you will thank me for fighting for you when you couldn't son,"

He clicks his tongue, " I want to go back to my room ma so please leave,"

"I'll come see you again next Friday. What do you want me to bring for you?" I ask.

"Don't come ma, I'll tell the doctors to call you when I need something," he says, getting up from the chair. Why is he being difficult?

"Qophelo, I love you," he walks away without saying anything. I just want what's best for him, why am I the bad guy?

Why am I the enemy when I'm only trying to help him get his life back on track.

I want to start at the mall before driving back to Mzumbe. Sqalo asked me to get him a few things, it has been total bliss living in the same house as him. Our relationship is now official, we don't have to hide anymore and that's what I've always wanted. I need to plan a girls weekend away with Ndondo and let her know about me and Sqalo. Hopefully she will be happy for me and not judge because of the age difference. I'll only tell Qophelo when he's out of rehab, I know for sure that he will be difficult about this whole thing. He has made comments in the past about busting any man's brain open for being in my life.

"Nobantu Dladla," someone says in the parking lot of the rehab center. I turn and it's a light skinned woman who has curly hair. She's wearing a navy blue suit with the highest heels, she's very beautiful and I think I know her from somewhere.

"Hello, do I know you?" I ask.

"The name is Vivian Shozi," she says and I blink rapidly, "You have been fuckin my husband for years now," she says with a smile. What the hell is she doing here? Where my son is.

"You know me?" I had no idea that she knows about Sqalo and I. He didn't mention anything about telling her that he's leaving her for me.

"Yes, you and many others," my heart almost stops.

"What is that supposed to mean?" I ask and she laughs.

"Please don't tell me that you thought you're the only one," she says, placing a hand on her chest.

"Sisi, your boyfriend cannot keep it in his pants. He has a wondering eye, he likes them very young. I was shocked to learn that he has a cougar," I narrow my eyes at the last past. How dare she!

"You're only bitter because your husband left you for this cougar, now you're making up stories to make us fight," I say and she's thrown into a fit of laughter.

"Is that what he told you? That he left me? Oh my God, wisdom doesn't come with age after all. Enjoy him sisi, I want absolutely nothing to do with Sqalo. He is a community dick and I deserve better," anger is bubbling in my stomach.

"What are you doing here? Are you following me around?" I ask with a raised eyebrow.

"Don't flatter yourself, I work here," she what? Why did Sqalo not tell me this when he suggested this place? Oh he has a fuckin lot to explain.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 25

SPONSORED BY DITSHWANELO

NOBANTU DLADLA

The two hour drive from Durban to Mzumbe felt like ten today, I just wanted to get home and talk to Sqalo. He needs to tell me why he didn't mention that his wife works at the rehab center. I also want to know why she called him a community dick, I won't be staying with a man who has other women on the side.

When Vivian said he likes them young my mind immediately ran to Mawande, I remembered the day I found him in nothing but his boxers in the kitchen while Mawande was making him a sandwich. Why would he be comfortable in his underwear in front of my niece if he respects me? He even had the audacity to call me insecure in front of her. I know he apologized and promised that it won't happen again but after what his ex told me I can't help but raise an eyebrow. What if he has already taken a liking in my own niece? I should have known that Mawande will be temptation, I really have to do something about this.

The shower taps finally close, Sqalo takes the longest showers. I stopped myself a couple of time from going in the bathroom and pulling him out so we can have a conversation. He walks in our bedroom and finds me sitting on the edge of the bed. He greets me with a smile and bends down to kiss my lips before dropping the towel and moisturizing his skin.

"Is everything okay babe? You look mad, whose ass am I kicking?" He asks and I scoff.

"No Sqalo, why didn't you tell me that Vivian works at the rehab you suggested my son goes to?" He frowns and stands up straight.

"I didn't think it was important, my focus was getting your boy in the best care facility. Is that a crime?" He asks and I swallow.

"No, it's not a crime, but you should have told me. I ran into her and she told me all sorts of things about you,"

He blows out a sigh, "Let me guess, she told you how she's the one that left me. I was probably accused of sleeping with the whole of Durban, am I close?" I blink rapidly. How did he know?

"Wait," he says, pulling up his boxers, "You believe her Nobantu?" He asks, I can see how disappointed he is in me.

"Can't you see what she's trying to do?"

His voice is hoarse.

"You have to understand that she caught me off guard and started saying things, I am only human," he chuckles in disbelief.

"She said all of those things to make you react this way, she wants us to fight and you're allowing her to get in between us," he says, pulling out a T-shirt from the drawer.

"How did she even find out about us?" I ask.

"I told you she was trying to track me down, that's why I wanted to leave for Swaziland or Lesotho," damn, he's right.

"Are you going to come home with an attitude everytime you hear something about me in the streets?" He asks and I shake my head.

"Of course not baba, like I said, she caught me off guard,"

"I can't be with someone who doesn't trust me Nobantu, maybe I should just leave," he says and I quickly get on my feet and go to him, I snake my hands around his waist.

"No, please don't leave. Let's not allow her to come in between us," I say and peck his lips.

"No, you firstly scolded me like a child for being in my boxers in front of Mawande and now you come home with Vivian's nonsense. If we don't have trust then we might as well just stop what we are doing," He has been angry with me before but not like this.

"Baba, I'm sorry. It will not happen again," he clicks his tongue and removes my arms from around him before exiting the bedroom. Damn it Nobantu! You should have known better. Vivian is obviously hurt that Sqalo chose me over her and she will do everything in her power to try and destroy our relationship.

I am in the kitchen cooking supper for Sqalo, from now onwards I will be preparing all of his meals. I don't want Mawande anywhere near my man, Sqalo is a man and he loves me but I don't want to place temptation in front of him. I mean a lion will never look away from a vulnerable prey, it's the same with men. Plus, Mawande might just seduce him as pay back for everything that has happened.

Sqalo is in the lounge watching soccer, I served him his favorite cognac because I'm trying to get him to forgive me for bringing Vivian's nonsense home. When he is done eating his supper I'm taking him to our bedroom to properly apologize. In there he can punish me however he desires for offending him today.

The door opens and Mawande walks in humming a melody. She now comes and goes as she pleases since befriending MaMokwena's daughter. I would forbid her from ever making contact with that girl but that annoying old hag would show up here asking questions. I don't know why she didn't move back to Lesotho when Ngidi kicked the bucket. The supermarket has to come back, it's the only thing that kept her in line and away from making meaningless friendships.

"Aunty Nobantu, I thought you said I shouldn't cook," she says panicking.

I was going to bring takeaways from Durban but after my encounter with Vivian I just wanted to come straight home.

"That didn't mean you should stay at MaMokwena's house until this time," I say, pointing the knife I'm using to chop these vegetables at her.

"I'm sorry, Nhlelozenkosi and I lost track of..."

I quickly interject, "I don't care about all of that Mawande. Listen, you'll be moving out of the main house," I say and her eyes widen.

"Hao! Why aunty? Where will I be staying?" I roll my eyes, "Wake up early tomorrow morning and clean up the room at the back. You'll be moving in there. You sleep in there, bath in there and only come in the house when I call you,"

"Did I do something wrong?" She asks.

"Your age mates have long moved out of home, I'm just doing you a favor,"

"And food?" That's all she's worried about.

"I will not starve you Mawande, but from now on I'll be cooking for my man. You will only cook when I ask you to, you will clean and do our laundry every Saturday morning, are we clear?" She nods vigorously.

"Good girl, now go pack your things so long," she walks away and I narrow my eyes. Why does she look happy about this arrangement?

NDONDOLOZA DLADLA

I open my eyes and roll over to the other side of the bed before stretching. My whole body is so sore, it's like I went to the gym after a long ass time. I get out of bed and make my way to the adjoining bathroom. I scream in pain when I urinate and it burns like hell. Tears blur my vision, I honestly don't know what has been happening with me this entire week. I wake up and my vagina is painful, it feels like I had rough sex the entire night. I ignored it the first two days but I'm starting to get worried now, yesterday morning I googled and got scared out of my mind. According to the internet I have an STI but I don't believe that because I only sleep with Dedani, even though we haven't been having sex.

I had a shower and applied vaginal cream to soothe my good girl from the pain and discomfort, I need to talk to Dedani and ask that we both visit a doctor. I cannot continue ignoring this thing, it will only get worse from here.

I am in the kitchen making myself breakfast, I bought a cook book and I've been trying out the recipes from it. Everything I've done so far has been delicious, if I wasn't starting with work this coming week I'd be starting my own channel where I recreate recipes. I've always wanted to be a content creator and maybe I should find the time for it.

"My baby," Dedani kisses my neck. I didn't hear him come in, I'm now outside in the garden. What a wonderful surprise.

"Hey love, you smell so good," he chuckles and places a bouquet of flowers on the garden table and two paper bags from Louis Vuitton. Oh my God, he replaced the bag my brother stole and got me an extra gift. I'm such a spoilt hun.

"No you didn't," I say, clapping excitedly.

"I couldn't leave Sandton without buying my good girl some goodies,"
oh I love this man please.

"Oh baby, thank you so much," I get up and kiss him on the lips. He went to Johannesburg on Wednesday for business and I've been missing him terribly.

"I'm still mad at you for switching off your phone Thursday night and only switching it on Friday afternoon," he says and I give him puppy eyes. I honestly didn't do that on purpose, my phone was on flight mode and I wasn't even aware. I only realized when I wasn't getting any calls from him.

"I'll make it up to you," I say and he crosses his legs.

"Don't worry about it, you're doing so much for me already. Now, open your gifts," he says and I quickly grab the first paper bag to unbox my new baby.

"Where's your phone? Let's take a video," he asks and I giggle. Isn't he the absolute best? He understands Instagram content.

"Babe no," I say then cover my mouth with both hands.

"You deserve it," Dedani Mkhize bought me a boss babe bag, the bag Qophelo stole wasn't even close to this one.

"I really appreciate you love," I sit on top of him, I'll open the other gift later.

"Not opening that one?" He asks.

"In a minute," I try to kiss him but he moves his face away.

I heave a sigh, "What's wrong? You haven't been kissing and touching me Mkhize,"

"Nothing babe," he caresses my face.

"Dedani are you sure it's still just me and Hlubi you are with?" I ask and he narrows his eyes.

"What kind of bullshit are you asking me Ndongoloza?" Oh Lord, I didn't mean to anger him. I just wanted to know why he isn't touching me, he said it himself that he only gets pleasure from me and sleeps with Hlubi out of duty. If he's not getting pleasure from me then where is he getting it from because it has been a while.

"Babe, I have been burning when I pee, the internet says it could be an STI. I have never had any of those things but here I am now," he pushes me off him and I manage to balance and not fall.

"Are you insulting me Ndongoloza?" He is livid.

"Of course not love, I was just asking. I'm worried about my health and yours," he chuckles.

"I respect myself too much to be sleeping around. If you have an STI then you have a lot of explaining to do girly," he says, wagging a finger at me.

My pulse leaps, "Baby please, I wasn't trying to anger you,"

He clicks his tongue, "I came here because I missed you and you just had to ruin this moment by asking me stupid questions," he gets up from the garden couch.

"Don't leave please," he doesn't even look back at me. Fuck Ndongoloza, you could have handled this issue better.

After he left angrily I cleaned around the house and did my laundry then took a nap, It hasn't been long since I woke up. I tried his phone a million times and he's ignoring me. I know he's only going to talk to me days later, he punishes me with silence and that kills me everytime. It's a Saturday and I thought I had him the entirely day, I don't want to stay here and be bored. I called my best friend Londeka and she said she's at her flat, I'm going to see her and come back later on.

I greet the security guard at the gate and he waves at me as I drive out. I have to start at the mall and get Londeka and I some food and drinks, I should withdraw some money to give her. She's still struggling to get a job and now that her parents aren't helping out financially it's tough for her. I don't mind helping her because I know if the tables were turned she would do the same for me. The song stops playing and my phone rings, it's Dedani. I sigh in relief, I thought it's going to take us days to talk again.

"Babe," I answer.

My iPhone is connected to the car.

"Where the fuck are you going Ndondo?" He asks.

How did he know that I'm going somewhere? Is he tracking me?

"How did you know I am going somewhere?" I ask.

"Because I can hear that you're driving, and never answer a question with a question again," I blow out a sigh.

"I'm going to see Londeka,"

He chuckles, "Who did you tell sisi?"

"You weren't answering my calls Dedani,"

"So you couldn't leave me a message?" Oh nkosiyami!

"I'm sorry babe,"

"I don't need your apology. I told you that I worry and to keep me calm you should tell me your every move, didn't I?"

"You did,"

"Turn that fuckin car around and go back to the house Ndondoloza. You don't need to be visiting friends, I pay for DSTV, Netflix, WiFi

and everything else. Open a bottle of champagne and when you're drunk go to bed," he orders.

"Baby please, I've already told Londeka that I'm on my way," He can't do this to me.

I deserve to have a social life, I can't always be locked up.

"That's not my problem, go back home. When I call you better be there Ndondo or else," the line goes dead.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 26

SPONSORED BY DITSHWANELO

MAWANDE DUMA

Last night I packed all of my clothes and shoes, the photos I have of my parents and everything that has sentimental value to me. I was awake before four in the morning like I normally am and made my way to the back room. I used the rechargeable bulb to illuminate the room because it was so dark then. The room was a mess, I'm still struggling to take out some of the things from inside and it's now twelve in the afternoon. My aunt came earlier to check on me and placed my breakfast on the dusty chair next to what used to be our kraal. By breakfast I mean buttered bread and black coffee, I am not complaining because food is food. Some people don't even have clean water to drink, I'm grateful for anything. She told me that she and her boyfriend will be going to Port Edward and will be back later on. She gave me permission to go inside the house to make myself something to eat, I'm planning on taking extra non perishables for when she decides to starve me. I know she said she won't but I've

lived with aunt Nobantu for a long time, she changes colors like a chameleon.

Aunt Nobantu thought she's sending me to the pits but I am happy to be moving out of the main house. I don't have to always be looking over my shoulder to see if her boyfriend isn't giving me inappropriate looks. I don't have to hide when using my phone and most importantly I will leave without being seen when it's time to go to university. She will regret ever setting me free and I will be long gone by then.

As much as I am happy about this, I'm angry at my aunt for making me move out today. Msebeyelanga asked to take me to the salon in town and this whole thing messed up our plans. I was really looking forward to spending the day with him, yes, my crush is back and bigger than the last time. Sauda is nothing to him and maybe there's still a chance for me, I just pray to God that I'm not setting myself up for heart break. A sane part of me what's to give up and stop chasing pavements but the in love part of me is planning my wedding with Msebe. I already have names for our children and where we are going to live. That's how bad I have it for this man.

He was disappointed when he called last night and I told him that I can't go to town with him today, I explained why and he lost it. He couldn't understand why my aunt would put me out of the main house, I tried explaining that this is a good thing for me but he just didn't want to hear it. I managed to calm him down when I said we can go to the salon on Monday and he can choose my hairstyle. I'm just not looking forward to canceling Mafube again, I don't want him to think that I'm not serious with this whole mentorship thing.

"Wande," I drop the cabinet and it hits my toes.

"Ahhhh shit!" I cry in pain.

"Oh Wande, I am so sorry," a tear escapes my eye. Msebe helps move the cabinet off my foot then picks me up bridal style, he places me gently on the dusty chair that had my breakfast and quickly removes my sneaker to check my foot.

"I am really sorry, I didn't mean to startle you," he says, rubbing away the pain. Atleast I'm not bleeding and nothing feels broken.

"It's okay, I should have been aware of my surrounding and not lost in thoughts," I say, enjoying his touch. His hands are so soft, I can have him do this all day.

"What are you doing here?" I ask.

He blows out a sigh, "I came to help you with the cleaning up and moving in," he says and I laugh out loud.

"Dressed like that?" He frowns and looks at himself.

"What's wrong with this outfit?" Is he kidding me?

"Couldn't you find something old? The dirt in there will ruin your clothes,"

"These are my old clothes,"

Wow! I would have gone with him to the mall dressed like that. I mean I'm wearing an old legging that's torn in the thighs, an ANC T-shirt that has served as a pyjama before and a headscarf that belonged to my grandmother.

"No, Msebe. These are old clothes," I say, pointing at myself from head to toe and he chuckles.

"Stop being silly, let's get on with the work before it gets dark," he says, smiling at me.

"Thank you for coming to help," I say.

"I wouldn't choose to be anywhere else, Wande," he says and my heart skips a beat. He puts my sneaker back on, the pain is all gone now. He helps me get up and we make our way to the room, he whistles shaking his head. I know, it's a total mess in here.

"Mawande, were you going to clean this room alone if I didn't come?" He asks and I nod.

"I can't afford to pay for cleaning services," I joke and he rolls his eyes.

"Your aunt is something else, she should have at least found people to help you move these things out," I want to laugh. Nobantu doesn't give a single fuck about me.

"You're here to help," I say then pout.

"Yes, I am. So let's move out the remaining furniture. I'll dust and disinfect all of it while you sweep and clean inside. At least some of the furniture is still in good condition," he says and I nod.

"Okay soldier, let's get to work,"

He rolls up the sleeves of his t-shirt, "You didn't tell me why she wants you to move in here," he says, stacking the chairs together.

"She didn't say but I suspect it's because of her toy boy,"

He turns with widened eyes, "She has a younger boyfriend and she moved him here?"

His reaction has me smiling, "Yep, she even calls him baba," he is thrown into a fit of laughter.

"You're joking me," I wish I was.

"Nope, it has been a cringefest,"

"It's good that you're moving out then, we don't want her accusing you of anything," I nod in agreement.

"Yeah,"

"I'd kill maMokwena if she brought a Ben ten to my father's house," oh son's and playing good cop. MaMokwena would just slap this big head back to it's lane, she didn't raise spoilt brats.

"Yeah right! Anyway, did you have fun yesterday?" I ask.

I was a little jealous when they left for Margate with Mafube. I wish I can hide him from thirsty women who might snatch him.

NTUTHUKO BUTHELEZI

It has been a whole entire week since I told MaHlomuka how I feel about her. She hasn't told me if she's giving me a chance or not, I'm trying to be patient but the waiting is killing me. I have waited for her all my adult life and now I just want to make her and Singabakhe happy and enjoy life together as a family. Speaking of Singa, he has been with me since Friday and we've been having so much fun. Nhlelozenkosi is coming to pick him up later on and I've already asked him not to cry and give his mommy a tough time when it's time to go. He promised to be a good boy for as long as I also promise to tell mommy to allow him come sleep over again. He's a sly little boy, always negotiating.

I just had a bath, I want to make breakfast before Singabakhe wakes up. He's still out of it, we slept pretty late last night watching movies. Who would have thought that I would enjoy animated movies? The things we do for love, I didn't even crave a drink or a joint of weed.

A knock on the door comes through as a I step in the kitchen, who could it be this early? I go unlock the door and open, my heart starts beating abnormally because of the beautiful woman that stands before me.

"MaHlomuka," I say with a big smile.

No one has ever had my heart like this gorgeous girl.

"Shenge, how are you?" My heart is pumping custard, this woman just called me by my clan name.

"I'm great, how are you?" Nhlelozenkosi can ask me to run from uMzumbe to Uruguay and I will do so without stopping for anything. I'd even walk on water to prove my love for her and Singabakhe.

"I'm okay, I hope I didn't wake you up," she says and I chuckle.

"I wake up before the rooster crows," I say and she rolls her eyes.

"Are you going to allow me in? Or do you have some girl here?" I quickly move to the side.

"Never! It's just me and ntwana," she kisses my lips before making her way to the kitchen with the plastics she's carrying. I am standing here utterly dumbfounded, I cannot believe that she just kissed me. Somebody please call an ambulance, I don't think it's healthy to be to his happy.

"Ntuthuko, is Singabakhe still sleeping?" She asks, unpacking food from the plastic.

"MaHlomuka, you just kissed me on the lips,"

"Yes, that's normally where a girlfriend kisses her boyfriend," she says and I swear I want to dance.

"Am I your girlfriend? Are you my boyfriend?" She bursts out laughing.

Mxm, her kiss made me dizzy.

"I am your girlfriend, you're my man," Now I know that God hasn't forsaken me, he has given me this beautiful woman and a son. He gave me a family I will fight for until my dying day.

"Come here MaHlomuka, come kiss me like your man and not Singa," she giggles and hurries back to me, she throws her arms around my neck and I tightened mine around her waist.

"You're so beautiful themba lami," I say and kiss her passionately. Nothing feels better than this, I am the happiest man on the planet right now. She's the first one to pull away.

"I didn't expect that," she says, panting.

"You didn't expect me to be a great kisser?" I ask and she giggles, hiding her face in my chest.

"Don't take it in a bad way," I kiss her forehead.

"I'm going to enjoy shocking you," I say and she gasps for air.

"Ntuthuko! What are you trying to tell me?" She's naughty, I didn't say anything that would make her give me those bedroom eyes.

"Why are you looking at me like that? What do you think I'm trying to tell you?" she hits my arm playfully and walks away.

"I'm not playing dirty with you when my son is in the other room," I shake my head, making my way to the kitchen.

"I know it's too soon to ask because you just made things official but do you see a future with me?" Her smile fades.

"Ntuthuko, I am a mother. I don't date for fun, when I decide to be with someone I see myself going all the way. Yes, I see a future with you. We still need to sit down and talk about that future but I do see one with you," I nod my head understanding.

"Then with time can we move from your son to our son? I know Singabakhe has a father and I don't want to replace him but he can be a blessed boy with two dad's," tears glisten in her eyes, I didn't mean to make her cry.

"Please don't change on us Shenge," I shake my head, rounding the table to hug her.

"I won't MaHlomuka, I love you two so much, more than life itself," she holds me tighter.

"Mommy," I let go of Nhlelo and she turns to wipe her tears.

"You're finally awake ntwana,"

"Good morning baby, oh I've missed you so much," Nhlelo says, hugging him and kissing him all over the face. She is a great mother.

"When did you arrive?" Singa asks, rubbing sleep off his eyes.

"A few minutes ago, I'm here to make you guys breakfast and cook Sunday lunch," oh, that sounds good. I have been doing my own cooking since I started living alone. I'm going to enjoy having a woman in my life.

"Can I please watch tv?" He asks.

"No baby, go brush your teeth and I'll come give you a bath. When we are done then you'll watch TV while I make breakfast,"

"I will give him his bath, you do your thing in the kitchen for your boys," I say and she smiles.

"You're the best," she blows me a kiss.

"Come ntwana," I take his hand and we make our way to the bathroom. I need to install a geyser for this bath tub, Singa has already asked me why I use a bathing dish and not the tub. I give him the toothbrush to brush his teeth while I go plug in the kettle for his bath.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 27

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DEDANI MKHIZE

"Is it normal for her to have STI like symptoms," Madlabantu laughs over the phone.

"Mkhize, that girl is your sacrifice. What happens to her shouldn't bother you, just enjoy the riches you're getting from this whole thing," he says and I heave a sigh.

The morning after isilwane sami first slept with Ndongoloza I got a call from two companies telling me that I've been awarded the tenders I bid for. I'm talking about two multimillion rand tenders on the same day, I couldn't believe it. I've had deals come through for me since ngathwala but not two deals on the same day and big contracts for that matter.

"I told you that this upgrade will benefit you," he says and I nod. I was skeptical of practicing this form of ukuthwala but he assured me that for as long as I keep it happy nothing will happen to me and my loved ones. And for five years it hasn't changed its requirements, I got into this knowing that in a couple of years I will have to sacrifice a woman I've slept with and her womb. Once we are done with Ndongoloza I will have another five years to prepare yet another girl.

"What other symptoms must I look out for with Ndongoloza?" I ask.

"Just the obvious, people will not be able to stand her. She will walk into a room and people will walk out. She won't be able to keep money and food in her house will not last. Also, don't be surprised when she starts being addicted to a certain substance, especially alcohol," I'm nodding my understanding.

"I hear you Madlabantu,"

"Good. Do you have anything to tell me?"

I frown, "Do I have to have something to tell you maybe?" I ask.

"I am making you one of the richest and powerful man in this country, the least you can do is tell me that you've grown your family,"

He says and I smile, "Oh yes, Nomahlubi is pregnant. We are over the moon, at least now I have someone who will inherit all that I'm working hard for," I don't bother to ask how he knows.

He laughs, an evil laugh that sends shivers down my spine, "Congratulations Mkhize, your things are coming together nicely. How far along is she?"

"She's almost 12 weeks," we were already pregnant when we got married.

"Listen Madlabantu, I have to go. I will call you soon," I say.

"Okay Mkhize,"

I find my wife in the bedroom, trying to put on her shoes. She looks really gorgeous, I'm taking her out for a bite and a little shopping. I have been spoiling her rotten since we found out that we are pregnant. I don't want Hlubi to want for anything, she has given me everything I could have ever dreamt off and I will live my life making her happy.

"Need me to help you?" I ask and she rolls her eyes.

"Baby, I told you to stop treating me like an invalid. I'm only pregnant," she complains and I chuckle.

"Exactly, you're carrying precious cargo in there," If needs be I will get her a helper for everything. Taking a bath, getting dressed, going to the bathroom, you name it.

"You're so dramatic," she says with the most beautiful smile. She has that pregnancy glow.

"I'll take that, for as long as you're good and taking it easy,"

"Wow babe. Anyway, who were you on the phone with for so long?"

I clear my throat, "Some local news paper, they want to know about the tenders I received. You know how they can get," She gets up from the bed.

"Urgh! They must stop sniffing, you got those legit,"

"You know how a black man's success is questioned by everyone,"

"Mmhhh, that's very true," she takes her handbag and gives it to me.

"Before I forget, mom is coming in a few days time. She wants to pray for me and the baby," oh no!

My mother in law doesn't really like me.

She tried talking Nomahlubi out of marrying me, the whole family had to intervene and tell her to leave us be. I honestly don't know why she is against me, for a praying woman she really carries hate in her heart.

"I should book myself into a hotel then," she gives me the eye.

"Baby no, mom will behave. I promise," I chuckle. She knows that's impossible, that woman will give me an attitude in my own home.

"Tell Qaqamba to come with her, your sister can handle your mom," she's thrown into a fit of laughter.

"Can we go please," she says, taking my hand.

Sea food is not my first choice, I'm only having it because my wife said she's craving crab curry. I couldn't order anything else because this place is a sea food house, I'll stomach it only because Hlubi and my baby are enjoying it. I don't want to make her feel guilty for bringing me here, until my baby is born I will eat wherever she wants.

"Oh my God, this is so good," Hlubi says, licking her fingers.

"I can see you're enjoying yourself Mrs Mkhize," she blushes.

"Nope, this isn't me. It's all your baby my love," she says and I laugh.

My poor baby will be blamed for everything now, it's going to be a long and interesting journey.

"Hello," someone says and both my wife and I look up.

"Apologies for disturbing you, are you guys still okay?" The white lady asks, my smile fades when I see who she's standing with. What the fuck is she doing here? The tag on her shirt answers me, she's a trainee waitress.

I hate this Londeka girl, she's always saying things in Ndongoloza's ear.

"More than okay, this curry is amazing. My baby and I are very happy, compliments to the chef," Hlubi says and Londeka looks at me with a snapped eyebrow.

"Oh wow. Congratulations to you both, we are glad that we could feed your craving," the white lady says.

"Can you please get me a sea food boil for takeaway," sea food boil? That's Ndongoloza's obsession.

"Londeka here will bring it to you, thank you for dining with us this afternoon," They walk away.

"The trainee waitress looks very unhappy, " my wife says.

We are driving home now, my wife had the meal she wanted and ordered another to take home. I took her shopping and bought her the ice cream she's eating. The only thing left is for me to make love to her when we get to the house and my job as a husband will be

done for the day. I don't regret taking the Wednesday off to make my wife happy because when she's happy my heart is alright.

My phone rings in my pocket, I know it's Ndongoloza. She has been blowing it up from the restaurant, Londeka definitely told her about seeing me and my wife and her being pregnant. If that wasn't the case then she wouldn't even bother calling me because she knows how I punish her. When she pisses me off I go for days without talking to her, she takes it like a big girl and when I show up everything goes on like nothing happened. Londeka is bad influence on Ndongoloza, that's why I need this friendship over. They can rekindle their friendship when Ndongoloza is done playing her part in my life.

My wife isn't asking me questions about this ringing phone because I told her it's the journalists.

MSEBEYELANGA NGIDI

My sister and I are watching her boyfriend play with Singabakhe from the kitchen window. My nephew is having so much fun, it's going to be a problem when Ntuthuko has to leave. He cries so painfully and most times we all just want to ask Ntuthuko to take him with, but Singa has to know that he can't always get what he wants in life.

"He's so good with him," Nhlelo says and I look at her. She looks like a love struck puppy.

"Are you with him because of how he is with Singabakhe?" She frowns and looks at me. I might sound insensitive but I need to find out where her head is at.

"I'm with him because of many different reasons and yes, that is one of them,"

"Just give me another reason," I say and she smiles.

"He feels like my home Msebe. You know home is where there's love, warmth and comfort, it's a place you want to be whether you're going through bad or good," okay, I'll take that.

"I honestly thought you'll end up with Daluxolo," I say and she makes a disgusted face.

"Why the hell would you think that?"

I chuckle, "It seemed like you didn't want to move on from him. Like you were looking for him in every guy you dated, that's what I believed but I was miles away to know for sure,"

She laughs, "No Msebe, I wanted a man who knows and understands that I am a love one get one free. He had to know that there's no Nhlelozenkosi without Singabakhe. I wasn't crazy to want that and wait for it because God brought me Ntuthuko at the end,"

"So you're going all the way?"

She nods confidently, "He's not what people expected me to end up with and I will admit that I didn't see it too. I'm not settling, I want to build with him and make him happy the way he's trying to make Singa and I happy. He is different and in a way I need him to be,"

"I'm happy for you and my nephew Nhlelo. You deserve a man who will love and treat you right. A man that will love your son like his own, he's all of that and it's a thumbs up from me," she attacks me with a hug.

"Thank you bhut'wami," she says and I kiss her cheek.

Singa is showing his friends something on the tablet, when did they get here? He even left Ntuthuko to entertain his friends, but you wait

and see the drama he will cause when his mother's man has to leave. Kids are something else, especially my nephew but even so they are adorable. I cannot wait to have a couple myself, I know I will make a great dad.

"Your ntwana has left you alone now," I say, settling down next to him.

"It would be war if I left him," he says and we both laugh. I haven't had a one on one with Ntuthuko. I just know that he's like a brother to Mawande and now my sister's boyfriend.

"He loves you," he's smiling, looking at Singa with his friends.

"He's my boy, I love him too," I believe him but I won't show him that I like him because that's what big brothers do to their little sisters' boyfriends.

"What are your intentions with my sister?" I ask and he clears his throat and looks at me.

"MaHlomuka is the first woman I've ever loved, I adore her even more because I am a bonus dad because of her. I would marry your sister tomorrow Msebe but I don't think she's ready for that step. I'm moving at her pace because I respect her," haibo! Is Ntuthuko trying to sweep me off my feet as well?

"I might not be as big as you but I will knock out your teeth if you stop loving them," he smiles and looks down.

"I hear you,"

"Good, Nhlelo will be with you soon," I tell him.

"What are your intentions with my sister Msebe?" He asks and I frown.

"I don't understand,"

He laughs, "She won't stop taking pictures of herself in the hairstyle you chose," he says and I blush looking away.

He's talking about Wande, I also cannot stop looking at the picture I took of her on Monday. She looks breathtaking, the hairdresser understood the assignment. I told her not to add any hair extensions on Mawande's hair and she killed it. Wande gave me permission to choose her hairstyle and now I have appointed myself to be her hairstyle "picker" because I did a great job.

"She's a gorgeous girl, she should take a million pictures of herself,"

"No offense but I don't believe you're a blind bat," I gasp in shock, what's with the insults manje?

"I'm sorry if that came out wrong but damn Msebe, she's in love with you man," my heart stops.

"She is?" I am surprised to hear this but happy at the same time.

"You haven't realized?" I shake my head.

"No, she's normally so shy and reserved around me. Most of the time I cannot guess what's going on in her head,"

"That's because she's afraid of slipping up and telling you she's in love with you. You're all we talk about now, if you don't like her like that please keep your distance," I shake my head.

"I do, I'm into her too. Thing is I just got out of a serious relationship, I didn't want to rush into anything and bleed on her. She deserves a healed version of me, I don't want to get into a relationship prematurely. I have been trying to push my feelings for her to the side because I believe it's too early to feel this way but at the same time I don't want my cousin getting close to her. Do you understand?" He nods.

"I do, and I respect you for that," I sigh in relief. At least someone understands that I cannot just jump into another relationship.

Yes, I have intense feelings for that beautiful Africa queen and I cannot wait to see what life has in store for us.

"But at the same time I know that she'll get over you if you don't make your move soon," he's fuckin right!

"What do I do? You seem to be nailing it with my sister,"

He laughs, shaking his head, "I'm taking things a day a time. I don't know what I'm doing, she's my first ever serious girlfriend. My love for her is navigating the way for us," I nod my understanding, "Let her know how you really feel Msebe then sit her down and ask her to take things slowly to allow yourself to completely get over your past," He is a wise man.

"Thank you so much Ntuthuko,"

"Don't take your time, Mafube is quite the charmer," he says and laughs when I roll my eyes.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 28

NDONDOLOZA DLADLA

It has been two days since Londeka called and told me that Hlubi is pregnant, my so called boyfriend hasn't called or come around to see me. He knows that I know that he made her pregnant because of the paragraphs I've been sending him, but he doesn't care enough to want to explain himself to me. I thought he loved me and respected what we share but getting Hlubi pregnant proves otherwise. He hurt me by marrying her and now he has killed my soul, he is giving her everything that he promised me. I would still be in the dark about this whole pregnancy thing if Londeka didn't get the waitressing job and happen to help them out at the restaurant.

This week was supposed to be my happiest, I started work on Monday and I enjoyed it until Wednesday afternoon. Dedani ruined it for me and I wish he didn't have so much power over me, my heart and my happiness. I blame myself for how things are, I gave him the go ahead to constantly hurt me. I allowed him to make me feel like I am a nothing without him in my life and that has to stop. He has to start treating me right or let me go because I cannot constantly do this to myself. I love him with all my heart, but it's only painful to love him. My happiness is always short lived with him and I try my absolute best to be what he wants me to be, and it's sad that it doesn't seem to ever be enough for him.

"Hey girl, don't you want to join us for drinks? We have this office tradition to share a few drinks and thank God it's Friday," one of my colleagues says as I walk out through the door to my waiting car.

"Thank you for the invite but I have to drive home to Mzumbe," I say.

I am not in the best of moods, plus most of my colleagues don't really like me. I don't know what I've done to them because I've been keeping to myself and doing my job.

"I thought you live in Port Zimbali," she says with narrowed eyes. She's the only one who has tried getting to know me.

"Mzumbe is home, that's where my family is. I'm renting an apartment in Port Zimbali," I explain and she nods.

"I've been wondering how you afford renting there on your entry level salary," She says, fishing for information. I just laugh and shrug my shoulders.

"So you'll join us next week?" I doubt I'll ever join them for drinks, I don't ever want to feel like I'm forcing myself on people. I've read the energy in the room and I know that I'm not welcomed in their circle.

"Yes, maybe next week," I say and she smiles before walking towards the waiting group that's laughing.

I decided to start at the mall to get myself some alcohol and goodies before heading home. I don't want to go anywhere this weekend, I just want to be drunk and not think of Dedani and his betrayal. I will drive back to Durban on Monday Morning and head straight to the office then my place after work. I didn't tell Dedani that I won't be around this weekend, why should I when he doesn't have the decency to communicate with me the way he expects me to.

My phone rings through the car speaker as I drive through Mzumbe, oh now he wants to call me? This piece of shit! I ignore the first call, I will not appear desperate. He has to know that I'm not sitting around waiting for him to finally be human and call me, the woman he claims to love more than anything. He calls again and I let it go to voicemail as I park on the side of the road, I don't want him knowing that I'm driving. His third call comes through and only then do I answer him.

"Hi,"

He huffs out a humourless laugh, "Is that how you answer me now?" I roll my eyes, he has the nerve.

"What do you want Dedani?" I need this man to know that I'm not his doormat.

"Ndongoloza, are you aware of who you are talking to?" He asks and I chuckle, rolling my eyes.

"I called your name didn't I?" He must be going insane, I've never spoken to him like this in the five years we have been together.

"Oh so you're disrespecting me on purpose then?" I honestly don't have time for this.

He is the one who wronged me, he has to be the humble one here.

"Take it however way you please, I honestly don't care bhuti," If I was next to him he would have given me a slap across my face.

"You're poking a snake in it's hole right now," I am far away and very pissed to take his threats to mind. He can compare himself to Lucifer and I still wouldn't care.

"I am going to hang up this phone if you don't tell me what you want," I say, tightening my hands around the steering wheel.

"I am at the house and you are not here, you knocked off a while ago and you should be here by now," he says and I swallow hard.

"I'm not coming back there this weekend," I don't know where I'm taking this confidence to give Dedani shit but I'm glad I have it in me.

"What do you mean?"

"Haibo! You can't understand simple English now?"

I start the car and continue my way home, there's no point in stopping because he already knows I'm not in Port Zimbali.

"Get your ass to this fuckin house right now," he roars and normally I would turn this car around but not today, I refuse to give this man what he wants.

"I will come back when I want to Dedani, not a minute earlier,"

"You don't want to test me Ndongoloza, you have duties here," I frown, what does he mean duties? He hasn't been eating my food or my pussy for that matter.

"Duties? Tell Hlubi to take care of those, whatever they are. She managed to get a ring and a baby from you so she won't mind," I sneer.

"My love, I know you are angry and must have a lot of questions but I cannot answer those and explain my side of the story if you're not here. Please come home so we can be able to sit down and have a conversation, I promise you'll understand," If that was the case then he wouldn't have taken days to call me.

"I'm not interested in talking to you this weekend," I hang up my phone and switch it off. Let him feel what he always makes me feel.

I drive into the yard and there's a car with Durban number plates, who came to visit?

I park next to it and climb out before taking out my weekender from the boot. Mawande will come get my plastics of alcohol and junk, I hope she prepared something nice for supper. I have been enjoying cooking at my place but I really miss her food.

I walk inside the house and head to the lounge to greet my mom and the guest she has, but why are they playing music at some a high volume? My heart stops for a second when I get to the lounge and find my mom bending over the couch and taking dick in her ass.

"Oh my God! What the fuck ma?" I shout and they both stop and try to cover their nakedness.

"Ndongoloza, what are you doing here?" My mother asks shocked.

"This is my home, I can come and go as I please. Unless that has changed and you forgot to tell me," she closes her eyes ashamed.

"Of course not, I just wasn't expecting you home my princess," Clearly! She would have locked the door if she knew I was coming.

"Can you both at least go and be decent? Christ!" Now I seriously regret coming home. Imagine finding your mother being fucked like a two dollar hoe by a guy who is even younger than her.

"Baba, come let's go," she says to the guy who is covering his genitals with both hands. Nobantu has a lot of explaining to do and what the hell did she just call this guy? I can't I need a glass of champagne.

"Mawande!"

NHLELOZENKOSI NGIDI

"You know my cousin has been around for a while now and we haven't done anything fun together," I say, drawing circles on his bare chest. We have been cuddling and kissing for hours now, he hasn't even tried to get in my pants and I appreciate him for not trying to move this train quickly. But I am happy that he is sexually attracted to me because Shenge junior has been hard the entire time.

"Braai some meat for him," Ntuthuko says and I roll my eyes.

"We've been doing that babe. I was thinking that we all go to the beach, book a place and just have fun," I suggest.

"Who is all?"

"Us, my brothers and Mawande,"

"We are leaving Singabakhe? He's going to be mad at us MaHlomuka, he's already not happy because you left him with maMokwena," oh kill me now.

I appreciate that he loves Singabakhe but he can't tag along with us everywhere, we need some couple time. They are always together during the week, when they drive to and from school and the hour they play before he finally gives me some attention.

"Shenge," I know how weak he gets when I call him by his clan name.

"Sthandwa sami," he answers softly.

"Singabakhe has to know that mommy and ntwana need some alone time, that doesn't mean we love him any less,"

He heaves a heavy sigh, "I just don't want him to feel sidelined now that I am your man," My heart melts.

"You're the best but there will be family time and mommy and ntwana time, he will get used to it with time," he nods his understanding.

"There are two bedrooms here sthandwa sami, he can sleep alone in the other room,"

"He has never slept alone so we will have to train him and see how it goes," he nods smiling.

"In that way we will have mommy and ntwana time when he's asleep and family time during the day,"

"That's okay but you have to know that sometimes I want mommy and ntwana time during the day, that's when we leave him with my mom. You understand that we have to have balance right?" He nods.

"You're right. When do you want us to go to the beach?" He asks, brushing and squeezing my ass.

I'm going to love being in his arms like this.

"Tomorrow and come back Sunday evening," I say.

"Won't it be short notice for the others?" His question is valid but I know how to persuade people, they'll drop whatever they have for this. I sit up straight and reach for my phone then text Msebe and Mafube on our WhatsApp group and forward the same message to Mawande. My friend is the first to respond, she would love to tag along. Msebe is next saying for as long as I'm covering the costs, he likes milking me dry this one. Mafube responds with the dancing woman emoji, I can't help but laugh. I tell them the details and go back to my man.

"They are all in baby," I tell him.

"Good, maybe your brother will tell Mawande how he feels this weekend," Ntuthuko says and I frown.

"Huh?" I'm confused, "Which brother?"

He kisses my forehead, "Msebe and Mawande have feelings for each other. Your brother wasn't aware that Mawande is in love with him, I told him to make his move before it's too late . Plus, there's your charming cousin, he might take her attention," I gasp in shock.

How did I miss all of this?

My mom has been praying for my brother to get with Mawande, she's going to be excited. Mawande is an amazing, humble girl, she would be the perfect fit for my brother and our family.

"How did I miss all of this?" Claps once?

"It's not like you're observant MaHlomuka, you failed to see how crazy in love I am with you," he says and I giggle.

"Oh wow,"

A knock on the door disturbs us.

Some people don't have timing shame, we are playing the bold and the beautiful and they decide to visit. Ntuthuko pecks my lips before getting off the bed to go open for whoever it is. I am left blushing alone in the bedroom, I cannot believe I am in a relationship with a man that loves me and my son so much. If I knew God had Ntuthuko waiting for me then I wouldn't have bothered with the other assholes after Daluxolo. Sometimes all we have to do is wait on the Lord because he knows what we need.

I get off the bed when I hear someone crying in the lounge, it's a woman. I just pray to God that it's not that old woman I once found here, the one that left with the groceries. I don't need her begging my man, Ntuthuko is mine now and I'm not known to play nice with the people I hold dear to my heart. I push my feet through the morning slippers and go see what's happening in there.

"He is not okay Ntuthuko, he might die any minute now," an elder woman who is on her knees says, with tears streaming down her face. Don't tell me this is another ex, what's with this man and elder woman?

"You can go back to the bedroom MaHlomuka," he says without even looking at me.

"Is everything okay Shenge?" I ask because I don't like how he is right now, he looks like he's about to explode.

"It's nothing I can't handle sthandwa sami, just go to the bedroom and wait for me there, please MaHlomuka," I look at the woman. Who is she and why is her presence making my boyfriend this angry?

"Please help me beg him sisi," she says to me and that seems to anger Ntuthuko even more.

"Don't you even dare! Nomafu don't speak to Nhlelozenkosi, don't even look at her. I want you to get up and leave my house before I break your bones," he says, his hands are trembling.

I have never seen him this way, Ntuthuko is always so sweet and calm.

"I know a lot has happened but I am still your mother Ntuthuko," he chuckles, not out of amusement.

This is his mom, I've tried asking him about family but he gives me dismissive answers and starts another conversation to avoid the

family talk. What did she do to him? It must be big because I can see tears glistening in his eyes.

"Mama, please leave. You can see that he's getting worked up, please leave before it escalates to something he will regret," I beg this woman.

"It's important that they talk," Ntuthuko and who? His father maybe?

"Nomafu leave!" I jump in fear, this right here is not my Ntuthuko. His mother quickly gets on her feet and hurries out, is this how she wanted him to be before leaving?

Ntuthuko is trying to calm down, I don't know what to do right now but I can tell he needs to be held and assured that everything is going to be okay. I make my way to him, he is looking at me with pleading eyes. I'm not sure what he is asking of me with that look but I can give him a warm embrace and empathy for now. I snake my arms around his neck and he pulls me to him and holds me tight.

"I am so sorry you had to see that," he says with a shaking voice.

What demons are you fighting Ntuthuko?

"Talk to me babe," he kisses my shoulder.

"I wish I could but I'm afraid you will not look at me the same way. MaHlomuka if you knew some truths about me then you'll change and not treat me like your man," I will not push him to talk, at least not today.

"I hope one day you'll trust me enough to tell me everything,"

"I'm sorry sthandwa sami, I never wanted you to see me like that," I gently push him off and once we are eye to eye, I take his lips into mine.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 29

SPONSORED BY N.L

NOBANTU DLADLA

I couldn't talk to my daughter yesterday because Sqalo wanted us to finish where we left off. I wasn't comfortable having sex with him while Ndondo was in another room and worse after she caught us, but I couldn't deny him. He worked me for another two rounds and when he was done I was out of it, Sqalo is a beast in the sheets and he has a big appetite. When we started seeing each other I couldn't do half the things he wanted, but I had to learn so he doesn't go out there looking for what I couldn't give him. Mediocre sex is the reason why most men cheat on their partners and I wasn't about to be that woman who gets cheated on because they refuse to be spontaneous behind closed doors.

I knock on Ndondoloza's door and she gives me permission to come in, I take a deep breath before opening the door and walking in. She's sitting up right with her eyes closed, there are two empty bottles of champagne on her pedestal. I settle on the edge of the bed and place a hand on her feet, this is so awkward. She's probably thinking about what she saw in the lounge yesterday, I will not get over it anytime soon. I have never been that embarrassed in my life.

"Princess," I say and she chuckles.

"Are you done with your toy boy ma?" I manage to swallow past this dry lump clogged in my throat.

"Ndondoloza, I know you're still shocked by what you saw yesterday. I was going to take you away and explain that I am in love with Sqalo and we are officially in a relationship and he's living here with me," she raises an eyebrow.

"Haibo ma! You brought a man to live here? If it's serious why didn't he take you to his house?" She asks, folding her arms across her chest.

"I have done nothing but give you everything you've ever wanted Ndongolozza. I've lived my entire life for you and Qophelo, don't I deserve to be happy? To live my own life for me this once?" I ask with tears burning my eyes.

I hoped that she will understand and be happy for me, I expected judgement from Qophelo not her.

"You can live your life and be happy with a man who is your age ma," she says with an attitude.

"Is Dedani your age mate? Did I judge you for the age difference?" She's blinking rapidly.

"It's not the same mama," I shake my head.

"How is it different? Explain it to me?"

She heaves a sigh, "I'm only starting out my life, I don't have children to think of. You on the other hand, what will people say?" Claps once!

"I don't care what people say," I say and she's thrown into a fit of laughter.

"If that's the case, why did you tell people that your precious son is in rehab not traveling Europe?" This child is testing my patience.

"I know you're still shocked but I will not have you disrespect me like this. It's okay if you don't accept my relationship with Sqalo but you will respect it and him. If that's hard for you then don't come here," I say out of anger and leave her bedroom.

What an ungrateful brat!

I need to make breakfast for Sqalo but first I need to take a shower. I walk in the bathroom and freshen up quickly, once done I make my way to our bedroom and he's still out of it. He should start waking up early because he'll be going back to work soon, and to be able to make it to Durban he has to wake up much earlier because it's a two hour drive. I moisturize my skin and put on a dress then go make him some breakfast in bed.

I'm not making any breakfast for Ndongoloza because of her attitude and disrespect. She will have to prepare her own food this weekend, unless if she humbles herself and comes to apologize to me. A knock comes through the kitchen door, it cannot be Mawande because she only comes to the main house when called. I wipe my hands and leave the sausages in the pan, I unlock the door and before me stands Ndongoloza's boyfriend, he looks terrible. His eyes are blood shot and his shoulders are sagging like he is defeated.

"Mkhize,"

"I am really sorry for just showing up here ma but I had to talk to you," he says with a shaking voice.

"Is everything okay?" I ask and he shakes his head no.

"Come in," I step to the side and he walks through. I might be angry at my daughter but I still want her to hold on to this man.

"I don't know where Ndongoloza is, her phone is switched off and I swear that I'm getting tired of all this ma," I narrow my eyes. She left Durban without telling him? My daughter is the biggest fool, does she want to lose this powerful man? She has a job and a fancy apartment because of Dedani.

"Did you two fight?" I ask.

"That's what we always do these days, your daughter has decided to listen to the advices of a friend who is jealous of her. Londeka feeds Ndongoloza all these lies about me and she believes her. I have done nothing but love, support and provide for your daughter but I'm getting tired. I'm starting to think that love might not be enough," he says and my blood is boiling.

How dare she? It's obvious that Londeka wants to pull her down because she's progressing in life while she's stuck.

"I'm really sorry to hear this Mkhize, I did not raise a fool," I say and he wipes his tears, poor man.

"Ndongoloza Prudence Dladla," I call for her and a few seconds later her bedroom door creaks open and she appears still wearing her pyjamas. She rolls her eyes when she finds Dedani standing in this kitchen.

"What are you doing here?" Where did she take this stinking attitude from? She has never been this unruly, someone is bewitching my child.

"See what I mean mama?" Dedani says.

"What has gotten into you? Why would you come here without telling him and this attitude? Are you going to listen to a friend who is obviously jealous of you?" I ask and she laughs then claps once!

"You really drove all the way to lie to my mother Dedani?"

"I drove all this way because you're the love of my life and I want to make you my wife some day. I drove here because I cannot just sit and allow people to destroy what we have. I have been honest with you Ndongoloza, you know my reasons for every move I make," just listen to that.

She wants to take away my opportunity of giving her a big wedding, it will never happen.

"Ndongoloza, go pack your things. You're going back to Durban with Mkhize," I order and she snaps an eyebrow.

"I will go back to Durban when I'm good and ready, not because you or Dedani are telling me to," kahleni bo!

"Baby, I am begging you please," he says, kneeling down. Ndongoloza is ought to be ashamed, making a man do this?

"Do you think you'll ever find a man who will love you like this?" I ask.

"You can have him mama, polyandry is not frowned upon nowadays. They'll just judge you for sleeping with young man." I gasp in shock and watch my daughter turn to leave the room. The devil is testing me.

DEDANI MKHIZE

My trip to Mzombe was futile, Ndongoloza refused to come back with me. In the five years that I've known this girl, she has never given me an attitude or refused anything I say to her. I am still shocked by the girl I've been dealing with since yesterday over the phone. I was told that as soon as Ndondo moves in the house she mustn't sleep out, not for any reason.

Isilwane sami must find her there every night and now that it didn't find her I don't know what's going to happen. I tried to call Madlabantu yesterday but it took me straight to voicemail. I haven't tried him today because I thought I will be able to bring Ndongoloza back before tonight.

I just drove into Durban, my head is all over the place. I don't want to go to my house because I don't want to find myself snapping at my

pregnant wife because of Ndongoloza's mistakes. She will know me well when she comes back, she will regret ever causing me this kind of stress. When I'm done with her she will know not to mess with Dedani Mkhize, she will bow down to me like I am her God.

I decide to stop at some joint to have a few drinks before going home to Hlubi.

My phone rings as I'm about to climb out of the car, it's Madlabantu.

"Hello," I answer.

"You are ungrateful Mkhize," he shouts and I mop my face with the palm of my hand.

"You had one job, just one. Keep that sacrifice in that house every night until isilwane sakho is done with her,"

"I'm sorry Madlabantu, I don't know what's happening with Ndongoloza. She grew some balls and left, I just got back from Mzumbe to try and get her but she refused," I explain.

"Do you want to loose everything?" He asks and I shake my head.

Is he kidding me? "No, I don't want to loose everything. What can I do to fix this," I ask briskly.

He laughs an evil laugh, one that sends chills down my spine, "What are you willing to do Mkhize? How far are you willing to go to keep your money and power?"

I take a minute before answering, "Anything you want me to do I'll do," His laugh intensifies.

"Good, because isilwane sakho is angry and wants to take everything. I tried to appease it with some animal blood last night but it didn't accept. It wants innocent blood, a pure soul that has never set foot on this earth," he says and I frown.

"What's that? Tell me so I can get it,"

I would give everything to live the life I'm living, I will never be poor in my life again.

"The child your wife is carrying," Madlabantu says nonchalantly and I gasp in shock.

My first child? They want my heir?

"You said you're willing to give anything," he reminds me.

Tears are burning my eyes, "I know what I said but this is not what I had in mind,"

"It's either that or your money and power will vanish by tomorrow morning. You will be a nothing Mkhize, you'll be standing in the robots begging for money to feed. Hlubi and your child will be living in a mansion with another man who can provide and that's not me scaring you. It's a prophecy that will come to pass," He says and my whole body goes cold.

"I need an answer now to start working on my things,"

"What about Ndongoloza? I can bring her back before tonight," I say with tears streaming down my face.

"Ndongoloza will remain the sacrifice you gave to it. Your unborn baby is just blood we are offering to appease it for what happened last night, nothing has changed with the arrangement," Hlubi is going to be broken, she was looking forward to being a mother.

"Mkhize, time is money,"

I heave a deep sigh, "Fine Madlabantu, sacrifice my unborn child," I hate myself so much right now. I promised never to hurt Hlubi and this is me doing it.

"Listen, go to the house and give her an excuse of why you cannot sleep at home tonight. It has to find her alone on your bed to get the job done. You can only go back in the morning," that's just cruel.

She will be loosing our baby and I won't be there for her.

"I'll do exactly as you say," Ndongoloza is going to pay for this. If she stayed in that apartment then I wouldn't have to sacrifice my child to appease isilwane.

"Sleep sound tonight knowing you'll be richer," Madlabantu says then hangs up.

I left early in the morning to go to Mzambe, I told Hlubi there was an emergency I needed to attend to in Margate. I'll add on that excuse and say I have to sleep that side because things are on fire and we need to be there to put it out.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 30

MAWANDE DUMA

"Friend," a knock comes through my door and my smile widens. I am so excited to be going away with Nhlelozenkosi and the guys.

"Come on in," she pushes the door open and walks in. Lord, she looks gorgeous. I know I always say this but you can never get used to how beautiful and well dressed she always is. Bonus, she has a beautiful heart too.

"Hey, are you ready?" She asks and I nod vigorously.

"Yes, we can go," she takes my bag on top of the bed and we walk out. I lock my door and we use the back gate to where her car is waiting. I asked her to use this gate because I don't want anyone seeing us leave. I know my aunt would have done something to prevent me from leaving.

"We are going to have so much fun," I am all for that. I just want to be twenty five years this weekend and live life.

"I need fun please," she giggles.

The guys are sitting in the back seat of her car, at least it's a big SUV and they aren't squashed. Nhlelozenkosi puts my bag in the boot as I climb in the front passenger seat.

"Hey guys," I greet them.

"Sisi, unjani?" Sgora asks.

I smile at him, he's glowing. MaHlomuka wakhe must be treating him good, "I am well yourself?"

"I've never been better," I am glad to hear that, he deserves this happiness. He deserves this beautiful thing him and Nhlelo just started.

"You look beautiful Mawande, that hair really suits you," Mafube says and I smile and thank him as Nhlelozenkosi starts the engine. Thank God no one saw us leaving. I'll explain when I come back, at least I have my personal space now and some food saved.

"Beautiful? That's an understatement man. There's no word to describe Wande, and I chose that hairstyle for her," Msebe says and laughter erupts from Nhlelo and Sgora. Am I missing something?

I am trying to keep my cool but I'm about to melt into liquid right now, what Msebeyelanga just said gave me more butterflies. This man will be the death of me.

"Yeah, whoever ends up with my sister will be a lucky man," Sgora says.

"Definitely babe," Nhlelo agrees with her boyfriend.

"Why are you talking as if y'all don't know who she'll end up with? Mawande will be a Mokwena," Mafube says and I swallow hard, I pray he's just joking and Msebe knows it. He's a great guy but I don't

see him like that, his brother is the one that sets my whole world on fire.

"Can I please connect my phone," Msebe says hurriedly.

"Yes, music please," That's Nhlelo.

We stopped at the stores in Shelly beach to get some drinks, food and snacks for the weekend. Nhlelozenkosi booked us at the Lodge that belongs to me but taken by my aunt. I haven't been there in years, I'm sure she made so many changes to the place.

Nhlelozenkosi, Sgora and I are waiting for Mafube and Msebeyelanga in the parking lot. They went to buy alcohol and the three of us went to get food and snacks. The couple is busy kissing and whispering to each other then giggling like high school kids. They are cute to watch even though they've turned me into their spare wheel. The two brothers finally come out carrying plastics and we get in the car to go check in at the lodge.

I can't fault my aunt with this place, she renovated it very nicely. Even so, my heart is aching as I look around, I'm thinking of my parents and our times here. This place, like the business center holds so many good memories of my parents, God bless their souls. I am reminded of the beautiful life I once had, of how much I was loved and cared for. Tears burn my eyes, It's really hard to think about them and not cry, especially in a place that holds so much for me.

"Mawande, are you okay?" Mafube asks, placing a hand on my shoulder.

I heave a deep sigh, "This place just...it holds so many memories for me," I say and wipe the tears that escapes my eyes.

"Oh my friend, I'm really sorry. I wouldn't have chosen it had I known it will trigger you," Nhlelo says.

I shake my head, "No, it's okay babe. I'm glad I came here. I just need a moment to gather my emotions," I say.

"We will check in and ask the receptionist to show you to your room once you're okay," -Nhlelo.

I didn't mean to make her feel bad about choosing this place, I mean she planned this so we could have fun not nurse my emotions. I need to get it together.

"Thank you, I won't take much time,"

"Take all the time you need, once you're okay you'll text me and I'll tell you where we are," she's such a sweet girl. I am honored to be friends with her.

"I'll take your bag to your room," Mafube says and I offer him a weak smile.

"Thank you,"

"Do you need anything?" That's my bonus brother, looking worried.

"I just need a minute," he nods and I look at Msebe. Why isn't he saying anything? He's the one person I'm desperate to see and hear concern from right now. His warm hug would help me be alright.

I walk away first, making my way to the garden. I can still remember my way around. It's breathtaking, I'm glad to see that she kept the water fountain in the middle. I stroll around the garden crying, thank Goodness there aren't any people to see me. I need to get these emotions out of my system before I go back to the others. I don't want to ruin their weekend and the only way is to cry and let it out so I can be okay and enjoy with them.

I settle down on the concrete bench under the tree, sitting here I'm reminded of my 10th birthday, it was everything. My parents went all out and I had the time of my life. I was supposed to have my sweet sixteen here but they died before it could happen, I didn't even get a cake for my sixteenth birthday. Oh life has been a rollercoaster, but what I've learned from it is that you cannot know the joys of being full if you've never starved. The only way to appreciate good times is when you've experienced the worst. My breakthrough is coming, it might not be at the speed I want but it will come and life will make sense once again.

Someone places a hand on my shoulder and I turn with the hopes that it's Msebe finally coming to check on me. I turn only to find Mafube, how disappointing.

"I'm sorry, I know you said you needed a minute but you've been gone for almost an hour and I just had to check up on you," he says and I quickly get up. It has been that long already? It feels like I've been sitting here for only a minute.

"I didn't realize, I should go freshen up and join you guys. Where are you sitting?" I ask, wiping my face.

"We are by the pool side next to our rooms," he says.

"You'll show me my room?" He nods then hands me a bottle of water. I open and gulp down half of it, that was needed.

"Thank you,"

Nhlelozenkosi booked four chalets, she's sharing with Sgora and the rest of us are alone in our rooms. It's nicely decorated and the bed is very comfortable, I'm going to sleep sound tonight. I washed my face and put on the swimming costume, I'm glad I didn't burn it when Ndondoloza gave it to me because it's coming in handy now. Thank

goodness it comes with a cover up, even though it's a see through, at least I won't feel completely naked.

Nhlelozenkosi and Sgora are no longer sitting with the guys when I get there, where did they disappear to? Mafube quickly gets on his feet and pulls a chair for me, I settle down and thank him. He's doing everything I wish his brother was doing, maybe I should just get over this stupid crush and accept that he will never see me as a woman he can date.

"Wande, are you feeling better now?" Oh now he wants to know? He is such a confusing man, one minute I feel like there's a connection between us and the next I feel like I don't exist to him.

I clear my throat, "Much better. Now I want to have fun, can I please have a drink," he nods and stands to mix me a drink. I have been drinking bottles ever since I started hanging out with them.

"Here you go," he hands me the glass and I drink everything at one go.

"Whoa! Slow down tiger, the day is still long. I don't want you passing out," well I want to get drunk and have fun.

"Give the lady another drink bro," Mafube says.

"My kind of guy," I say with a smile and hand the glass back to Msebe who doesn't look happy.

"Well guys, Singabakhe asked me to tell you all that you should bring him a toy each tomorrow," Nhlelo says, holding hands with Sgora. I'm jealous of them and how they've grown into each other in such a short period of time. My jealousy is not toxic at all.

"Remind us tomorrow to pass by the mall," Msebe says.

"I will because all hell will break loose if you don't, he made that very clear," -Nhlelo.

"Now we are being punished by Singa because we took his ntwana," Mafube says and we all laugh.

"Imagine, that one has to remember that Ntuthuko is my man before he is his ntwana," look at Sgora blush.

All the people he has ever beat up would be shocked to see that he has a mushy side to him.

"Actually sis, he is his ntwana before he is your man. Singa met Ntuthuko first, you just joined the moving train," Msebe says and Nhlelo clicks her tongue as we laugh at the truth Msebe just spoke.

"Oh wow baby, you're also laughing?" Sgora stops and shakes his head.

"Never sthandwa sami," he gets a peck on the lips for that. Love is beautiful, pity some of us are in love with slow learners, I wonder how he managed to pass and be an architect.

"Stop it you guys, some of us are single," Mafube says to the couple.

Msebeyelanga huffs out a humourless laugh, "What about the string of woman you have all over South African?"

"Really bro?"

I'm drunk and having the time of my life,

I haven't enjoyed myself like this in a very long time. I really thank God for this friendship with Nhlelozenkosi, through it I will find myself and discover parts of what makes me who I am. We are playing music through a portable bluetooth speaker, I don't know who brought it but it's a life saver. Nhlelozenkosi is drunk like me and she's busy twerking for Ntuthuko who is enjoying the show. I'm

dancing with Mafube, we both suck but at least we are having fun, unlike Msebe who is sitting down looking like he's swallowing nails.

"Wande, I think you should sit down now," Msebe says, trying to pull me from his cousin.

"No, I'm okay. I am having fun, you sit down," I'm still so pissed at him for not coming to check up on me when I was having a moment.

He heaves a sigh, "Wande please,"

"Leave her alone bro, she's having fun," Mafube says and his cousin gives him a death stare.

"I'm talking to Mawande," okay what's with the attitude, "Wande, I think it's time to sleep,"

"What is your problem Msebe?" I snap, yanking my hand away. I can't deal with these mixed signals anymore.

"I just don't want you to pass out," I chuckle.

"No, you don't want to see me dancing with your cousin but at the same time you don't want to make a move on me," I say then realize that the music has stopped playing and Nhlelo and Sgora have stopped dancing and are now looking at us.

"I don't know if you're really blind or you're just pretending not to see that I'm head over heels in love with your big head," I say, not holding back.

I'm tired of dying in silence, if he doesn't reciprocate my feelings then I'll finally move on and forget about him.

"I can't continue wondering what's going on in that head of yours, one day I feel like you're looking at me like a woman you love and the next I feel like I'm just... I don't even know what Msebe," He's shocked by my outburst.

"Wande, please calm down," he's making me more angry.

I blow out a sigh, "Msebe, I just told you that I'm in love with you and the first thing you say is I should calm down," He shakes his head. I am so humiliated, I shouldn't have said anything.

"No, I'm asking you to calm down so I can talk," I degraded myself, I told a man that I love him first. My mother must be turning in her grave.

"I'm going to bed," I'm ashamed of myself,
I can't even look at him.

"Let me make sure you get to your room safely," Mafube says.

"Dude, can you just back off?" Msebe says annoyed. "My room or yours? Where will you be comfortable talking?" I shrug my shoulders.

"Okay," he holds out his hand and I look at it for a minute before linking mine with his.

I am so stupid, now my butterflies are back.

"Enjoy the rest of your night guys, Wande and I are calling it. We will see you tomorrow for breakfast," he says and leads us towards the chalets.

"Okay goodnight," Nhlelozenkosi.

She's smiling like a fool.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 31

SPONSORED BY N.L

MSEBEYELANGA NGIDI

I am starring at the gorgeous woman sleeping next to me, grateful that she told me how she feels because I didn't know how I was going to tell her. This is my first time having a problem with expressing my feelings for a woman, maybe that's because Mawande is not just any woman. She's different from everything I have ever known, different in a way that I need this time around. We didn't speak much last night, she just shouted and gave me a piece of her mind then wanted food and slept. I just laughed and joined her in bed, I didn't want to leave her room because I wanted us to talk first thing in the morning.

"My head is about to explode," she complains in a groggy voice.

"That's what happens when you drink a lot of alcohol. You can come with me to the doctor, you said I need to check what's in my head because you suspect that it's full of sparkling water," I say with a smile.

The things she was saying to me last night were pretty funny but I couldn't laugh in her face because that was her being seriously angry.

"I'm sorry Msebe, I was just...I got alcohol courage and I shouldn't have said anything," the last part hurts my heart.

"You regret telling me how you feel?" You cannot miss the hurt in my voice.

"I regret drinking alcohol and blurting it out in front of everyone like that," okay, that's a reason I can take and live with.

"Well, I understand but I'm glad that you told me. The whole of yesterday on that pool side I was busy thinking of a way to tell you myself. I couldn't find the perfect opportunity because I was so nervous, kept wondering if you're still feeling the same way since I took my time with you," I say and only then does she open her eyes.

She swallows hard, "What are you saying to me Msebe?"

"Well, I'm saying I'm not a slow learner like you said Wande. I just took time telling you about my feelings because I wanted to move past my issues with Sauda. I was invested in that relationship, I saw a future with her and when she dumped me I was so hurt. I didn't want to rush into a new relationship and bleed all over you, I didn't want to bring my issues with Sauda to you," her face has softened up, she looks beautiful, even when she's hangover.

"So you're still scared of bleeding all over me?" She asks, a valid question.

"I will forever be scared of bleeding on you Mawande but I'm not allowing my past to stand in between us and starting something beautiful," she smiles and hides her face in the pillow.

"Please look at me," she doesn't wait for me to ask her twice, she looks at me in the eyes and smiles shyly. I caress the side of her face and she leans in to my touch.

"I am a man with flaws, Wande. I'm far from perfection but one thing about me is when I'm in, I'm in and I give it my all. I'm not sure what life will have in store for us but whatever it has to offer I'd like to experience it all with you. I would love to be a part of your life in a special way, I'd love to be your man," tears are glistening in her eyes, I hope she's not going to reject me.

"You don't know how much I've always wanted to hear you say this to me, but at some point I was ready to forget about my feelings for you because I thought I wasn't your type," I'm shaking my head.

She's everything I tried to convince myself that I don't need, even when my mom was talking in my ear. But I'm happy that I stopped being in denial about it and I'm opening myself up to her.

"Are you asking me to be your girlfriend because you don't want to hurt my feelings?" Her question is warranted but I'd never do that, I wouldn't tie myself to someone because I'm afraid of hurting their feelings. That would be torturous for the both of us.

"No, Wande. I'm not asking you to get into a relationship with me because I don't want to embarrass you for telling me that you're in love with me in front of everyone. I want to get into a relationship with you because I reciprocate your feelings," that's my honest truth and I hope she believes me. The last thing I want is her questioning my intentions, it will do no good for our relationship.

"Okay," I snuggle closer to her and put my arm over her waist, my pulse leaps from touching her skin, she's so soft. Goodnesses!

"Msebe," it comes out in a whisper, she also felt it.

"Yes baby," my lips are just an inch from hers, I'm dying to kiss her but she has to tell me if we are one from this minute onwards.

"Are you mine Wande?" I ask when the silence between us has stretched for a minute.

"I've been yours, I was just waiting for you to realize it," my heart is beating in a way it has never done before.

"Kiss me please," she places a hand on my cheek and takes my lips into hers, they dance together slowly. I pull her closer to me and she moans in my mouth, making me lose my mind. I have to pull out of this kiss before things go far, I don't want to rush things but at the same time I cannot have enough of this.

A knock on the door disturbs this perfect moment, who the fuck could it be? My siblings should know not to disturb us because this started in front of them. They should know that we are having a moment and we don't want to be disturbed by anyone. Wande and I are still kissing, completely ignoring the person on the door but whoever it is isn't going away. I pull out of the kiss first, annoyed as hell. She's smiling and her eyes are twinkling, I have never seen a woman more perfect. I climb off the bed in nothing but my boxers, I have a strong and steady erection. Hopefully whoever it is doesn't

look down and see it, the package is only for Wande's eyes now. I open the door and it's Mafube with two cups of coffee in his hand, my cousins smile disappears when his eyes land on me in my underwear.

"You look like you've just seen a ghost," I say and he shakes his head.

"You slept in here?" Is that a rhetorical question? Didn't he see Mawande and I leave together last night?

"Yeah, Wande and I needed to sort somethings out," his adams apple is bobbing like a money on a stick.

"Is she okay? I brought her coffee to help with the hangover," that's very thoughtful of him but was he planning on drinking his coffee in here with her?

"She's definitely hangover, the coffee will help thanks bro," I say holding out my hand for the cup. He looks at my hand then back at my face before handing me the coffee.

"Nhlelozenkosi and Ntuthuko are getting ready for breakfast, you guys should get ready too," he says then walks away.

Okay, that was cold. Did I maybe do something to offend my brother without realizing? He's never this way with me, he didn't even try to joke or anything.

I close the door and turn to find Mawande sitting up straight, she's looking at me with a beautiful smile plastered across her face. I love that she's no longer shy and embarrassed around me. I bend down and give her a peck on the lips before handing her the cup of coffee.

"That's from Mafube," I say and she chuckles.

"Why is your face like that?" She asks, taking a sip.

"Like what babe?" I settle down on the edge of the bed and take her free hand, linking our fingers.

"Your facial expression hardened when you mentioned his name,"

I heave a sigh, "I didn't realize," that's a lie, I'm still pissed at him for what he did yesterday. Running after Wande each chance he got, dancing with her like I wasn't there. But I won't give him an attitude because of it.

"Okay, we should freshen up and join them for breakfast," I nod my head and get up so she can be able to climb off the bed. As drunk as she was she still managed to change into pajamas last night. I pull her to me and she fits perfectly in my arms.

"You think you can stay with me here for another night?" I need more time alone with her, without Mafube's interference.

"I would love to," she says, brushing the back of my head.

"And your aunt?" I ask and she looks down.

"Don't worry yourself about her," I just nod but I hope this won't put her into any trouble.

"Okay, I'll go extend our stay at the reception. Should I keep both rooms or you'll be comfortable with me in the same room and bed?" She giggles.

"There won't be a need to extend our stay if we stay in separate rooms Msebe," she has a point.

"I just don't want you to be uncomfortable,"

The last thing I want to do is make her feel like I'm rushing things, we are going to take our relationship one day at a time.

"I appreciate that but I'll be good with you in the same room,"

"Okay, let me go take a shower and change. I'll be outside your door in thirty minutes, is that good?" She nods vigorously then pouts for me to kiss her.

Carefree Mawande is my favorite person in the whole world.

Mawande looks absolutely gorgeous in this floral jump suit, her body is flexing in it and I cannot help but admire. We are making our way to the lodges restaurant for breakfast, my sister called to say they are waiting on us. We walk in hand in hand and find them sitting with glasses of juice in front of them. Nhlelo and Ntuthuko are sitting next to each other and Mafube is on the other side with an empty chair next to him. Why didn't he sit at the head of the table, he's the only one without a partner here. They are all watching us, our joined hands to be specific. The couple with smiles on their faces and my cousin with a stoic expression. We greet them and I pull the chair at the head of the table for Mawande to sit down then I settle next to Mafube, my girl isn't sitting next to him.

"How are you feeling friend?" Nhlelozenkosi asks Mawande who is avoiding their eyes. She's definitely embarrassed by what happened last night, but she shouldn't because it led to us being honest with our feelings. I don't see her any less just because she told me she loves me first.

"I'm okay babe, thank you,"

"Forgive me for being forward guys but I couldn't help but notice you two holding hands," I roll my eyes before looking at Mawande with a smile on my face, her eyes are on me too but she quickly looks away blushing.

"Their faces says it all," Mafube says distastefully, what's his problem?

"Oh you guys are so cute. MaMokwena is going to be thrilled," oh Jesus!

My mother might throw a party for finally getting the girl she wants as her daughter in law to be my woman.

The waitress comes and we all place our orders, after a few minutes the waitress comes back with cups of coffees for me and Wande and let's us know that our food will come shortly.

"Singabakhe called and reminded me of his toys," my sister says.

"We will get those on our way home," Mafube replies.

"We should get them before we go to the beach because it'll be late when we go back home. You know Sundays they close early," Ntuthuko says and they agree.

"Unfortunately Mawande and I won't be heading home with everyone this evening. We have decided to sleep here again tonight,"

"Okay love birds, we understand," Nhlelo says and Mafube fake coughs. He's getting on my last nerve now. If I did something to him then he should tell me rather than giving me this attitude.

"You're missing a lot of mentorship sessions because of Msebeyelanga. Are you sure you still want to be a lawyer?" Haibo! What did he just say?

DEDANI MKHIZE

My wife tried calling me in the early hours of the morning and I couldn't go to help her. I just sat there and watched my phone ringing, knowing fully well that she was in a lot of pain and loosing our first baby. I will never forgive myself for sacrificing my own blood to evil like this, even though I didn't have a choice. My heart is heavy, guilt is eating through me because I never wanted to hurt Nomahlubi.

This is all Ndongolozza's fault, had she just did as I told her then we wouldn't be in this situation. She's going to pay dearly for what she did to my wife and I, for robbing us off the chance of being parents and our happiness. She better be strong enough for what I have in mind for her, I'm going to break her spirit until the only option she has is death.

My wife managed to call the ambulance and they brought her to the hospital but it was too late; there wasn't a chance for the baby. I rushed here this morning when the hospital called and told me she has been admitted, the doctors have done what needs to be done and Hlubi is still sleeping. I'm not leaving her side until she's discharged and I can take her home and take care of her myself. It's the least I can do to ease my guilt.

"Oh Nomahlubi, oh my baby," her mother says, rushing to my wife's side. It's going to be hectic with this woman here, she doesn't like me much and I honestly cannot say what I've done to deserve it.

I wish I didn't call her here but all hell would have broke loose if I didn't.

"Bhut'Dedani," I get up from the chair and hug my sister in law.

"Qaqamba, thank you for coming. She will need all of us when she wakes up," she nods vigorously.

"What happened to my child Mkhize," the mother asks, looking like she's ready to murder me.

"I honestly don't know ma, I'm waiting for her to wake up and tell me," she frowns then rounds the bed and stops in front of me like she wants to fight.

"You don't know? Where the hell were you when my child was loosing her baby?" She's shaking with anger.

"Mama, please calm down," Qaqamba says but she knows not to bother. Their mother always sees red when it comes to me.

"Don't tell me to calm down. Your sister lost her baby while he was out there doing God knows what. I told Hlubi not to marry this good for nothing piece of shit, she deserves much better. She deserves a good man, a man who fears God before anything," she's screaming at me, I'm trying my level best to keep my cool but she can test even the patience of a saint.

"I understand mama but this is not the place or time for this, please,"

"Mkhize, you did this to my daughter," I swallow hard and watch her wipe her tears.

"Bhut'Dedani, please take a walk," -Qaqamba.

This is why I never want my mother in law to come around, all she does is give me bad attitude and accuse me of everything and anything.

"Call me when she's awake," she nods.

I walk out of my wife's room, I could use a drink but I don't want to leave this hospital. I need to be near when she wakes up and needs me to comfort her. I'm her husband, the father of her baby and best friend; so I know I'll be the first person she wants to see when she opens her eyes. The mother might hate me but I'm everything to her daughter, she loves me as much as I love her. Nothing she says or does will get between our love and our marriage, she should know this and know peace.

I unlock my car and climb inside then recline the chair back. I need to calm down and block my mother in-law out before my wife wakes up. My phone vibrates in my pocket and I heave a deep sigh, I'm sure it's Madlabantu. He has been blowing up my phone since this morning, I know he's calling to tell me to expect a lot of money because I've sacrificed my child. The last thing I need to be reminded of is that I'll be richer because of my own blood. I take it out of my pocket and it's Ndongoloza, my blood boils immediately. I find myself in this mess because of this bitch but as much as I'm mad at her I still need her to finish this whole thing.

"What do you want?" I answer.

"My love," she's crying. Too soon because I haven't started with her.

"What do you want Ndongoloza? You made it clear where you stand when I was there so what?"

"Her cry is annoying me, "Baby please, I honestly don't know what came over me. I cannot explain my behavior because that wasn't me Dedani. I swear it felt like something took over me and I just got back the real me this morning," what bullshit! She expects me to believe this stupidity?"

"Good for you," she cries harder.

"Dedani please, I'm about to go back to our place in a few minutes. Please meet me there later," reliefs floods through me.

"Do as you please Ndongoloza, I don't care anymore,"

"Please don't speak like this, I am truly sorry my love," I yawn.

Let her come back so I can get her back in line once and for all.

"I have to go, I'll see you when I see you," I say and hung up my phone.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 32

MAWANDE DUMA

"You guys are definitely a thing now," the hairdresser says and I frown.

"Huh?" She rolls her eyes.

"You cannot stop looking at each other and smiling like cheshire cats. The last time you guys came here you weren't behaving like this," I giggle, looking at him through the mirror. He's busy on his phone now. He is so handsome, God!

"Yes, he's my boyfriend now," I didn't think this would ever happen, I honestly thought it will only be nothing but a dream.

"He's very good looking and clean, you're a lucky girl," she winks at me then goes back to styling my hair. Msebe brought me to the salon to change my hairstyle, he said he wants to see my crown always at its best.

We are walking out of the salon holding hands, he's the one who reaches for mine each time. I'm not complaining because I love it, I love him. He's yet to tell me the three little words but I'm not in any hurry to hear them. He made it clear that he reciprocates my feelings and for now that's enough for me. We will take our relationship one day at a time and just focus on making each other happy and to feel at peace together. This is my first relationship and I don't know much but I will let my heart lead me through this journey with Msebeyelanga.

He opens my door and I climb in then watch him round the car and get in the driver's side. Ntuthuko drives Singabakhe to school every

morning so he helped Msebe find a guy who will bring his car and catch a lift with him back to Mzumbe.

"You look absolutely gorgeous habibti," he says with a smile and I'm left melting into liquid. I have been blushing since yesterday morning, I never thought I'd ever feel this way.

"Thank you. What does habibti mean?" I ask as he starts the engine and reverses out of the parking space.

"It's an Arabic word babe, find it's meaning," right, he lived in Dubai, now he's flexing their language. I take out my phone from the bag and only then I remember that I don't have data. Things have been hectic since I stopped working at the supermarket, yes, I didn't get paid but I'd manage to take a little something for airtime now and again.

"Are you not googling the meaning?" Msebe asks as I put the phone back in my bag.

"I didn't buy data, I'll google later on," I say, looking out the window.

"Wande," he calls out softly and I can't help but look at him. His eyes are darting between me and the road, at least the road is not too busy.

"Since the supermarket is no longer operating does your aunt give you an allowance?" That would be the day, Nobantu would never give me a cent. She failed giving me one when I was working for it.

"No, but I'm okay," I lie, ashamed to admit that I'm broke and cannot afford to buy mere data.

"Okay how babe? How do you survive?" He sounds really concerned.

I heave a sigh, "Ntuthuko helps when he can," he sends me airtime to buy data because he doesn't want me missing emails from my university and funding applications. He has tried to give me some

money but I just can't accept it, he's not working himself plus he has already done so much for me.

"He's a good guy but I'm your man now Wande, I'll take care of you," he says and I shake my head. I cannot be a burden to him.

"Msebeyelanga, I'm your girlfriend not your financial responsibility," he presses his lips into a thin line.

"Baby, we are together now. I am your man and I have to step up for you, let's not argue about it. I will send you a monthly allowance into your account," I'm not used to this, I've been struggling all on my own.

"We haven't even been dating for a month, it doesn't feel right. I'm not in this relationship for anything else but your heart," he smiles.

"I'm glad to hear that but everything else comes with my heart, please understand that and sms me your banking details," shit! I don't have a bank account, why would I open one when I don't have any funds coming in.

"Uhm, I'll open one soon," he nods.

Thank God he's not judging me for not having a bank account at my age.

"We will come back to town sometime this week and open one for you, don't worry about it,"

"Thank you," he takes my hand and brushes my knuckles with his thumb.

"Now tell me, did you enjoy your weekend?" He asks.

"I enjoyed my time with you more," he grins, pleased with my answer.

I have never felt so happy and alive since my parents died. Yesterday at the beach we couldn't separate, we were like conjoined twins. We took a swim in the ocean and cuddled in the sand. I'm surprised at

how I easily loose myself when I'm with him, it's like time stops and we are the only two people existing in the world.

"I'm sad that we are going home and you won't be sleeping next to me tonight," me too, I wish we could stay together longer.

"I'm sad too, when will I see you again?" I hope I'm not sounding needy.

"You'll see me everyday of your life Wande," I'm glad to hear that.

"That sounds good to me,"

"Now where does my gorgeous gorgeous girl want to eat?" He asks and I remember that I've been craving some ribs.

My mood went from a hundred to a zero real quick, the thought of going back to that cold, lonely place after such an amazing weekend hurts my heart. I want to cry but I don't want to stress out Msebeyelanga and have him ask a million questions. I'm not ready to talk to him about all that I've been through. It's not that I don't trust him, I just don't want to bring the painful part of my life into this beautiful thing I have with him.

He stops the car outside the back gate, where they picked me up on Saturday.

"Please don't be sad babe, you'll see me tomorrow," he says and I offer him a weak smile.

"It's going to be a long night," my aunt is going to grill me. I have been ignoring her calls since Saturday, I didn't want her ruining my mood. She's definitely waiting to deal with me.

"I can already tell that my bed is going to be cold AF," he says.

I enjoyed sleeping in his arms last night, I felt safe, he felt like home. We stayed up until the early hours of the morning talking and talking. Some of the things we were talking about didn't make any sense but they got me laughing until my stomach hurt.

"We will have to be strong," I say and he leans in for a kiss, I'm nervous as I meet his lips. I am crossing fingers that my aunt isn't seeing this, I don't want to be accused of sleeping with Msebe this whole weekend.

"Wande," he says after pulling out of the kiss.

"Yes?"

He heaves a deep sigh, "You're tense, is everything okay?" Oh shit!

"I'm sorry, I'm just scared that my aunt will come out and scream," he laughs.

"I understand," how I wish we were far away from Mzumbe. I am so free and light when we are away and I don't have to think about Nobantu.

"Let me go inside," I say and he nods.

"I'll call you a little later," I peck his lips before opening the door and climbing out.

My bag and the take away he forced me to get are in the backseat, I take them out and wave goodbye after I close the door. I walk inside the yard and go straight to my bedroom, this food needs to be hidden in case aunt Nobantu comes. My room is stuffy, I draw the curtains and open the windows for some fresh air.

I'm missing Msebeyelanga already but tomorrow is not really that far, I shouldn't behave like I haven't lived before being his girlfriend. But I

will admit that being with him has brought me happiness, even though it has only been two days since we made it official.

I'm humming a song as I unpack the dirty clothes I came back with, I will have to wait for Saturday to do the laundry. I'm only allowed to do mine once theirs is all good. My phone vibrates on the bed, I don't have data so what could it be? I pick it up and power on the screen, it's a notification for airtime and data. It can only be Msebe.

WhatsApp texts from his sister flood in, I open the chat and laugh at the last text she sent me. She said I shouldn't get pregnant until Msebe does the right thing, she's such a clown. Her brother is a gentleman, he didn't even try to have sex with me. He got erections and a lot of them but he never tried his luck.

I respond with laughing emojis and right after a text from Msebe comes through.

| I'm glad to see you online habibti. |

The text says and I'm reminded to find out what the name means.

| I was about to call you, thank you so much. |

I respond and get a reply almost immediately.

| You're welcome babe, call me when I'm done answering my mother's million questions |

I respond with a heart emoji and go to Google to check the meaning of habibti,

okay I found something that's making me melt. Habibti is the feminine form of the Arabic word habibi, it literally means my love, my darling or beloved.

Msebeyelanga is calling me his love, what a perfect way to end the perfect weekend I had with him. I don't want my aunt to see that I'm home and ruin my mood. I should close my window and put on my headsets as I watch something on YouTube, I'll deal with her wrath tomorrow. Today I'm just a girl who is madly in love and cannot stop blushing.

NHLELOZENKOSI NGIDI

My brother hasn't even had the chance to go to his rondavel to take a shower and change, maMokwena is already on his neck. She wants to know how it went with Mawande. Mama has been trying to get Msebe to look at Mawande and this for her is a dream come true. I'm happy for my big brother for finding someone so calm, genuine and determined. They are going to make a dream team and I know my nieces and nephews will look super cute.

"She was right to say your head is filled with sparkling water. You took your time with her, what if someone else came and snatched her away from you?" Mama says after laughing at what Mawande said to her son.

"Mawande loves me ma, no man stood a chance with her," oh wow, look at him bragging.

"You better not always wait on her to make the first move on everything," mama says and I laugh alone.

"Oh come on! She just beat me to it, I was going to tell her the very same night," my mother clicks her tongue.

"Please treat her right Msebeyelanga, she's a special girl," my brother nods vigorously.

"I am a lucky guy. I'm going to treat Wande like a queen," maMokwena claps excitedly, she's like a child who has just been given candy.

"Oh Langoo, I'm so happy for you,"

"I am happy for you too, may your relationship bring nothing but happiness and peace," I add and our cousin gets up from the couch and heads out. He has been in a foul mood since yesterday, I suspect that he's mad about Mawande and Msebe getting together. He once told my mom that he's just being his flirtatious self and he doesn't want Mawande. Now I'm beginning to think that he caught feelings along the way.

"Should I dish for you?" Ma asks her son.

"No, thank you. Wande and I had something to eat before we drove home," If I didn't have my nike tracksuits loving man I'd be craving love by just looking at my brother's face. I have never seen Msebe light up this way.

"Let me go take a shower," he gets up then kisses mama's cheek.

"Nhlelozenkosi, the car is still outside," oh yeah, let me go drive it into the garage.

I grab my car keys on the dining table that has become my office and head outside. Mafube is standing under the tree, I should have a word with him and find out what's eating through him. I have an idea but I

would rather hear it from the horse's mouth and if it's true then he should know that he can't do anything. Mawande is his brother's girlfriend now and he needs to respect that. Plus, he has a string of women to his name and children. Mawande doesn't deserve the burden he comes with and he knows that.

I drive in the car and lock the garage door then make my way to Mafube, hopefully he opens his chest for me.

"Cous," I say, standing next to him.

"Zulu princess,"

I clear my throat, "You have been in a foul mood since yesterday, want to talk about it?" He shakes his head.

"I'm okay sis," Why is he lying? It's written all over his face that something is eating him up. I'll just use another approach to get the truth out of him.

"Msebe and Mawande make a cute couple don't they?"

He chuckles, "They are alright,"

"No come on, they are a match made in heaven," he looks at me with a raised eyebrow.

"That's taking it too far. Msebe just had it easy with Mawande, he didn't even put in the effort. His good looks just made things simple for him, like they always do," kahleni bo!

"What is that supposed to mean?" I ask.

"He has always taken the girls I like simply because he is handsome. I'd put in the work in trying my luck and all he had to do was smile and the women would fall at his feet," I knew it, he's mad at his brother because Mawande is in love with Msebeyelanga and not him.

"But you can't blame Msebe for that," he laughs.

"Of course you would say that, you've never had to be in his shadow," he says then walks away.

This is deep!

I doubt my brother knows that Mafube feels this way.

"Sawubona," I jump, turning to see who just startled me. I've seen this woman before, I'm trying to place her in my head.

"Can I help you?" I ask.

"I hope so. My name is Nomafu MaButhelezi, Ntuthuko's mother," oh yeah, I remember how she made my boyfriend angry. What is she doing here?

"I'm sorry for bringing you into this but I really need your help," she says with tears welling up in her dead eyes. What is the issue between them? Why does she think I can help her

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 33

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NOBANTU DLADLA

"He still hasn't come around?" I ask my crying daughter.

"He's not even answering my calls mama, I swear this time he's done with me," Man like Mkhize are not supposed to be pushed to the edge. Ndongoloza bruised his ego when he came here and kneeled before her only to be rejected.

"What do I do ma? I cannot lose Dedani, he is the love of my life," oh my poor baby.

There's still a lot I need to teach her about powerful man and how to treat them. If she continues acting like a brat when she's mad at him then Dedani will look for another woman. A mature woman who will bring him peace.

"Give him more time princess, he will come around. That man loves you, I saw it in his eyes. Right now he's still hurt by how you treated him when he came here to make amends," I advise and she heaves a deep sigh.

"I'm loosing my mind, I can't even focus at work," she says and I shake my head.

"Ndondoloza, no baby. Leave your private life out of the office, you can't risk making mistakes at work," No matter what happens she must never play with this job. As much as I want Dedani as my son in law, man come and go but jobs are few in this country.

"I know. I'm thinking of going to the spa this weekend to relax and wait on him to deal with my disrespect," that's a great idea.

"We can turn it into a mother and daughter thing, sleep at a hotel and have endless cocktails," I say and she giggles.

"That sounds tempting but I'd rather be at the house in case he just shows up and wants to talk," makes sense.

"Okay then, we will do it once you guys have fixed things,"

My daughter clears her throat, "Ma,"

"Princess,"

"I am really sorry for the way I spoke to you this weekend, I honestly don't know what came over me. I appreciate how you raised Qophelo and I, you sacrificed so much for us and it's only fair that I support you. If it's bhut'Sqalo you choose then it's okay," she says and tears burn my eyes. This means so much to me.

"Thank you so much my love, I appreciate it," I say then wipe the tears that just fell.

"He better treat you right or I swear I will deal with him," I'm thrown into a fit of laughter.

"He has been nothing but amazing, you don't have to worry about it," that's the honest truth.

"Good, now has Mawande come back from wherever she disappeared to?" She asks and my stomach bubbles with anger. That girl is disrespectful and I know exactly how to deal with her ungrateful self.

"I went to check her room yesterday and she wasn't in, I'll go check again. She probably got in late," she laughs.

"You better get her on birth control. It's obvious she was with a man," she knows what will happen to her if she comes back here with a bastard in her womb.

"She wouldn't dare, unless if she's stupid. But you're right, I will take her to the doctor," I'd rather be safe than sorry.

I'm glad my daughter and I are on good terms, I hate it when we are at loggerheads. Especially now that her twin brother is in rehab after being out of control. That one is stressing me out, he doesn't want me coming to see him at the rehab center and he won't talk to me over the phone. I don't know if we will be able to get our relationship to where it used to be, I miss the sweet little boy he used to be.

I get up from the couch and exit the main house, I want to check if Mawande is home. That one needs to be taught a lesson of her life, next time she will think twice before disrespecting me by disappearing and not answering her phone when I call. The window

is open, she's home. I pick up my pace and once I'm at the door I pound on it then roll up the sleeves of my dress. She opens, her eyes already widened with fear. She should be scared, she has forgotten that I'm Nobantu and she is at my mercy until the day I meet my maker.

"Two bulls cannot rule in one kraal," I say, hitting her chest with my fist.

"Your tears won't save you and Qophelo isn't here to threaten me," she is shaking like a leaf.

"I am really sorry aunt Nobantu," I push her and she falls down and cries in pain.

"Where did you disappear to the whole weekend? Have you started sleeping around?" She's shaking her head.

"I don't know any man, I swear I'm still a virgin," that's laughable, I wouldn't bet my last cent on her being pure.

"Where have you been Mawande?" I scream and she closes her eyes.

"I went to the beach with Nhlelozenkosi," that prostitute from Cape Town.

"You have been out of control ever since you started this stupid friendship with MaMokwena's daughter. You don't see me any more, you don't regard me Mawande," I say, wagging a finger at her.

"I am really sorry aunt Nobantu, I'm so sorry," she's making me more angry because she's not sorry. She's just saying it with the hope that it touches my heart but little does she know that I don't have a heart when it comes to her; and she should blame her dead mother for it.

"From now onwards you will start feeding and clothing yourself because you are a woman who follows her own rules," I say and she gasps. "Don't be shocked, you wanted this,"

"Aunt Nobantu, please. For the love you once had for my mother please stop treating me like this," she says, kneeling before me.

I slap her hard across the face, "Don't you ever mention your mother to me, her name only brings hate and anger to my heart," I say and leave the room quickly, my hands are shaking with anger. Tears streaming down my face. How dare she mention Nandi to me.

NTUTHUKO BUTHELEZI

Nhlelozenkosi has to be Mrs Buthelezi soon, I cannot continue staying alone when I have her and Singabakhe. The money for her lobola and traditional ceremonies is already available in the bags I've buried in my yard. I do have a bank account but I don't keep all my money in it, it's too much and it will definitely raise suspicions. I have been a weed grower and supplier for years and years and I've never really had anyone to spend my money on. The only thing I've ever done with my money is build a house and buy the furniture in it. I need to start a legit business with the money I have, one that can sustain me and my family. I want to stop selling weed, Singabakhe looks up to me and I don't want him to think it's okay being involved in illegal activities. I got into this business because I had to survive, but now I have a choice to do something legal.

MaHlomuka comes and sits next to me, she was washing the dishes. My woman cooked me a nice meal, seven colors on a Tuesday. I've been living like a King since she agreed to be mine, I swear on my late father that I have never been this happy in my entire 32 years of living. Nhlelo leans in and pecks my lips before asking me to place both my feet on her lap, she's giving me a foot rub. I should be the one doing all of these things to her, but I won't stop her and come across as a typical village champion.

"What happened here?" She asks, pointing at the two scars on my legs. My stomach freezes at the memory.

"I was a naughty kid," I lie, forcing a smile to hide my pain.

"I can imagine a young naughty little boy with curly hair and beautiful skin," she says and I laugh.

"Hopefully Singabakhe's siblings don't take after me," she chuckles.

"They better be well behaved because mama doesn't take any nonsense," her words make me happy. She really sees herself with me, as my wife and the mother of my children.

"What they can take is daddy's hair and skin, I'm all for that," I'm blushing. I have always been teased for my skin and hair, so for her to love the things that others made me feel insecure about means a lot to me. I hide my hair with caps because I hate being bald, unfortunately there's nothing I can hide my skin tone with.

"I honestly don't care what they look like, for as long as they are mine and yours," her eyes twinkle.

"Jesus, Ntuthuko, I love you so much," my heart drops into my stomach, this is the first time she's telling me that she loves me.

"MaHlomuka, sthandwa sami. I love you more than like itself," I put my feet down and move closer to her, cupping her face and kissing her lips passionately.

She breaks the kiss first and takes a deep breath.

"Ntuthuko, I need you to know that I'm in this. I have never felt so adored in my life and because of that I will live my life trying to make you feel the way you make me feel," Is this woman trying to kill me with happiness?

"Your love is everything to me, you don't know what you have healed by allowing me into yours and Singabakhe's life," tears are glistening in her eyes.

"Whatever pain you carry, whatever bad memory you have, share all with me baby. I will never judge you, look at you any differently or love you any less. Everything you've been through has made you the man you are to me and my son, the little boy you love like your own," I allow my tears to fall. No woman has ever seen me so vulnerable.

"Those are memories I want to bury and never think about," It comes out in a whisper.

"You cannot babe, you have to deal with everything so you can move past it," I shake my head.

"I'd rather not," she nods, understanding.

"I hear you but it looks like the people who are the cause of the pain you're feeling aren't going to allow you to bury anything," she says and I frown.

"What do you mean?"

She takes a deep breath, "Your mother came to see me yesterday," she says and I quickly get up from the couch.

"She what?" I ask, blinking rapidly. How dare she comes near my girlfriend? Who gave her the right to do that?

"Please calm down," she looks scared so I close my eyes and breath in and out.

"What did she say to you?" I won't let her turn me into a monster in Nhlelo's eyes.

"She just asked me to help her beg you to sit down with her. She said there's a lot she needs to apologize for and an important thing she needs to tell you," I huff out a humourless laugh.

"Can I borrow your car for a few minutes?" I ask and she shakes her head.

"Please don't go there Ntuthuko," she's on her feet, holding my hand.

"Nhlelozenkosi," I can do anything for her but I cannot let this one go.

"Promise me that you will not hurt her," I feel a sting of pain.

"I won't lay my hands on her or any human being. I'm over my violent nature, I have a son who I need to set the right example for now," her face soften.

"Okay, you can take my car," I kiss her forehead before putting on my shoes and taking the car keys on the table.

"I'll be right back, I love you,"

I stop the car outside their yard and climb out angrily, I'm only going to warn her once and if she does this again then she will know the monster her husband created. The yard is quiet but the door is open, they are home. I walk in without knocking and she gets up from the kitchen stool, her eyes are threatening to jump out of the sockets. Her husband is laying on the reed mat next to the coal stove, he is now the shadow of his old self. He's no longer the bastard that used to cause me all sorts of pains, I could take my revenge this minute because he's as helpless as I was. But I made a promise to the love of my life.

"N-Ntuthuko," he says with a shaking voice.

I swallow pass the dry lump, "Nomafu, who gave you the right to go to MaHlomuka yesterday?" I ask her, totally ignoring her husband.

"I am desperate, I didn't mean to make you angry," she says, clutching at her chest.

"Oh well I am angry," I scream and she jumps.

"Oh my son," she must never call me that again.

"Stay away from Nhlelozenkosi, stay away from me. I want nothing to do with you, your apologies or truths," she's shaking her head.

"I know I hurt you and I will forever hate myself for choosing to stay with him and not running away with you. Poverty made me stay, his threats..."

I quickly interject, "I don't care. I came here to tell you to stay away from us,"

"Ntuthuko please, I won't apologize then but there's something really important I need to tell you,"

"I don't want to hear it. Stay away from us or the next time I come back here I'll burn this house down with the both of you in it," she gasps in shock.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 34

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DEDANI MKHIZE

"Are you sure she's good to go?" I ask the doctor for the millionth time.

"I'm sure Mr. Mkhize. Your wife is fine, she's pretty much back to her physical function. The only thing I will ask you to do is be there for her; losing a baby this far in the pregnancy is devastating. She will need all the emotional support," she says and I look at my beautiful wife who is lost in her train of thoughts. My heart is bleeding because

I'm responsible for this, I couldn't get Ndongoloza to stay in the apartment.

"I took time off work, I'll stay with her for as long as she needs," I say and she nods with a smile.

"Good, just don't shove your own feelings out. It was also your baby, you too need to deal with your pain," I deserve to live with the pain doctor.

"I will thank you," my mother in law clears her throat.

"Let's go home my love," I say, helping Hlubi up from the bed then taking the bag.

"I'll help you with that bhut'Dedani," Qaqamba is sweet. I hand her the bag and we all walk out.

Nomahlubi has been looking out the window since we left the hospital, she hasn't said a word to me since she woke up that Sunday afternoon. All she did was hold on to me crying so painfully, I could tell that her soul is broken. She was really excited to become a mom, excited to meet the life we had created out of love. I wish I could take her pain away, I should be able to do that because I promised to make her happy when I married her.

I press the remote and the gate slides open; I'm not looking forward to staying with my mother in law but I will have to deal with her because Hlubi needs her right now. I climb out the car first and round it to help my wife out, I step on my mother in law and she gives me a dirty look. This is going to be my life until they go back to East London.

"This house is cold, it feels like I just entered the devil's playground. We need to pray," my mother in law says as we enter the house. I heave a sigh and decide to just ignore her.

"Mama, please stop," Qaqamba tries to reprimand her. I wish I could tell her not to bother, their mother will never like me. They all just have to make peace with it.

"Intoni ke wena? I'm just saying what my spirit is feeling, I'm not insulting anyone. Why are you kids afraid of the truth?" She clicks her tongue. She should have continued to stay at the hotel.

"My love, please take me upstairs," she finally says something to me.

"Okay babe, let me carry you," she chuckles lightly and my mood is lifted a little, at least the pain hasn't fully consumed her.

"Oh Mkhize, I can walk," I shake my head.

"I know that but I still want to carry you," I carry her bridal style up the stairs and I'm glad my mother in law isn't following us. The woman is a nuisance, she'll be in our space all day every day. I push the door with my leg and walk in, it smells fresh in here. Our helper cleaned and changed the bedding. I place my wife gently on the bed then take off her morning slippers.

"Do you need anything?" I ask and she shakes her head.

"Just you, lay down with me," I smile and take off my shoes before laying next to her and taking her in my arms.

"I'm really sorry Mkhize," she says and I narrow my eyes.

"For what my love?" I ask.

"For loosing the baby, I know how excited you were to be a dad," she just broke my heart even further. I help her sit up straight so we are eye to eye.

"Hlubi, love. Please don't put this on you. I don't blame you now and I won't blame you in the future. We will be pregnant again and you'll

carry full term and our baby will live and be as beautiful and gracious as her mother," I say and her tears fall.

I wipe them with my hands, "We are going to be okay my love. We will be happy and complete with our baby, don't feel bad don't feel rushed. I am your husband and I love you with all my heart," she pulls me to her and holds on tight, I hug her back and allow my own tears to fall. We are going to get through this.

The door opens and my mother in law walks in, I roll my eyes. Now she's just going to badge in our matrimonial bedroom, this is our private space and she shouldn't even enter it. She's holding a tray of food, it's obviously for Hlubi, she wouldn't feed me even if my life depended on it.

"Mama is going to feed you my baby," she says, placing the tray on the pedestal.

"I can feed her ma," she gives me a side eye.

"She's my child Dedani, I will feed her myself," oh she wants to play like that? In my territory?

"She's also my wife, whom I adore very much. I can feed her myself in our bedroom," I say and Hlubi heaves a deep sigh.

"Baby," she's giving me those puppy eyes. I cannot say no to her when she's looking at me like that.

"I'll be in my study," I say, getting off the bed. My mother in law is smiling like she just won the lottery.

"A child will always choose it's mother," she says and I narrow my eyes at my wife.

"Mama," Hlubi doesn't need to deal with her pettiness right now.

"I'm just saying. Mkhize, tell Qaqamba to bring my Bible, I know it will burn you if you touch it," I'm slowly running out of patience with this woman.

"Okay, that's enough mama. I know you're not a fan of my husband but this is his house so please show him a little respect," I walk out before I can hear her response.

My phone chimes in my hand, I look at it and it's Ndongoloza. She's telling me that she's going to get lunch at the mall then go back to the office. I haven't gone to see her, I don't trust myself not to strangle her to death. I still need her to finish what she came into my life for, I will probably go see her next week. I'm just glad she's back to her senses and doing as I asked. Now she tells me her every move without fail. I power my screen off and walk to my study without telling Qaqamba to take the bible upstairs.

NHLELOZENKOSI NGIDI

"Ma are you sure you don't mind?" I ask and she nods.

"Nhlelo, Singabakhe is my grandson. We will be okay without you for the weekend," she says and I take a deep breath.

"I kind of feel bad for leaving my son two weekends in a row," I say and she reaches for my hand.

"Having a life outside of being a mother doesn't make you a bad parent. You are with him everyday, you take care of him and make sure he is happy. Ntuthuko needs you now, he's always going out of his way for you both now it's time you stick by him," I just explained to my mom that there's bad blood between Ntuthuko and his parents, and that he has been sad since the Tuesday I told him about his

mom. I don't know the story behind everything but I hope with time he trusts me enough to share his pain with me.

"Thank you ma, I'll see you guys on Sunday," she nods and I take my car keys on the kitchen counter and walk out, my weekender is already in the boot. Msebeyelanga said he will come back with Singabakhe because him and Mawande went into town.

I get to Ntuthuko's house and drive in the yard then climb out to go lock the gate. I don't think we will be going anywhere this entire weekend, there's food in the house and I'll cook and my boyfriend bought my favorite alcohol so we are set. I push the door open and he's sitting on the couch in nothing but his shorts. Ntuthuko has beautiful skin, one would swear he is mixed. He offers me a weak smile and I wish I knew how to help him.

"I'm happy you're here," he says and I settle down next to him, taking his hand and kissing his knuckles.

"I'm happy to be here with you baby,"

"Will Msebe bring Singa here?" He asks and shake my head no.

"No, today is Ntwana and mommy time. We will see sonshine on Sunday,"

"He's going to be extremely mad, two weekends in a row. We need to make it up to him, maybe go to Durban, just the three of us," Ntuthuko is so thoughtful. He's going through a lot but he's still thinking about making Singa happy.

"You're the best bonus dad ever," his eyes light up.

"Thank you for making me a dad," why won't I love this guy? I mean who loves a woman and her cub so fearlessly? Who appreciates a child he didn't create so much?

"Something I will never regret. The short space of time we've been together has brought so much happiness to me and Singa," I say and he nods and looks at the TV stand.

"MaHlomuka, " his voice is shaking.

"Shenge," he looks at me with tears in his eyes.

"I've been alone for years. Dealing with this pain all on my own, I've never been vulnerable to anyone like this. I feel safe with you, loved and held high. Promise me that you will not see me as anything less," he says and my own tears blur my vision.

"I promise, for as long as you don't change on us Shenge," he nods.

"I promise never to change on you guys, you are my life line," God bless this beautiful soul.

"Do you see that man on the picture?" He asks and I nod.

"That's my father, His name is Richard Mahlangu. He died before I was born and before he could take my mother to meet his family. I don't know my people, I'm using my mother's surname and it's hard on me as a man you know," Oh, I thought his father was the man that married his mom, I shouldn't have assumed because he refers to the man as his mothers husband.

"Have you tried tracking them down?" I ask and he nods.

"I tried the only lead I had but the place closed down many years ago. Nomafu met him while working at the sugarcane plantation,"

"Your mother doesn't know where he was from?" I ask.

He heaves a heavy sigh, "No MaHlomuka, she only knows that he was from Mpumalanga,"

"We should hire a private investigator to track down his people," I suggest.

"I've been thinking about that but that's not the story I wanted to tell you," I narrow my eyes.

"Okay," He clears his throat and sit up to face me.

"My mother got married when I was around Singa's age, I don't remember much of that age. I don't know if my mother was ever truly happy with him because all I remember is the pain and hell we went through," he doesn't want to blink because his tears will fall. Oh Ntuthuko, you don't have to act strong around me.

"They tried having kids but nothing happened, not a miscarriage, not a still birth, nothing. That made him go crazy, he started abusing my mother because her womb wasn't accepting his seed. He beat her up even more because people knew that he's the problem since my mother has me. I, on the other hand was beaten because I was another man's child. The reason why everyone was blaming him for their childlessness," his voice is getting hoarse, it's hard for him but he's letting me in and I appreciate that.

"He beat his wife so much she was at the hospital more than she was at home and that was always his chance to..." He stops talking and buries his face in his hands, sobbing. My heart is thumping in my chest, Ntuthuko has been through a lot in his life. I wish I could make him forget about it all. I brush his back in circles, crying with him. I feel what he feels because I love him so much. He stops crying and looks at me with bloodshot eyes.

"Uhm, so when my mother was recovering in the hospital he would come into my room and tell me that I have to stand in for Nomafu. That monster would rape me every other night MaHlomuka, I would cry and beg him to stop but it all fell on deaf ears," he says and I gasp in shock. Oh my God, I wasn't expecting this. I hate that man, I hope he rots in hell. I clasp Ntuthuko's hand, this is for him to see that I'm here and not judging or looking at him differently. It wasn't his fault, he didn't do anything wrong.

"It's, he would... MaHlomuka, that man took away my soul," I take him in my arms and kiss the top of his head repeatedly. Hoping to assure him that I love him still.

"I am really sorry my love. God, I'm really sorry," This is so painful.

"The scars you asked me about? I wasn't a naughty child, I got them from my step father. I ran away once and when they found me he hit me with a belt and then hammered nails in my feet so I won't be able to run away again. He had my mother restrained throughout that nightmare. I was in pain the whole night, he only agreed for my mother to take me to the hospital in the morning when I was weak and having a fever. The doctors were shocked. I was treated very quickly and my mother took me and ran immediately after I was treated, all because she didn't want to be questioned by the police and social workers. Instead of running back to her family with me, Nomafu came back here, to our abuser," my heart cannot take any more of this. It's too painful to hear, I can only imagine what he's going through. He lived that life and he's now living with the memories of his pain.

"MaHlomuka, I will never hurt you or Singabakhe," I can hear the desperation in his voice for me to believe him and Lord knows I do.

"I know baby, I know," he holds on tight.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 35

MAWANDE DUMA

I knew there would be consequences for disappearing the whole weekend and not answering her calls. But I honestly didn't think she would punish me by telling me to fend for myself. Yes, I kept

perishables because I suspected she would starve me now and again not cut me off completely. At least I will be able to afford to buy food, cosmetics and clothes with the allowance Msebe will give me. The man deposited R3000 in my account the same day we opened an account. He told me that's what I'll be getting on a monthly basis and begged me to tell him when I need something. What would I possibly need on top of R3000? I didn't tell him what happened with my aunt, when he asked if I wasn't in trouble I lied and said I'm okay. I don't want him to pity me, to feel obligated to stay with me and provide because he feels sorry for me.

My hope was restored this morning when a response from University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg came through; I got accepted to study for my LLB next year. I cried for about 30 minutes straight, tears of unmatched joy.

My countdown of leaving Mzumbe has finally began, I am really excited for what the future holds. I just need to hold on a little longer, to be strong and take Nobantu's shit for the last time in my life. When I come back to this village I will be hell fire for her and her children, they won't know what hit them. Ntuthuko was the first person I called with the good news, because all of this wouldn't have been possible without his help. Msebe was next and he was genuinely happy for me, he even asked me to come over when he's back from Port Shepstone.

There's a knock on my door, it must be my aunt. I look around the room to make sure that there's nothing that will make her go off like a bomb on me. I get off the bed and push my phone under the pillow, this one she can never see. I open the door and frown, what is Mafube doing here? If Nobantu sees him here then they'll be hell to

pay, she's already thinking that I'm sleeping around. This will stamp on that, I honestly don't need any drama.

"What are you doing here, my aunt..."

He quickly interjects, "Relax Mawande, she drove out a few minutes ago," I frown.

"Have you been watching the house?" I ask.

"I'm not stalking you, I just needed to catch you alone. These days you're always with Msebe, he doesn't leave your side," he says distastefully and I narrow my eyes.

"Why are you here Mafube?" I'm not comfortable anymore, not after what he just said and how he said it.

"Are you still interested in me being your mentor?" I doubt that very much now.

"Of course I am. We agreed that we will start with the mentorship once I'm in university, you said I can text if I have any questions for now," this was agreed on when we were having breakfast at the lodge. After he asked me if I still want to be a lawyer.

"I suggested that because I realized that you are now more interested in your relationship with Msebe than your education. The driven Mawande I first met is gone, don't loose yourself for a man who has established himself. My cousin's career has reached it's peak. He doesn't need to send CV's, companies track him down and beg him to work with them. What about you? What will happen when he takes a job offer somewhere across the world?" Why is he trying to plant doubts in my head? Msebe is cheering for me to go to school, he encourages me everyday.

"I will go to university and become a lawyer. My relationship will not stand in the way of reaching my goals," he laughs.

"Do you really believe that? Msebe is looking for a wife and a baby maker, not someone who is looking to chase a career," I take a deep breath.

"I think you should go Mafube," why is he concerning himself with my relationship with his cousin? I only needed his guidance in the career path I have chosen, not his input on my private life.

"I didn't mean to offend you, I'm just trying to look out for you Mawande because you're special to me," this is insane.

"Thank you but I'm good," I close the door and lock it.

"Good afternoon ma," I greet maMokwena who is already smiling from ear to ear.

My relationship with her son has really made this woman happy, she's our biggest cheerleader.

"My beautiful daughter in law," yes, she's already there. Last weekend we were talking about the wedding menu. Msebe was laughing the entire time, he is used to his mothers drama. I told him not to feel pressured into doing anything he's not ready for just to make his mom happy. This relationship is for us, I'm grateful that everyone in his family is in support of it but they will move at our pace.

"How are you in ma?" I ask and she stop braiding her piggy tails. She has long beautiful relaxed hair.

"I'm well thank you sisi, how are you?"

"I'm okay. Is Msebe home?" I ask, even though I see his car parked under the tree.

She nods, "Yes, he came home with a lot of plastics and he has been in his rondavel since," Did he go shopping after his meeting?

"Can I go through?"

She laughs out loud, "Don't let me stop you baby girl," This is so embarrassing.

I knock on the door and Msebe gives me permission to come inside. I push the door open and gasp when I walk in and find silver foil balloons spelling Congrats above his headboard, he did this for me? Oh Msebe! He's just amazing.

There's a beautiful bouquet of flowers on the couch and the table has been set with two glasses of champagne and a bottle in the ice bucket. There are two plates and cutlery next to the takeaway containers of food. I swear this is everything, he just made me fall deeper in love with him.

"Congratulations on being accepted habibti," his love, I will never get used to him calling me his love. He picks up the flowers from the couch and hands them to me before wiping my tear. I feel so special right now.

"Oh, this is so beautiful. Thank you so much," I kiss him.

"I thought of asking you to come to Port Shepstone with Ntuthuko when he goes to pick up Singabakhe so we can have a celebratory meal. But I thought I should do something myself, hoping the memory will live with you forever," a man after my own heart. This is better than any fancy restaurant.

"This means so much, I will never forget it," he kisses my forehead, he does that a lot. I absolutely love it because I feel like there's a message he's trying to send to me and I believe I know what it is.

He takes the bottle of Moet and opens it then pours into both glasses, I put the flowers down to be able to accept the drink. This will be my first time drinking champagne, life is changing.

"To my future attorney," I blush, clicking my glass with his and we take a sip at the same time.

"Now we cross fingers for me to get funding," he shakes his head.

"Don't stress yourself Wande. If you don't get funding then we will make a plan,"

I heave a sigh, "What plan? I've already applied for many company bursaries and NSFAS. I don't qualify for a student loan," he takes my hand with a warm smile on his face.

"You are going to university Mawande, come hell or high water," he says confidently. The little doubt Mafube's words planted in my head disappears immediately, Msebe wants me to succeed.

"I hope so," he cups my chin and looks into my eyes.

"When a man loves a woman he will move mountains for her. I am making you a promise this very minute babe, you are going to become a lawyer for as long as I live," he says and my heart is alright.

DEDANI MKHIZE

"Come on comrade, you are the one who asked me to hire this girl. Are you not sleeping with her anymore?" Zweli asks and I laugh.

"I am but she's starting to think she's bigger than me, I need to cut her wings and remind her that she is because of me. Until she learns to respect and do as I say then she will be out of a job and rely of me," I'm putting Ndondo out of a job because of the pain she caused Hlubi and I, if she didn't leave that damn apartment I wouldn't have had to sacrifice my own blood. She brought this onto herself and I'm

afraid this is only the beginning. I cannot take her life to avenge my child because she needs to finish what she came into my life for, but I can make her life a living hell.

"I can't just fire her for nothing," I roll my eyes, he's boring me now.

"Zweli, give the girl some written warnings then kick her out," he heaves a sigh and nods.

"Advertise her post so everything is legit but hire this girl instead," I hand him a picture, name and contact details of Londeka.

Ndondoloza's best friend. This will make sure that their friendship is broken forever, she will watch Londeka get everything that belonged to her.

"What game are you playing?" I laugh, he's nosey.

"One that will make someone remember that I'm Dedani Mkhize, she will know that I have so much power and my word is law to her," he's shaking his head.

"I fear for the poor girl,"

"I fear for the girl you are going to fuck after spending this money on her," I say handing him a brown envelope with a lot of money.

He's thrown into a fit of laughter, "Hawu Comrade, what are you saying?" I get up from the leather chair and button my blazer.

"I'll see you around Zweli," I say and head to the door. I bump into Ndondoloza when I walk out of the building, she's holding a McDonald's paper bag. She did text when I got here, telling me she's going to get lunch.

"Babe," she says in a low sad voice.

"Ndondo," I say in a bored tone, she closes her eyes.

"I didn't know you'd be here," I laugh.

"Oh, I thought Londeka would have known that I'll be here and give you the heads up. She seems to know everything about my life, she's the one who told you Hlubi is pregnant and you believed her and ran for the hills right?" She swallows hard.

"Can we please go to your car and talk, please," she says.

"Talk about what?" I ask, folding my arms across my chest.

"Our situation. I can understand if a mistake happened with you and Hlubi and she fell pregnant," a mistake? My baby was no mistake girly.

"That's the problem with you, you believe everything that comes out of Londeka's mouth. Nomahlubi is not pregnant, she never was. Why would I want a baby with a woman who is a means to an end? I told you that this marriage is of convenience but you never listen, you would rather believe Londeka and every bullshit she feeds you about me," I lie, I'm trying to woo her back in fully and make her doubt Londeka.

"She's not pregnant?" She asks and I roll my eyes.

"I did not stutter," her lower lip is quivering.

"Mkhize, my love. I am so sorry, please forgive me,"

"Mxm, I can't do this with you everytime Ndongoloza," she tries to hold me but I step back.

"Babe, I promise that I'll change. I will never believe things if they aren't from your mouth. Please forgive me,"

"I need time Ndongoloza, you disrespected and humiliated me in front of your mother. You made me feel like I was a nothing to you," she places a hand over her mouth.

"Give me another chance and I will show you how sorry I am," you cannot miss the desperation in her voice.

"I don't know, I need time to deal with everything. Give me space, I'll reach out when I'm ready," she nods.

"I love you, please don't forget that," oh you love me alright. I nod and walk away.

I started at chicken licken, Hlubi asked me to bring her their wings and chilli cheese sliders. She's not a hundred percent but at least she doesn't cry as much now and she said she will think about doing therapy. I want to make sure that she's alright and not blaming herself for what happened. We will have another baby and our home will be complete, not that it isn't right now. I'll always feel complete for as long as she's by my side, she's my entire life.

I stop outside my gate and narrow my eyes, who came here with a quantum? I don't know any taxi drivers, just taxi bosses and non of them would show up without calling me. I drive in and park my car next to the taxi.

I open the door and freeze when someone sprinkles water on me, what the fuck? I mop my face with the palm of my hand.

My house is full of people who are praying, binding and casting the evil spirit that's present in this house. Nomahlubi's mother is working on my last nerve, this old woman is a thorn on my side. I don't know why she's still here, she should have left with Qaqamba. I should get Madlabantu to deal with this annoying woman.

"This is my son in law pastor, please pray for him. I feel nothing but darkness around this man, I'm afraid this darkness will affect my daughter," she says, pulling me further inside the house, we stop in front of a man wearing a shinny suit. I look around and my wife is

surrounded by three women praying for her, I have never been so pissed off.

"You had no right to bring strangers in my house," I say, giving my mother in law a fulminating gaze.

"This is also my daughter's home, you married her didn't you?"

"Son, we are not here to cause any harm. We are here to invite God into this house, and tell the evil spirits to leave this home because its occupants are children of God," not this little boy calling me son.

"Nomahlubi," I call for my wife.

"Shhhh, they are praying for her," my mother in law says, annoyed.

"I've had enough of you ma. I've tried showing you respect but you constantly come for me, I can't anymore. These people better be out of my house when I get back," I say angrily, headed for the stairs.

"Babe," Nomahlubi calls after me but I ignore her and place the food on the table with flowers and photos.

"I told you that your husband is dark, who runs away from prayer Nomahlubi?" She says, loud enough for me to hear her.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 36

SPONSORED BY MBALI THEE BREADWINNER

NDONDOLOZA DLADLA

I am making my way to my boss's office, I'm nervous because one is never called to their superior's office for nothing, I just hope I didn't do anything wrong without realizing. I take a deep breath outside his office before knocking, he gives me permission to get in. I turn the

door handle and walk inside, he's sitting behind his desk wearing their political parties T-shirt. Fridays we are all casual, it's a tradition I found when I started working here.

"You called for me sir," I say, scared as hell.

This is like coming to the principals office, it's never good news.

"Yes, Miss Dladla. Please, have a seat," he points me to the leather chair facing him. I pull it out and settle down without wasting any time. He looks through the files on his desk and pulls one then hands it to me.

"Did you work on that?" He asks and I page through the document. I don't recognize the report even though it's my name on the paper.

"Uhm, I don't remember typing this sir," I say and he narrows his eyes like I just gave him the wrong answer.

"But it's your name on the document, correct?" He leans in, placing both elbows on the desk.

"Yes, yes sir," he nods slowly.

"So, what do you mean you don't remember typing this?" He asks and I clear my throat. He is very intimidating.

"I swear, I didn't put this together, I remember the report I worked on. Luckily I still have it saved on my profile, I can quickly run back to my work station and email it to you," he nods.

"No need to run, come log on your profile on my computer. We need to get to the bottom of this, a mistake was made and a big one. My head is on the chopping block because I gave you permission to do your work unsupervised as I trusted your capabilities," I am scared out of my mind, I'm at the verge of tears.

I push the chair back and get up to go sit on his chair and log in.

"Oh my God!" I exclaim as I see the document he just asked me about on the system. "I, uhm I honestly don't remember working on this," I say with a shaking voice. This is not happening.

"You work in supply chain Miss Dladla, do you understand what a mistake like this means?" My career just ended before it even started.

"I understand sir, my sincerest apologies,"

He heaves a sigh, "You claim you didn't work on this document so how do you explain this?" I honestly don't know.

I can't even say someone hacked into my work profile, how would the person know my password?

"Some of your colleagues complained about you being absent minded and handing over your work late," I close my eyes, this whole Dedani situation has been stressful.

"I have been dealing with personal issues, I promise it's all over now," nothing is over.

My boyfriend still won't answer my phone calls and the last time I saw him here he was so cold towards me.

"I would let this slide but there are too many senior eyes on this," he says and my heart drops into my stomach. I'm getting fired. He takes a paper and pen then hands them to me, "This is your first written warning. Two more and you'll be relieved off your duties in this municipality. Please sign it," he says and I bite my lower lip. A written warning is bad but at least I'm not getting fired, I quickly sign and hand it back to him.

"You need to be focused at work Miss Dladla. There are mistakes the integrity of this municipality cannot afford you to make," he says and I nod my understanding.

"You asked to leave early for a doctors appointment?" He asks.

"Yes, my gynaecologist asked to see me today," I explain.

"You can leave, just don't forget to bring a medical certificate on Monday and a clear head,"

"Thank you,"

I can't keep my tears in any longer, I run to the bathroom then lock myself in the cubicle and cry silently. I'm crying because I messed up at work, crying because I might have lost Dedani for good. I'm in this bloody mess because I chose to listen to Londeka, I didn't believe in my boyfriend. He has been trying to talk to me, to get me to trust him and believe that he would never hurt me. I haven't confronted Londeka about why she lied to me. A part of me already knows why, she doesn't want me with Dedani so she will do and say anything to get us fighting. I thought she was my best friend and she loves me and cares about my happiness. I never forced her to like Dedani but I expected her to respect the fact that I love him. I wipe my tears and walk out of the cubicle to fix my make up, it's ruined but at least I have time to head home and take a shower before I go see the doctor.

"Ndondo, is everything okay?" The colleague that once asked me to join them for drinks asks. She's the only one who isn't disgusted by me; I'm still not sure what I've done to the people who work in this office for them to hate me.

"It's nothing, I'm missing a document on the database so he was asking me to bring it on Monday," I lie through my teeth.

I can't tell her that I have a written warning, they would play on my head for me to get the other two and be fired.

"Okay. So, you're not joining us for drinks again today?" She asks and I chuckle. She asks every Friday without fail and I always give an excuse.

"I have a doctor's appointment, I'm actually leaving right now," she shrugs her shoulders.

"Hai, okay girl," she walks away and I pack my belongings then text Dedani to inform him that I'm going home to change then head to the doctor.

I am at my gynaecologists office, I decided to test for STI's on Tuesday because the pain and discomfort were getting too much. I don't want to touch on the smelly discharge I now have, it has gotten to a point where I change my underwear twice at work and change my pantyliner after every hour. I don't want my colleagues to gossip behind my back. My doctor agreed that it might be an STI when she examined my vagina and the discharge and she took my samples and sent them to the lab for testing. The results are back and I'm nervous out of mind, Dedani will think I'm sleeping around and that's how I got it and gave it to him. Even though he's he one who has been sleeping with Hlubi and I, but I guess Hlubi is the one getting all the sex now because he hasn't touched me in weeks.

"Ndondo, the results are back and everything is clear, you don't have any STI's," she says and relief floods through me.

"Then how do we explain the smelly discharge and the pain I feel?" I ask.

"The tests didn't pick up anything but we are going to start you on a course of antibiotics and after seven days you'll come back and tell me how you've been feeling. I'll also include vaginal creams," she says and I nod.

"Okay doctor, thank you,"

"Are you on birth control?" She asks and I nod vigorously.

"Yes, I'm on the injection,"

"Please don't have unprotected sex, you'll risk getting pregnant. Antibiotics flush out everything," I don't have to worry about that, I haven't been getting any action.

I am in my car, taking a picture of the test results to send Dedani, he needs to know that I am clean. I'm sure he has been worried, thinking he has what I have. Before I could start the engine and drive out my phone chimes and it's Dedani, he's asking me what the doctor said. I text him back what the doctor said and almost immediately he responds telling me to get well soon. I smile because this is a step in the right direction, I mean he hasn't been responding to any of my messages. This just gave me some hope.

NOBANTU DLADLA

"I told you not to come see me ma," Qophelo says, completely annoyed.

I heave a sigh, "I know but I had to see you and ask you something. It might help me understand you better," I say and he frowns then settles down on the bench next to me. I asked to sit with him in the garden because of what we are going to discuss. We need all the privacy we can get, the walls inside have ears.

"Ask so you can get going," my son carries so much anger and pain.

I take a deep breath, "Your drug use, did it start after? Uhm, you know?" I ask and he laughs. I didn't want to reopen old wounds for him but in order to help him accordingly I need to know the truth.

"Say it mama," he orders, folding his arms.

"Qophelo," I close my eyes pained.

This is something I never wanted to talk about in my life but I'm afraid that it might be the reason why my son is this way.

"Don't Qophelo me. I did what I did to protect you mama and you have never asked me how it made me feel. You just cleaned up the mess and left me to deal with the guilt all on my own," he says with so much anger, tears glistening in his eyes.

"I didn't want to bring it up because I was afraid that you'll never get over it," he laughs.

"Well, not talking about it messed me up. I needed my mother to see that I was drowning, I needed you but you ignored me. I started smoking weed and drinking alcohol when I was 15 years old because they helped me forget. They helped me sleep throughout the night without having nightmares. But one day they stopped working and the nightmares came so I had to move to heavy drugs," he says and I place a hand over my mouth.

"I am so sorry my baby. These past couple of days have been so hard on me, I've been thinking about how we ended up here. If Nandi didn't take her time helping me then you wouldn't have done it," I try to hold him but he shakes his head, he hates me.

"Don't blame aunt Nandi mama. She begged you to leave that bastard for the longest time but you kept hoping that he will change; that he will treat us right," he says and I'm shaking my head in disagreement.

"Then why didn't she act fast when I really needed help? I ask, crying. The memories of my past life are painful.

"Because each time you went asking for help you'd only end up going back. How was she supposed to believe that it was real that time?"
Why is Qophelo taking her side?

"She failed to help Qophelo. If she came for us then you wouldn't have killed your own father trying to save me," I finally say it and it leaves a bitter taste in my mouth.

My son is a murderer because of my sister, because she didn't act at the time I needed her the most. She thought going away with her husband and spoiling Mawande was more important than saving her own sister and her twins. It shouldn't have mattered how many times I went to her for help only to go back to the father of my children.

"Mama, it all happened because you failed to love yourself enough. You decided to stay with a man who hated you. My father hated you for falling pregnant with us and causing the love of his life to leave him. He hated you and us for turning his life up side down," he says and I'm blinking rapidly. How does he know about all of this?

He laughs bitterly, "You thought I didn't know? Well I do because that's what he would say every night when he got home drunk after drinking the money aunt Nandi sent you," They would be asleep when he got home or so I believed.

"He beat you black and blue while you were pregnant. He never married you because he was forced by his family to take you in. He didn't support us but he took the mother you hustled for and the one your sister gave you. He would wake us up by pouring cold water on us so he can come in and sleep with another woman in the house. Mama we would sleep in the kraal all night, we would be freezing and he didn't care a damn. You decided to stay for that, not aunt Nandi," He doesn't understand. The Saturday afternoon he killed his father was just another day of him telling me how much he hates me and my bastard children. He was telling me how we ruined his life, that he regretted allowing lust to lead him to cheating on his fiance; a fiance I never knew existed because he lied to me. I was so hurt, I started crying and hitting him. It was all too much, I couldn't stand to listen to his bullshit for another minute. He got angered by me hitting him

so he started strangling me, he was a big and strong man so I couldn't push him away.

It would've been me who died that afternoon if Qophelo didn't come home from soccer and grabbed the knife and plunged it in his neck.

"Now I understand why you're treating Mawande like shit; you're punishing her because you blame her mom for everything. I stupidly hated my cousin, whose mother tried to help us with everything. I allowed my pain to make me see her as the bad guy. The one that lived comfortably while we suffered in the hands of the man who had to love and protect us," he says.

"Nandi is to blame Qophelo. I called and asked her to come and take us because I had finally decided to leave your father, but she told me that she's going on a weekend away with her family. If she had postponed that stupid trip to come take us that Saturday morning then you wouldn't have killed your father. You wouldn't be using cocaine to forget the pain, I almost lost you when you overdosed. Her selfishness lead us here and you know what they say, sins of the father fall on the child," he gets up from the bench.

"I hope you remember these very words when the time comes ma," he walks away.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 37

NHLELOZENKOSI NGIDI

"Do I really need all these clothes my love?" Ntuthuko asks and I laugh out loud, placing the Nike sneakers down.

"Yes, oh yes you do," I say and he frowns, leaving me smiling.

"You don't appreciate the way I dress?" He asks and I blow out a heavy sigh.

"I don't have a problem with how you dress baby but you can't always be wearing sports. What will happen when we go out to romantic dinners? When we attend concerts or weddings?" He shrugs his shoulders then adjust Singa on his back.

"I've never been to any of those events and places," I nod vigorously. Then he should trust me to know what he will need to wear because I've been to many of those.

"We are going to start with date nights soon and attending different events. These clothes will come in handy, you'll see and appreciate this shopping we are doing," I say and he nods.

"I guess my Queen knows what's best for me," he says and I smile proud. He's not hard headed, that's a huge relief.

"She does baby," I say, caressing his face.

"But I don't see you buying anything for yourself and Singabakhe," I smile.

Forever thoughtful.

"I don't want to blow your account baby. You already paid for the air BnB, the patrol, our food, everything. We have to spend carefully," he's looking at me with total admiration. I don't think he was expecting me to say that.

"You're beautiful, you think like a wife but MaHlomuka trust that I can afford it," I narrow my eyes.

"Ntuthuko, I know you said you have business interests that give you an income but we can't misuse money. And before this weekend ends I want to know the kind of business you're in," I say and he swallows hard.

"We don't have to worry about money, trust me," I do trust Ntuthuko. I trust him with my life but there are things I really need to know, I'm his woman and it's only fair.

"Okay, next time we come to Durban I will be the one doing all the shopping with your money," he laughs, shaking his head.

"You're stubborn but it's okay. Next time it's you and our boy," I peck his lips and he's left blushing.

We had a few disagreements when we had to buy formal clothing, Ntuthuko is a clown. He thinks formal and semi formal clothes are for pastors, I had to go on Pinterest and show him how handsome he will look with the formal outfits I chose. I think he's only excited for the jeans and sneakers because they aren't much of a change to what he's normally wearing. Tonight in our bedroom he's giving me a fashion show because he refused to go to the fitting room.

"What's all this now?" He asks, looking at the menu. I chuckle, I knew this was going to happen but he will have to be strong. He is the one who forced us into the first restaurant we saw because Singabakhe cried hunger.

"Do you need me to order for you?" I ask and he smacks his lips.

"I don't understand why they don't sell phuthu and meat in these restaurants," haibo! Not my man, he's gonna have to get used to these menus. He will eat his pap and meat when we are at home, I will personally cook for him.

"I'll help you order," I say and he closes his menu and leans back on his chair.

"For as long as it's not creepy creatures from under the sea," he says and I laugh, this is a sea food house though. I go through the menu

and I see that they have creamy shrimp pasta, Singabakhe will have that. Ntuthuko will have half portion rice and chips with their hake and I'll settle for their sea food boil. Our waitress Londeka brings the drinks while we wait for our food.

"Sthandwa sami," Ntuthuko calls out for me after taking a sip of his beer.

"Yes love," he smiles.

"Thank you for coming here with me. I am having a great time with you and our boy," he says, touching Singabakhe's shoulder. Yes, he's the one sitting next to my man, busy on his tablet.

"You know I love spending time with you and watching how great you are with him," He's totally amazing and I'm glad we did this Durban trip because he has been a little down since he had to open up about what he went through as a child. My own heart is still bleeding but one of us has to be strong for the other and in this case it has to be me.

"I love you so much MaHlomuka wami," I would fight a lion for this man. I have never in my life ever felt this way; Ntuthuko treats me like I am the only woman in this world. I've always prayed for this kind of love and now that I have it I will not let it go.

"I love you babe," I blow him a kiss because he's not next to me for a real one.

Our food comes and it looks delicious, how did I not know of this place before today? My son is enjoying his food, he's even dancing with his head.

"Do you have a twin?" I ask and he shakes his head.

"No my love, why do you ask?" I swallow and wipe my lips with the serviette.

"The lady that just walked in, she looks so much like you. Tell me you can see that," he places his fork down and looks to the door. He chuckles before looking back at me.

"You love so much you've started to see me everywhere," I laugh but I'm serious.

They look so alike, you'd swear they are related.

"I'm serious Shenge," he nods.

"I hear you babe but no, I don't have siblings that I know of," he says with a serious face and I just shrug my shoulders.

"Mommy," Singa says.

"Yes baby,"

"When will you buy another baby?" He asks and I look at Ntuthuko, what a question.

I take a deep breath and walk out of the adjoining bathroom. I hope my boyfriend doesn't think I'm too forward for this because it has been a while and I honestly need some action. I appreciate that he wasn't trying to rush me into anything but it's enough now, I could do with some dick.

I remove the plastics from on top of the bed and flip my weave back then settle down on the edge of the bed. I'm waiting for Ntuthuko to walk in and find me in this sexy black lingerie I have been dying to wear for a while now.

The door opens and he walk in, this means Singa is asleep and family time is over. We had a great day out and came back here to watch a

movie with homemade popcorns and slush. Now mommy and ntwana can play without sonshine disturbing them; I'm nervous and excited at the same time. I stand up and place both my hands on my waist, dzaddy has to see his beautiful present fully. He turns after closing the door and gasps for air, his hand moving to grab his Shenge down there. Good, he's enticed.

"Are you trying to kill me with all this sexiness?" he asks with a hoarse voice and I titter.

"Not at all babe, I was hoping my sexiness would get you excited," he licks his lower lip, his eyes are full of lust. The thoughts in his head right now are the same as mine, we both need this night of passionate love making.

"You wore that for me?" He asks and I nod vigorously.

"Only for you my love. You heard Singa, he wants a sibling and I know it's still early but it's not like we cannot practice so long," I say in a low voice and watch him come closer to me looking flushed.

"You look amazing in this but I know you'd be drop dead gorgeous without anything on," my clitoris pulsates immediately and I feel fire as he pulls me to him by my waist and breathes on my neck. I have never been this horny, I'm desperate to feel him inside of me, thrusting deep.

"Shit!" He cusses under his breath.

"What love?" I ask, sneaking my hands under his T-shirt and feeling him up.

"I didn't think we would do anything , I don't have condoms on me," he says and I close my eyes, "But I can quickly drive to the garage to buy them," he adds quickly.

I shake my head, "I'm too hot and bothered to wait for you Ntuthuko, I need you badly,"

"I've always put on a raincoat with my previous sexual partners, I'm clean and I promise I'll pull out," he says and I swallow, desire taking over me.

"No, don't pull out. We will get morning after pills tomorrow morning," he attacks me with a kiss, his hands exploring my body. He's squeezing my ass and brushing my thighs, igniting a fire that's not been burning for the longest time.

"Oh baby, please make love to me," I have never been so desperate to have a man inside of me. He manages to unhook my bra without breaking the kiss then cups my left breast before fondling them. I pull down his sweatpants and boxer briefs then grab his hard erection, he mounds in my mouth and I'm turned on even more. He breaks the sloppy kiss and quickly removes his pants and briefs completely and the t-shirt is next. He looks tempting in his birthday suit, I appreciate his length and the veins popping on it. My own personal Shenge, one that will give me pleasure and get me screaming his name.

"Let me take this off you," he says, kneeling in front of me and helping me out of my high heels then the underwear along with the garters and stockings. I'm left naked, my nipples hard and erect pointing at him as he stands straight. He pulls me to him and kisses me again as he leads me to the bed. He lays me down and I open my legs for him, his hard penis is at my wet entrance. I arch my back to try and lead it inside but he inserts a finger instead and hisses before taking my nipple in his mouth. Ntuthuko is killing me, I need him inside right this minute.

"Baby, please. I need it inside," I say and he takes out his finger and directs his dick inside of me slowly, I'm releasing a pleased moan as he groans in my ear. I am lost in ecstasy when he starts thrusting in and out of me, hitting all the right corners. He did say he will surprise

me and boy he is, not only is he a great kisser, he is great in bed too. Ntuthuko is working my body like he knew it's corners before tonight, our connection is out of this world.

"MaHlomuka, why is it this nice? What are you doing to it baby?" He is whispering in my ear. Ntuthuko is everything, I love me a man that talks to me during love making.

"It's all yours sthandwa sami," he picks up the pace after separating my butt cheeks, nothing comes close to the pleasure he's making me feel right now.

"Not too loud baby," he reminds me. I wish Singa wasn't in the next room, I cannot be silent when he's too good.

"Shenge, right there baby," I say, digging my nails in his flesh.

"I'm gonna cum MaHlomuka, it's too nice. Shenge cannot hold himself anymore," I don't think we are going to get any sleep tonight, this man is rocking my world.

"Cum baby cum," I say, opening my legs wider. He grabs my hips and his groan deepens, he's biting my neck but it's not painful, in fact it's making this extra delicious.

"Ahhhh, mmhh, yes baby," with that he stops moving completely and I know he's undone.

"The next one is all about you, I'm sorry,"

He says.

"I enjoyed this, all I need to do is cum too," he kisses my lips slowly and passionately for a few minutes before getting off me and heading to the bathroom to get a wet towel to wipe me.

"The reality is way better than my imagination," he says, laying next to me then pulling me to him. Cuddles after sex, I have myself the complete package.

"Oh, so you've imagined what my puna will feel like when you're inside it?" I ask and he laughs then kisses my forehead.

"I have and I know you have too, otherwise you wouldn't have prepared this much. Sexy underwear and all," I hide in his chest.

"Are you trying to indirectly remind me of the fact that I am the one who initiated our first time?"

He clears his throat, "I'm glad you did sthandwa sami. I've been scared to make a move and look like that's what I'm after," Oh my baby, we are adults and sex is part of relationships.

"I really enjoyed it, Ntuthuko,"

"I'm glad to hear that my love because I'm well satisfied. You know what, let me finish my job as a man so we can be on the same high," he says, laying me on my back then he goes down and opens my legs wide. I gasp when he licks my folds and adjusts my legs. Believe it or not but Ntuthuko will be the first man to ever go down on me, let me brace myself.

I am woken up by a ringing phone, I stretch my hand and reach for it on the pedestal and look at the screen. I roll my eyes, what does Daluxolo want? He hasn't called his son in while and now he's waking me up from a much needed sleep. I need to put this bastard in his place, he can't show up and disappear on my child like this. He needs to decide if he wants to be in Singabakhe's life or not. I sit up straight and answer.

"Daluxolo,"

"Nhlelo, must you always take your time before answering my calls?"
He asks and I heave a sigh.

"Because I'm always holding my phone waiting for you to call me right?" I snap at him and he chuckles.

"I'm not calling you, I'm calling my son,"

Wonders shall never end, "Oh, you have a son?"

"What is that supposed to mean?"

This is not how I wanted to wake up this morning, I had an amazing night. Daluxolo is the devil's agent but I will not allow him to bore me this early morning.

"A son you call to check up on when it suits you?"

He heaves a sigh, "You know I work. I'm always busy running my businesses Nhlelo, why do you make it sound like I'm a bad father?"
No, I don't need to be dealing with this arrogant and self centered man today. He will not ruin my mood and the beautiful weekend I'm having with my people.

"Singabakhe is sleeping, he will call you when he is awake," I say.

"When are you coming back to Cape Town? Being far away from my child is not working," I am thrown into a fit of laughter.

"Haibo! It was no different in Cape Town bhuti, you didn't spend time with your son. You picked him up only to dump him with your sisters,"

He takes a deep breath, "I didn't call to fight with you," The door opens and my boyfriend walks in holding a tray of food.

"It's early in the morning, I haven't brushed my teeth. I will call you when Singabakhe is awake Daluxolo," I hang up and put the phone back on the pedestal.

"MaHlomuka, good morning," Ntuthuko says, bending down to kiss me.

"Hey babe, is that for me?" He nods with a smile. He's romantic, breakfast in bed after a night of passion.

"Yes, I want you to eat and gain your strength back. I believe I wore you out last night," he says with a lopsided smile and I giggle.

"You really did, in the most delicious way," he's smiling, proud to hear me say this. He should be, he can handle his business in every department as a man.

He places the tray on my lap and sits on the edge of the bed.

"We aim to please sthandwa sami," World, Nhlelozenkosi Ngidi is a gone girl.

"Thank you so much for an amazing weekend, I love you," he caresses my face.

"No, thank you MaHlomuka," he scratches his forehead, "Was that Singabakhe's father on the phone?" He asks and I nod after taking a sip of my coffee.

"Yes babe, that guy just pisses me off. He comes and goes into my son's life as he pleases, I cannot watch him constantly hurting my child," I say and he nods his understanding.

"How do you want to handle that?"

"I don't know, I will have to talk to my mom about it," he takes my hand.

"Whatever that happens just know I'll be right by your side throughout," may God protect Ntuthuko and our relationship.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 38

SPONSORED BY MBALI THEE BREADWINNER

MAWANDE DUMA

I am busy washing my clothes outside, I couldn't do my laundry this past weekend because I was with Msebe. I slept over from Saturday and only came back this morning, It had to be early because I didn't want his mother to see me. Yes, she obviously knew I was there because her son never left the rondavel and each time he went to make food he prepared two plates. I would rather she sees the signs that I'm there, not me in person. It's her home and I'm not married so I have to show respect. Our weekend was lazy, we were in bed cuddling and kissing. My poor man had to take a lot of cold showers to get his erection down; I wanted to leave so he wouldn't suffer like that but he didn't want to hear that. I really want to go all the way with Msebe but I'm scared that Nobantu will see right through me and throw me out. Besides Nobantu I'm scared to fall pregnant without realizing my dreams of becoming a lawyer and being an independent woman.

"I have had enough of your disrespect Mawande," aunt Nobantu is screaming, approaching me. I heave a sigh and stand up straight, wiping my wet hands with the clothes I haven't soaked in water.

"You sleep out like this is your house. You leave without doing your chores, who do you expect to clean the house and do our laundry on the weekend? I wanted you to spring clean my house but you were nowhere to be found," she's wagging a finger at me. This woman has a nerve, she really thinks I am her slave.

"You expect me to still clean up after you?" I ask, folding my arms across my chest. I am the one who has had enough of her nonsense.

"Is it me you're giving an attitude?" Her eyebrow is raised.

I chuckle, "I'm not giving you attitude, I'm asking you a simple question,"

She claps once, "Yes, I expect you to still clean up after us. For as long as you're living in my yard you're going to do whatever it is that I want,"

I laugh out loud, "Yoh! Aunt Nobantu you are a serious joke. I am not your slave, I'm not under your mercy anymore. I don't have to do anything for you and your toy boy, you both have hands to clean after yourselves. If you cannot then hire someone, Mzumbe has a lot of unemployed people," I say calmly and she cannot believe her ears.

I have never talked back or said anything like this to her, I just shocked myself too.

"You are under my mercy you stupid girl, I feed you. I provide a room..." I hold my hand out to shut her up.

"Don't even, this whole damn house is mine Nobantu. Everything, even those cars, the clothes you are wearing are mine. You took what my parents left me and enriched yourself," she's blinking rapidly.

"Mawande, tread carefully,"

I shake my head, "No, I'm done allowing you to treat me like shit, done! Leave me alone in peace and I'll do the same, continue living with that toy boy in my grandparents house. I will not do anything because they will deal with you themselves, they might be silent but I can assure you that soon and very soon you will pay for all you have ever done to me," tears are burning my eyes but I will not back down. I will show this evil woman that I've had enough of her and her bullshit.

"You have abused me for a long time now and I'm done, I'm done being your doormat. You told me to move out of the house and I did, told me to fend for myself and that's what I'm doing. So, please leave me alone. Keep your side of the yard and allow me to keep mine,"

"You will surely regret this,"

I smile, "You've already done your worst to me dearest aunt. Nothing you do will break me so bring it on," I say, wiping my tears with the back of my hand. I can tell that she's burning but she doesn't want to provoke me even further because I have never acted like this before.

I go back to my laundry, my heart is thudding against my chest. I don't know where I took the courage to stand against my aunt but this needed to happen. I have lived like this for years now and I'm only human, I was bound to say something at some point; God knows I've been dying in silence for far too long. I have said my peace and hopefully she will leave me alone until I make it out of this place. If she thinks this is the worst then she should sit and wait for me to get my qualification and come guns blazing to get everything, everything that belonged to my late parents.

After doing the laundry I decided to unpack everything that I bought with the money Msebe gave me and cook supper. I am no longer scared that she will smell the aroma and come kicking down my door, asking me where I got the money to buy food. I'm tired of eating buttered bread with coffee or noodles, tonight I'll eat rice and tin fish. With the next allowance Msebe gives me I need to find a second hand fridge so I can buy meat and everything that needs to stay cold. At least this month I got a two plate stove and a kettle, essential homewares.

My phone rings from on top of the bed, I place down the lid and hurry to pick it up.

The corners of my lips curl up to form a smile, calls from him get me really excited.

"Hello," I answer.

"Hey beautiful, how far are you?" He asks and I frown.

"I am at home about to cook, why what's up?" He takes a deep breath.

"Aren't you coming back home, Wande?" No, he can't tempt me like this. I cannot sleep over again tonight.

"That's not what we agreed on baby lam," he laughs and I throw myself on the bed and bring my legs up.

"Call me that again," I blush, placing a hand over my face, he's making me shy.

"Haibo Sthandwa sami,"

"That's even better, I didn't like it when you call me Msebe. Mina ngu'baby ka Mawande," he says, making my heart beat abnormally. It must be illegal to be this happy.

"If that's your way of trying to lure me into coming back then you're on the right track sthandwa sami," I joke.

"Hold on," he hangs up the phone and I frown, why would he cut our call like that? Who is so important that he had to blow me off to attend to? I won't lie, he just broke my heart. A WhatsApp video call comes through, it's him. Oh Lord, I get jealous so easily, he just wanted to see my face. I answer and his handsome face appears on my screen, he's laying on his bed too.

"That's not the face I was hoping to see," he says and I heave a sigh.

"I was sad thinking you cut our call for someone else," I sulk and he smiles.

"My big baby, I would never. No one comes before you yezwa?" I nod my head with a pout. This is the perfect way to be reassured.

"So, I'm sleeping alone tonight?" He asks, making a sad face. I roll my eyes while laughing.

"I can't be sleeping over all the time, I don't want your mother to think I'm lawless,"

"MaMokwena adores, you can never do any wrong in her eyes," I giggle, pleased to hear this but I still need to show respect.

"Trust me, I want to be sleeping next to you tonight but we need to be respectful," I say and his smile widens.

"You see this? This is exactly why I fell in love with you. God, Mawande you are so respectful, calm and so soft. Your character is everything to me babe," I'm blinking rapidly, he just said...

"I love you too," he closes his eyes.

"Fuck, now I'm desperate to hold you. Can I at least come pick you up so we can go for a drive. Maybe go eat?" I nod.

I no longer care about my rice and fish plan, I want to go on a drive with my man and have a meal with him.

"Please hurry," he quickly climbs off the bed.

"I'll be there in 10 minutes," I laugh.

"I'm waiting," he ends the call and I get up from the bed and dance because of excitement, indoda will be the death of me.

DEDANI MKHIZE

"Baby, you have been leaving the house early and coming back when it's time to sleep. Dedani we don't do this, not in our marriage," Hlubi says and I heave a heavy sigh.

"Why would I want to be home? Your mother is making me uncomfortable in my own house. She brings in strangers and continuously tells me how dark I am," she closes her eyes.

"I know, I promise to talk to her," I chuckle, putting on my watch. I came home to take a shower because I was sweating like hell.

"You've been saying this but your mother still does it, she will make the same comment even now when I walk out of this room and pass her in the lounge," that woman is a thorn on my side, with her in the picture I cannot fully enjoy my marriage.

"Please stay home, have late lunch with me. I will talk to my mom after and set her straight once and for all," I close my eyes, I've already made plans to go see Ndongoloza. I've given her the cold shoulder for long now and I need to show face before she decides to just give up.

"I wish I could babe but I have a meeting to attend to, I can't cancel or postpone it," she flips her hair back.

"I don't like what is happening to us Dedani. We should be inseparable, trying to heal each other after losing our baby," my heart breaks, maybe I should cancel Ndongoloza and stay home with my wife.

"I know, that's what I wa..." The door opens and her mother walks in. I throw my hands up in defeat.

"Ma, come on. This is my matrimonial bedroom, you need to knock before you can come in," Hlubi says and I just laugh, grabbing my phone and car keys. I'm out of this house, if she doesn't tell her mom to leave then this will be how things are.

"Haibo, I need to talk to you about something very important. Plus, it's almost time for prayer," I would rather be bored by Ndondo than to deal with this woman.

"Mkhize, please come back early," Nomahlubi says after me.

I get to Ndongoloza's apartment and the guard that keeps me updated about her movements is very happy to see me. I haven't been here in a long while but we've been talking on the phone. I wanted to give my token of appreciation via a bank transfer and he almost bit my head off. He wants it cash because his wife holds his bank card, he didn't want to risk her finding out about the money then want to keep it.

I kill the engine at the parking lot and my phone rings as I'm about to open the door, it's Zweli, Ndongoloza's boss.

"Cadre," I answer.

"Comrade, what's good?"

"I am fine thank you, what's happening on your side?"

He blows out a sigh, "I take it your madam hasn't called you crying," I smile. Hopefully it's what I think it is.

"No, she hasn't said anything to me," She didn't even text me when she got home, the security guard is the one who messaged me. The last text I got from her was in the morning when she got to the office.

"Well, she has been relieved off her duties after starting a fight with a colleague and breaking municipal resources. I found a clause I wasn't aware of in her contract and set the whole fight up to boot her out. I'm gonna need you to send me money to pay off some people who helped with this whole plan. And Mkhize, please make sure that she doesn't run to CCMA or any labour lawyer," he says and I smile.

Now she has nothing to fall back on, she is back at my mercy and she knows it. This is only the beginning, I'm going to break her down for having a hand in the death of my child.

"You did good, I will come drop off the money tomorrow," we cannot have any paper trail in case an investigation of any sort comes up.

"Sure comrade," I hang up the phone and drum the steering wheel with my fingers before climbing out of the car.

I use my own key to unlock the door, I'm greeted by a pair of shoes and her handbag on the floor. She must be going through the emotions of loosing her job but this is really nothing compared to what's coming to her. I am going to add salt to her wounds just now, I need her on her knees begging me. I call her name but there's no response, she's probably sleeping. I make my way to the main bedroom and she left her clothes on the rug; the adjoining bathroom door is open. She's in the bathtub covered in bubble bath, eyes closed with a bottle of champagne in her hand. Ai ziyakhala ke manje.

"Ndondoloza," I call out her name and her eyes open and when she sees it's me she adjusts her position in the tub.

"Baby, I didn't know you'll be coming by," she says. Her eyes are bloodshot red, proof that she has been crying.

"Yeah, I need to talk to you,"

She swallows hard, "I'll be right out," she says and I walk out of the bathroom. I'm going to toy with her emotions just a little bit and have her remember that I'm her messiah. I get back to the lounge and sit down then bury my head in my hands. A few minutes later I hear her footsteps in the lounge, I sit up straight and look her direction.

Ndondo is nervous out of her mind, exactly how I like her.

"Hey," she's figeting with her fingers.

"Hey, I'm not staying long," the hope in her eyes disappear.

"It's okay, I'm just happy you came. I need you more than ever Mkhize, my life is getting out of control," she says and I get on my feet.

"I'm sorry to hear that and it's unfortunate that I won't be here to help you through whatever it is,"

She's blinking rapidly, "What do you mean?" Her voice is shaking.

"I cannot get over what you did Ndondo, you leaving here because of the lies Londeka told you. I feel like if we continue with our relationship she will always tell you things and you'll believe her over me. I've tried, believe me I have tried to put it behind me but I can't. You're not ready for my love, for the kind of trust and commitment I require from a woman I want to build a home with," she's shaking her head, tears streaming down her face.

"Dedani please, don't say this. I promise I will never ever listen to Londeka, I will never talk to her about anything that happens in our relationship," she's rubbing her hands together.

"I have heard this before but when she strikes you cannot help yourself," I take a deep breath, "I'm glad you're working and you can support yourself. Your mother will also help you with this places rent. I only paid for six months, you will have to cover the rest until the lease expires," I say, wiping fake tears.

"Baby please, don't leave me, please," she says then drops on her knees, I want to punch the air in victory.

"If you cannot afford it then I suggest you move in with Londeka, she needs help paying her rent right?" She's shaking her head, crawling to where I'm standing.

"Mkhize, Khabazela, kaMavovo

kaZihlandla..." Ahhh, music to my ears.

"No, no don't do that to me. Don't use my clan names to soften me up," I'm holding out both hands.

"I promise to change Dedani, I promise that Londeka will never be an issue in our relationship again. I swear on our baby that I miscarried," I clench my jaw, she's reminding me of the baby I wanted with my wife. The one I had to sacrifice because she decided not to sleep here. I don't care about the baby she's talking about, I didn't want it.

I take a deep breath and go back to my acting, "How do I believe you?" I ask.

"My changed behavior will show you that I mean every word, please give me another chance,"

I nod, "If anything like this happens again then I'll leave without even telling you," she nods vigorously.

"Thank you baby, thank you so much," she says.

"Can I have a drink, I need the bathroom. There's a lot we have to talk about," she quickly gets on her feet and hurries to the kitchen as I make my way to the bathroom. My phone chimes as I enter and I take it out of the pocket.

Madlabantu: Your mother in law is blocking my things Mkhize, I want her permanently dealt with and some of her blood. If we don't take care of her right now then she will expose and destroy us. It's either her or us, we don't have any time to waste. Get on it fast.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 39

SPONSORED BY SANELISIWE

NTUTHUKO BUTHELEZI

I just got home from Durban, I had a meeting with the guys I supply weed. I had to gather them all and let them know that I'm leaving this business and selling it. Two of them made me an offer and I told them I'll get back to them, I don't have anything to think about; I just want them panicking so they can increase their offers to counter the next persons. I need a lot of money so I can be able to venture into legit businesses, I'm yet to talk to MaHlomuka about my plans and ask for her advise. Her input is important because I'm taking this path for her, Singabakhe and our future children.

"Baby, you're home," MaHlomuka says with a smile and I feel all the love in the world. Things between us have intensified after our passionate night in Durban. Sex has never felt that way, it was different and fulfilling in every way possible. I am in love with this girl and I want forever with her.

"Missed me?" I ask, snaking my arms around her waist.

"Very much," I peck her lips.

My big baby, I left her sleeping in our bed this morning.

"Well, I missed you too babe. Where's my boy?" I ask and she heaves a sigh with a guilty look on her face.

I raise an eyebrow, "Nhlelozenkosi, what did you do to him?"

"He was being naughty, I tried reprimanding him but you know he is stubborn so I spanked his little butt,"

She says and quickly pouts; nope, she's not charming her way out of this one. I told her to stop hitting my boy, Singabakhe listens, she just has to be gentle with him.

"Nhlelozenkosi, I told you to stop doing that," I'm genuinely mad at her. She knows I don't want to hear Singa crying, it breaks my heart.

"Haibo! Babe, we aren't raising a spoilt brat. The world doesn't need another entitled child,"

I roll my eyes and she gasps, "There are a lot of ways to make him hear you, stop hitting my son. Sizoxabana sthandwa sami,"

Claps once, "But love," I shake my head, walking away to go check on Singabakhe.

I open the door and he's sleeping peacefully on his bed; Nhlelo must have hit him hard, so hard that he dozed off from all the crying. She's not getting any sex tonight as punishment for doing this to Singa, but it's going to be hard for me too. We've been at it like rabbits, we are addicted to each other. I settle down on the edge of the bed and look at this cute little boy who has a part of my heart on lockdown. He looks so much like the love of my life when he's asleep, how did I become so lucky? I decide to remove my shoes and nap with him, he will be happy to see me next to him when he wakes up.

"Babe, Shenge," her sweet voice wakes me up from a very nice afternoon sleep.

"Mhhhh," I open my eyes but they are still heavy with sleep.

"Wake up love, you have visitors," I frown, sitting up straight. What does she mean visitors? I don't have friends, non of my business associates will show up here without calling me first.

"Who?" I ask and her eyes are already pleading with me. I blow out a heavy sigh and climb off the bed, Singabakhe is still out of it. I look at Nhlelo, I just hope she can see what hitting him has done. She quickly looks away, she's right to be ashamed. I put on my shoes and stand

up. I attempt to walk past her but she pulls me back and circles her arms around my neck.

"I love you," she just knows how to melt and win me over again. I can't stay mad at this woman for a long time, I just cannot.

"I love you too, sthandwa sami," we share a kiss and she's the first one to pull out.

"Okay, uhm. They are waiting for you," she says, looking flushed. My horny little thing.

"Who is here," I ask again and she quickly looks down. What's happening? I decide to go see who is here for myself coz Nhlelo doesn't want to mention it.

I walk in the lounge and my eyes land on my mother, she's sitting nervously on the couch. Why can't this woman leave me alone? I don't want anything to do with her and her husband, I suffered in their hands. She's not alone, she brought an old white guy and a colored girl with beautiful hair. What's going on here? How does Nomafu know white people? I fold my arms across my chest and look at her, she's shaking like leaf. I feel nothing but hatred when I look at this woman.

"Ntuthuko," her voice is shaking. I would throw her out right this minute but I don't want to behave badly in front of people I don't know; and most importantly because my boy is sleeping in the next room.

"Nomafu, what are you doing here? Didn't I tell you to leave me and mine alone?" She nods vigorously.

"You did. I would honor your wishes but I need you to know the truth son," she says and I frown. Truth? What is she talking about now? It

just never ends with this woman that gave birth to me. "Please sit down," she pleads with with me and I go take the bar stool and settle on it, facing all three of them.

"Who are these people?" I ask and she clears her throat, nervously darting between me and the white old guy.

"My name is Chadwick Galloway and this is my daughter Vivian, we came all the way from Durban," The white man says and I can tell from his suit that his pockets are very heavy.

"Mr Megalo, what can I do for you and your daughter?" I ask him straight because I can see that Nomafu is shaking, I doubt she will be able to say anything without her voice breaking.

He clears his throat, "Well, there's no easy way of saying this. My daughter was approached by a witch doctor a while ago," he says and I raise an eyebrow.

"Daddy, it's a sangoma," Vivian says and her father rolls his eyes.

"Yes, that. I'm sorry. So, that woman told my daughter that she has a sibling from her father's side and that the child needs to be found and acknowledged by me. I laughed at first because it sounded like a scam to me. You know how they create these prophecies and demand money to help you get rid of spells and bad luck," he's now as nervous as Nomafu, what the hell is happening here? They came here to tell me about their problems because? I look at his daughter next to him and she's playing with the belt of her very expensive handbag.

It's almost time for soccer, can't they just get straight to the point and leave my house?

"Okay?" I didn't mean to sound rude but they are strangers telling me about sangomas, I didn't even know white people could be read by sangomas. I honestly thought our underground gangs' channels weren't in sync.

"Vivian is the only child I've ever had. Over the years many woman came trying to pin their children on me and the DNA always proved them wrong. Viv came with that woman to my house because she's stubborn and my jaw was on the ground the entire time she was talking. That sangoma told me a story about a young woman who used to work at my father's sugar cane plantation years ago; a young woman I was fooling around with," he pauses and I yawn. This is really an interesting story but why are they here telling me about it?

"The young woman I was fooling around with is your mother," his statement has me blinking rapidly. Nomafo is sobbing.

"Mr Megalo, uthini?" I ask, licking my lower lip.

"Nthuthuco," he just botched my name, "I am your biological father," he says and I immediately get on my feet.

"Impossible!" Uyanya nje lomlungu.

"I know that's not what you were expecting to hear but it's true. Look at you skin, your hair. You look so much like Vivian, your sister. Every doubt I had coming here was erased when you walked in and I saw Viv's face," I'm shaking my head, he's lying. I look at my mother who's now crying loudly.

"Nomafo, what is this man talking about?" I ask, my hands buried deep inside my pockets. My heart is thumping against my chest, this is a dream. I'm still napping next to Singabakhe, this can't be real.

"I'm really sorry Ntuthuko, I'm sorry. Chadwick is telling the truth, he is your father," I start laughing, this is crazy.

"He's my father?" She nods, avoiding my eyes, "If that's the case then who is that?" I point at the picture of the man I know to be my father.

"He's not your father, he's no one to you," she says and my heart drops into my stomach.

"What? You gave me that picture when I started asking questions about who my father was, you said he's my father and he loved me very much," I'm trying so hard not to let my tears fall. I cannot believe this woman, why did she lie like this?

"I'm sorry Ntuthuko, I'm sorry my son. Everything was just so complicated then," I'm shaking my head.

"Does Richard Mahlangu even exist?" I manage to ask past the dry lump clogged in my throat.

"Son please," I'd be damned!

"Nomafu, is that man in the picture Richard Mahlangu?" I ask and she shakes her head.

"No, it's just a picture. I don't know who the man in the picture is. I just had to give you something so you could stop asking questions," my mother is the devil.

"Get the fuck out of my house," I say through gritted teeth and she quickly stands up.

"I am sorry, I didn't mean to lie to you. Please find it in your heart to forgive me," I narrow my eyes at her, my hands are shaking. Anger is taking over every fiber of my being.

"Daddy, I think we should also go. We will come back some other time, Ntuthuko needs to take everything in," Vivian says, getting on her feet then helps her father to stand up too.

"I am really sorry. I wouldn't have stayed away if I knew about your existence," he says and takes out a card from the pocket of his expensive blazer and holds it out to me. I don't take it, I just stare at him. Vivian takes it from him and places it on the coffee table.

"I'm really sorry, you can call anytime," they all walk out and I close my eyes, allowing my tears to finally fall. Nhlelozenkosi wraps her arms around me and I hold on to her for dear life.

"I'm sorry my love," she whispers, brushing my back in circles. I am so glad that she's here, I'd be out of control if I didn't have her by my side as I deal with shocking revelation.

NOBANTU DLADLA

"Okay, take care my darling," I say.

"Bye ma," she hangs up and I heave a sigh.

My poor baby, the witches of Mzumbe are trying to destroy me but they will not win. Ndondoloza will get her job back, Mkhize will make sure of it. I wish she could come home so I can cheer her up but she and Dedani just fixed things and they need time to rekindle their love. I had a serious conversation with my daughter, I told her never to treat that man like a nothing again. Nothing that good comes twice in a life time, if she continues being immature then Dedani will start looking around. She will live to regret ever taking him for granted, she promised to treat him like a king and put him and their relationship before anything.

Mawande walks out of her room holding a bag, she's doing as she pleases these days and I don't say anything. Last week she stood up for herself for the very first time and I was shocked. I don't want to push her buttons and have her sniffing where she's not supposed to. I will let her think she has control because I need her tamed, if her eyes open then I'm done. Everything I have worked for will be taken from me and I cannot have that.

She leaves through the back gate, she didn't even greet me and she saw me standing under this tree. She is probably going to meet with that Ngidi boy who is using her for sex. She cannot be his type at all,

that boy is educated and success and Mawande has nothing but a matric certificate and shop keeping experience.

A Bentley with Durban number plates park outside my gate and I narrow my eyes. Who could be visiting me driving such an expensive car? I just hope the witches of this village are seeing the kind of people I'm associated with. Hopefully, after they see this car they'll start bewitching themselves to get to my level and not burn my store and get my daughter fired. The front passenger door opens and a woman I cannot make out from this distance climbs out. My excitement immediately dies down when I see who it is, what the hell is she doing here? Did Sqalo know about this? I fix my dress and quickly tuck a strand of loose hair behind my ear. I should have dressed up after taking a bath, now Vivian will think she's better than me.

"Nobantu," she says, smiling from ear to ear. Why is she being fake? I know she hates me, her husband left her for me.

"Vivian, what brings you here?" I ask with a straight face. I don't have time to be smiling at her, we aren't friends.

"I'm sorry for just showing up unannounced, I was in the neighborhood and I had to drop something for Sqalo. Is he in?" She says calmly and I narrow my eyes. What is she dropping for my man? Potions to try and get him back? Well not on my watch.

"Viv?" Sqalo says from behind her, she quickly turns.

"Oh hey, just the person I came to see," she says and Sqalo stops next to her. Why isn't he standing next to me? Vivian will start thinking that he misses her or something.

"Is everything okay? The kids?" She's shaking her head with a wide smile.

"The kids are good, everything is great. I just came to give you these, it's about time you know," she says and Sqalo looks at me then back at his ex.

She takes out a brown envelope from her Luis Vuitton bag, "What's that?" Sqalo asks, opening the envelope. His eyes threaten to pop out when he sees what the papers say.

"Viv," it comes out in a whisper and I raise my eyebrow.

"It's time. It pretty straight forward. You can keep everything except the house, the kids love that place," she's serving him divorce papers? I thought Sqalo had already filed and waiting for Vivian to be served. Why does he look so sad?

"I can't take everything, what about you and the kids?" Vivian chuckles lightly.

"The kids and I will be fine, my father will make sure of it," she says and Sqalo presses his lips into a thin line.

"Viv, you know how I feel about that," she nods.

"I know and I respected your wishes of my father not helping out because you were my husband, but I'm single now and I can enjoy my father's wealth and benefits without worrying that it makes you feel less of a man," Vivian has a rich father? Sqalo never mentioned this to me.

"That's Chadwick's car, are you here with him?" He asks, looking mad. What's his problem?

"Yes, we were in the neighborhood for some family stuff," she explains vaguely.

"You don't have family in Mzumbe,"

"You don't know that, Sqalo. Can you just sign the papers, dad and I need to get home," she says and he swallows hard.

"You can go, you'll get these when I come to Durban during the week," what the hell?

"Okay then, just don't drag your feet. I want to put this behind me," Sqalo nods.

"Can I have the kids next weekend? I can book into an Airbnb and have activities planned," he won't discuss this with me first?

"They can come here," I suggest because I don't want Sqalo out of my sight for the entire weekend.

Viv gasps, "Oh no honey,"

"I won't hurt your kids," what does she take me for? I'm their stepmom, we have to establish a relationship.

"My kids won't be meeting you or any woman, unless it's serious and Sqalo has grown up. I told you that Sqalo is a philanderer, imagine if I allowed my children to visit him where he will be shacking up at that time. My poor babies would be exposed to hundreds of women," Vivian says distastefully, Sqalo doesn't even try to set her straight. That just infuriates me even more.

Her father hoots and we all turn, "Dad is impatient. I'll wait for the papers then," she turns and leaves, swaying her hips, bloody Jezebel! We watch until the car disappears. I stare at Sqalo who is starring at the papers with sadness.

"What?" He asks after looking up and finding my gaze on him.

"Why didn't you defend our relationship? Vivian thinks you're just playing with me,"

He heaves a sigh, "Nobantu, I don't have time for this," he walks away.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 40

SPONSORED BY ANONYMOUS

NHLELOZENKOSI NGIDI

"Haibo! Nhlelo, am I talking to myself?" I snap out of my train of thoughts.

"I'm sorry mama, you were saying?" She shakes her head then comes to settle on the edge of my bed.

"What's going on? Talk to your mother," maybe mama will tell me how to help my man, it's been a few days since we found out the truth and he has been besides himself. I understand because for 32 years he has been living a lie, he has been mourning and missing his father while he was still alive. I cannot begin to imagine the pain he is going through; imagine looking at a strangers picture thinking it's your father only to find out it's just a stranger whose picture you were given to shut you up.

"Ntuthuko is going through a lot mama," I say with a heavy heart.

"Is it about his mother and what happened when he was still young?" She asks and I nod.

"Yes, he's still dealing with what happened to him as a child but now there's more. He had visitors this past Saturday, a white man and his daughter. His mother lied about who his biological father is, she gave him a strangers picture and said it's his father who died before he was born. Ntuthuko's father is a rich white man from Durban, they met when she was working at their sugarcane plantation," I explain and she's shocked out of her mind.

"Nhlelozenkosi, tell me you're lying," I shake my head, I also wish this was a nightmare.

"Unfortunately not mama. He is taking this hard, I don't even know how to be there for him. What do I do?" She takes my hand with a smile on her face.

"Just be there for him, assure him that you're with him through it all. When he has calmed down you need to advise him to talk about his pain and struggles with a professional. To deal with his issues head on so he can heal, forgive and move on," I nod.

I love Ntuthuko so much and it hurts that he's hurting right now.

"At least now he knows who he is. He will give his children and his wife the right surname," maMokwena adds and I nod vigorously.

I know how important it is to him to call his father's surname, even though it's not the surname he thought was his -Mahlangu.

"His wife being me, Mrs Nhlelozenkosi Ngidi-Galloway," I say and she laughs, throwing her head back. I join in the laughter as I remember Ntuthuko calling his father Mr Megalo instead of Galloway.

"Yes wena man!" She wipes her tears, "So your children will have a white grandfather and aunt," I shake my head.

"No, the sister is mixed. She definitely has a black mom, she's a female version of Ntuthuko," mama claps once!

"Hao! The white man definitely has a thing for black woman," I shrug my shoulders with a naughty smile.

"I guess so ma,"

"Let me go take my blood pressure medication before I drop down," she says, getting up from the bed then walking out of my room. I came back to bed after Ntuthuko and Singa left for school. I'm not working today, I called in sick and I'll have to email my boss a medical certificate. I know a doctor who will give me a sick note in Port Shepstone.

It has been a slow morning, I'm so used to working that it feels weird being free on a weekday morning. I wanted to go spend time with Ntuthuko today, hence I called in sick but he asked to use my car to drive to Durban. He said he has a meeting to attend but he will be back on time to get Singabakhe from school. I was planning on pressing him to tell me what he does to earn a living this past weekend but his father and sister showed up and I had to push it back. I won't lie, it's making me uneasy, I can't help but feel like he's doing something he's not supposed to be doing. But because I love that man I'm choosing to give him the benefit of doubt. He will never do anything that will put Singa and I in harm's way.

"Koko,"

"Come in," the handle turns and the door opens, Mawande walks in looking amazing. These hair styles Msebe chooses for her are perfect.

"My gorgeous gorgeous sister in law," she blushes. Urgh! She's so cute and in love with my brother, Msebeyelanga is very lucky to have bagged Mawande.

"Hey babe, how are you?" She asks, hugging me.

"I'm okay, thanks. Unjani wena?"

"I'm fine, I'm just missing Msebe terribly," she really does, her face just went cold. I'd die if I had to be away from Ntuthuko.

"Don't worry friend, he will be back soon," she nods then settles down on the high chair. My brother went to consult on a project in Italy, they begged him to come help since he turned down their offer to work for them. He chose to stay home to start his own thing, to be close to his family and to fully give his relationship with Mawande a chance.

"I'm so used to spending time with him. It feels like I last saw him decades ago and I was with him this past Saturday," I offer her a lopsided smile and she frowns.

"So you came to give daddy some goodbye action," she looks down, Mawande is shy until she's drunk.

"You're so naughty. Your brother and I haven't had...uhm...we haven't," I gasp in shock.

"What the hell are you guys waiting for?" I ask, folding my arms.

"You're right to wait Mawande, I strongly advice you to give it up only when he has married you. It won't stop him from getting buns from international huns but at least you will have a ring and his surname," Mafube says opening the fridge and I'm shocked out of my mind. Why would he plant such things in her head?

"Why would you say that to her? You know Msebe is not that kind of guy," I speak up for my big brother.

"Do I? Do we know what he's up to in Italy right now? He's probably busy with Sauda," I am disgusted by my cousin right now.

"Stop it will you," he chuckles.

"I'm just kidding ladies. We all know Msebe is a gentleman, he doesn't have one cheating bone in his body," he's laughing but I can see that he's not joking.

"That was a disgusting joke," Mawande says, looking at him with a fulminating gaze.

"My bad. I have to finish packing," he says and I want to shout hallelujah. He has to go if he's going to say bad things about my brother to his girlfriend.

"I wasn't aware that you're leaving," I say and he nods, biting his apple.

"They need me at work," he says and I nod.

"I'll be leaving tomorrow morning. Where's rakgadi? I need to tell her," he says.

"She went to see a friend," he better be grateful for her absence because hell would have frozen if she heard him talk ill about Msebe to Mawande. My mother would burn down everything that threatens to destroy her chances of having Mawande as her daughter in law.

"Okay, I'll see her when she comes back," he leaves the kitchen and I look at Mawande. She's lost in thought, probably thinking about what Mafube said about Sauda. I decide to take my phone and video call my brother, I'm glad South Africa and Italy have the same time. He answers after a couple of rings and his voice manages to get Mawande back to the now.

"My mother's daughter," he's walking out of a building, wearing a grey blazer with a white shirt that's not buttoned all the way up.

"Bhuti, how's Italy?" I ask and he sighs.

"It's okay, I miss home. I miss my girl," he says and Mawande's face lights up.

"When was the last time you spoke to her?"

"In the morning, before my first meeting. She was still sleeping, I doubt she even heard what I was saying," he chuckles at the end of the sentence and his girlfriend is blushing. "I just left a briefing, I am going to call her when I get to the hotel," I called him because I wanted Mawande to be reassured, to know that Msebe will not do her bad. Mafube's words must not be cemented in her head.

"Well, no need. I called her to come visit and she keeps on drifting away. Her body is here with me but her mind is in Rome with you," she's giggling and my brother is smiling like a Cheshire cat. Love is such a beautiful thing, just look at these two. I hand her the phone and I swear Mawande's face is about to turn red.

"Sthandwa sami," her soft voice says.

"Muntu wami. Nkosiyami! You look gorgeous, I miss you Wande," not me smiling like a fool. I wonder if I act this way when I'm talking to Ntuthuko.

"Come home," she says and I can see she means it.

"Soon as I'm done with my job here I'll be on the first flight home,"

"I love you," it comes out in a whisper from Mawande.

"It's only you Wande, I love you more," take that Mafube. Your stupid joke won't have it's way in her head now.

"Hey, don't cry. I'll be home before you know it, I also hate being away from you my love,"

"I'm such a baby," Mawande is wiping her tears.

"You are my baby," I go to the bathroom to give them a minute free from my intrusion and when I come back they are done talking on the phone.

"Thank you for that," she says and I offer her a sweet smile.

"It's okay babe," my phone rings, "He should call you on your own phone now," I say and she laughs as I take my phone from the counter. It's Daluxolo, Jesus, not this guy.

DEDANI MKHIZE

Ndondoloza's time in my life will soon come to an end and so I am tasked to find another girl who will replace her. A girl I will keep around to do what Ndondo is currently doing in a couple of years. I already have someone in mind, not only will I enjoy breaking that fighting spirit she has in her; I will also enjoy how much Ndondoloza will be hurting by seeing me doing this life thing with her best friend. I'm choosing Londeka to have what she thought will be hers forever

as revenge for what she did to me and Hlubi. She ran away and caused me to sacrifice my child, my own flesh and blood.

"Are you ready to order sir?" A waiter asks and I roll my eyes. I didn't come here for the food, I'm on a mission here.

"Is Londeka working today?" I ask and he frowns but quickly fixes his face.

"Yes, she's here," he says and I nod with a smile.

"I would like to be served by her," I say and he offers me a tight smile before walking away. I came to this restaurant to just toy with her a little, her fire gets my dick twitching every time. Even though she made me mad by planting shit in Ndongoloza's ear. But now I don't have to worry, that stupid girl is done with the friendship, she only wants to please me.

"What do you want Dedani?" she asks with an attitude. I chuckle, shaking my head.

"You don't talk to a paying customer like that," she rolls her eyes.

"What would you like to order then?" She takes out her notebook. My hard cock wants to fuck her into submission right this minute.

"Uhm, sea food boil on the go," this is Hlubi's favorite. She will be happy with me for bringing it for her.

"Coming right up," she attempts to walk away.

"I'm not done," she stops then turns before heaving an exasperated sigh. I wonder if she lets a man be a man in the sheets, she's too much of a fire cracker.

"What else would you like?" I lick my lower lip, wondering if she has good blowjob skills, her friend is a pro at it. It's really a pity that I cannot touch her now, she belongs to isilwane sami.

"I would like to know how you are doing as a waitress," I say and she rolls her eyes.

"I don't have time for your stupid games Dedani," I nod and signal for her to leave. I just wanted to annoy her, it honestly doesn't take much to infuriate Londeka.

Plans to trap her in my cage are already in motion. Family means so much to Londeka, she worked hard in university to be able to graduate and afford her mom and siblings with the best life. That will be exactly what makes her tie herself to me, her weakness is what I'll play with to get inside.

I tipped Londeka with R500 and she didn't even try to reject it, times are tough. I laughed and rubbed it in her face that she hates me but doesn't hate my money, she was obviously annoyed but didn't even threaten to bring it back.

I went to see a friend and business partner when I left the restaurant; I didn't want to go home and deal with my mother in-law for the last time. Luckily my wife texted me about twenty minutes ago telling me her mother just left; that woman hates me so much she didn't even want to drive my cars while around. She had her nephew bring in her car about two weeks ago. She's driving back to East London, this made the planning easier. Everything has been set and Madlabantu will have what he requested from me, my mother in-law permanently dealt with and some of her blood. He said he is going to work on her blood so her spirit doesn't come looking for vengeance, that's what I love about that old man, he takes care of it all. He doesn't leave anything to chance.

I am not a bad man, I wish Hlubi's mother left before things escalated to this point. I hate that this has to happen but it was either me or her. She has been a thorn on my side for the longest time and maybe I

will have a completely amazing marriage without her in the picture. Yes, Nomahlubi will be hurt but she'll heal and we will have peace. I should even start trying to get her knocked up again, a child will get her over the death of her mom quickly.

Hlubi's car is in the drive way, I park mine next to hers and climb out with the sea food boil I bought earlier on. She's going to have to warm it up before digging in.

I find Hlubi in our adjoining bathroom, soaking herself in a bubble bath and enjoying champagne. She won't say it but I know she's glad her mother left, she wasn't allowed to drink alcohol and couldn't walk around the house naked. I am just happy to have my space and peace of mind back and this time is for good. After a million thank yous for bringing her guilty pleasure, Hlubi asks me to warm it up and put another bottle of champagne in the fridge to chill while she's still in the tub. I head to the kitchen to do as madam asked and after that I go take a quick shower. I walk out of the guest bathroom feeling fresh and my phone chimes in my hand, alerting me of an incoming message. I power my screen on and my heart relaxes as I see the thumbs up emoji, it's done. My mother in law is dead, I have to prepare to console my wife. The news will hit her hard but at least she has a very loving husband in her corner. We will get through this together.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 41

SPONSORED BY NONHLE

DEDANI MKHIZE

This old bitch is strong, who survives 7 bullets? Seven fuckin bullets to the chest! The doctors don't even know how to explain it, they call it a miracle. I am so mad right now, the hitman I hired turned out to be stupid. They should have shot her in the head just to make sure that she's really dead. I had already bought material to cement her into the grave, to make sure that she doesn't even resurrect. Now that she's not dead what am I supposed to do with it? She wasted my money.

I haven't called Madlabantu to tell him that the old cargo is still alive, he's going to be so mad and instruct me to finish the job. I have been cracking my skull since two nights ago when we received a call to come to the hospital; trying to come up with a plan of finishing the job myself. I would hire a nurse and ask her to inject my mother in-law with something lethal but this job already has two many hands. I don't want any loose ends, at least I know the hitman I hired won't say a word. They've already disappeared into thin air with my mother in law's car, yes, we were disguising this hit as a hijacking gone wrong.

I walk in the private hospital room, which I am paying for because my wife wanted the best for her mother. She's connected to so many machines, the doctors and nurses come in every half hour to check if she's okay. On the other hand Nomahlubi and Qaqamba won't leave the hospital. When one needs to go shower the other sister stays behind with their mom. It's honestly going to be difficult for me to finish this old hag off. She really needs to go, I'll give her the most dignified funeral. East London will be talking about it for years to come.

"Hey babe," I kiss Nomahlubi on the cheek.

My wife is going through the motions. She's the only reason I feel bad about this whole thing. She just lost our child and now it's going to be her mom. I promise to find her the best psychological help when everything is done.

"Hey," her voice is emotionless.

I heave a sigh, "I got you guys something to eat. Qaqamba, how are you holding up?" I ask and my sister in-law shrugs her shoulders.

"I honestly don't know bhut'Dedani. Seeing mom like this hurts so much, we cannot loose her. She's all that we have," I'm nodding my understanding.

"I'm really sorry sisi. I'm here for you as much as I'm here for your sister. Whatever you need just let me know, okay?" She nods.

"Thank you," I settle next to Nomahlubi and take her hand, she snuggles closer to me so I let go of her hand and drape my arm over her shoulders and kiss her forehead.

"I love you," I whisper and she heaves a heavy sigh.

We have been sitting in this hospital room in total silence for over an hour. I cannot be in here for another minute, I'm going to loose my mind from all the pretending. The doctors came in twice since I got here, they say she's coming along alright but they are keeping her in a coma. I wanted to explode when they said that but I will have my chance to make this right.

A loud knock on the door startles us, we all turn and find the detective working on this case standing there with his left hand buried in his pocket. He's wearing an old leather jacket and black and white vintage golf shoes.

"I'm sorry for just showing up, I came to check if your mother hasn't woken up," he says.

"As you can see detective, my mom is still breathing with the help of these machines," Nomahlubi says and the cop nods, looking at my mother in law.

"Do you have any leads?" Qaqamba asks.

The cop walks further into the room, "No, not yet. We are hoping to get some information from your mother so we know where to start looking," They are going to waste state resources, they'll never find anything. Those hitman might have messed this job up but they never leave a trace.

"My mother's car has a tracker, have you checked with them to find out where it was last seen?" Qaqamba really wants to know what's happening, her elder sister doesn't seem interested at all. She's not even listening to the conversation, her eyes are fixed on their mother who is laying comatose.

"We did, the hijackers took out the tracker on the spot," Good boys.

"Will you find the people who did this to my mother or they'll just be roaming around and waiting to do this to another person?" - Qaqamba. She's wiping her tears with the back of her hand.

"I am going to work tirelessly to find people who did this ma'am. I just need your mother to wake up and give me her statement. Something to give me direction because right now I have absolutely nothing to work with," my phone vibrates in my pocket. I take it out, it's "Mr Gedeza". That's how I saved Ndongoloza's number on my phone.

"Please excuse me, I need to take this," Hlubi nods and I quickly excuse myself. I walk towards the elevators, far from the room and their ears.

"Hey," I answer.

"Hey babe, how are you? I haven't heard from you in a while," she says and I heave a sigh.

"I'm sorry. It has been hectic, Hlubi's mother is in the hospital. She was shot seven times by hijackers. I should have told you but it has been chaotic," I explain.

"Oh, that's sad. I'm sorry," well I'm not, I'm pissed that we aren't preparing for a funeral.

"It's okay. How have you been?"

She clears her throat, "Stressed and missing you," I narrow my eyes.

What could be stressing her? She's living in a private estate, drinks and eats whatever she wants when she wants it. She wears designer and has a life many girls would kill for.

"What's up?"

"My work situation. I feel like I was unfairly dismissed, I think I should get legal advise," I close my eyes. I don't need to be dealing with this right now.

"Babe, no. I told you I'll get you another job, I just need you to be patient. Do you understand this?"

"Okay, I'll wait for you then,"

"Thank you. I need to go, I'll call you later,"

"I love you, Mkhize," she says and I roll my eyes. Must she tell me this everytime?

"Take care now," I hang up and immediately get an incoming message alert.

Madlabantu: I should have taken care of it myself, you're useless. I hope for your sake that you got me her blood.

NOBANTU DLADLA

Ever since Vivian came here my relationship with Sqalo has been rocky. He hasn't touched me or tried to bend me in four different ways at the same time. I have tried initiating sex but he denies me immediately, giving me stupid excuses. I honestly don't know what his problem is, he should be happy that Vivian took this step and they are getting divorced. He wanted this, he left her so I don't know why he is sad about it now. Unless if he's still in love with her, the thought of him leaving me to go back to her gets bile rising from my stomach. It leaves a bitter taste in my mouth. I will not survive being shamed by another man, I will not allow Sqalo to humiliate me. The witches of Mzumbe would have a good laugh at my expense; I think I'm going to be forced to visit a place I promised myself never to set foot in again about a decade ago.

A knock comes through the kitchen door, I look at Sqalo but he's busy on his phone. He better not be talking to any women online if he doesn't want me to rain terror on him. I place my glass of wine on the coffee table and get up from the couch. He hasn't even lifted his eyes to look at me, this is not good. I get to the kitchen and open the door; I gasp in shock when I see my son standing before me with his sports bag hanging from his shoulder. He is holding plastics on the other hand. Tears are glistening in his eyes, oh my poor baby. I attack him with a warm embrace, I'm so happy to see him.

"Oh, Qophelo," I sob.

"Hey ma," he's not hugging me back but I don't care, I am happy to have my son home.

"When did you get out? I wasn't told, I would have come to get you myself," I say, letting go of him.

He coughs, "I'm sorry. I asked them not to because I wanted to surprise you," well it's a great surprise.

"You look well," I caress his cheek and he smiles sweetly at me. He has always been a handsome boy.

"I feel well mama," I'm so happy to hear this. I hope he won't go back to using cocaine. I hope he has realized that it will only destroy him and our family.

"Come on in. What do you have there?" I ask, taking the plastics.

"Your favorite food from Durban," I chuckle. He is so thoughtful. I place them on the kitchen island.

"My sweet baby boy," he groans and I laugh.

"I'm a man ma," I roll my eyes.

He will always be my baby boy, nothing will ever change that.

Sqalo walks in the kitchen with a snapped eyebrow, he and my son have a starring contest for a minute. Oh shit! This is not going to go well. Qophelo will remember that he's the one who helped me throw him in jail and rehab and hate him. Sqalo on the other hand believes that my son is a spoilt brat who needs tough love.

"Good evening," Qophelo greets calmly and my heart relaxes a little.

"Qophelo, when did you get out?" He asks, leaning by the door frame.

"This morning," Sqalo is nodding slowly.

I think Qophelo has put two and two together, hopefully he doesn't give me grief over my relationship.

"Did you know about this?" He asks me and I shake my head no.

"He wanted to surprise me,"

He chuckles, "Did you run away from rehab Qophelo?" What the hell is wrong with him? My son is home, he looks better. He shouldn't be asking him stupid questions.

Qophelo takes out an envelope from his bag and hands it to me. It's a discharge letter from the center.

"You can call them if you don't believe the letter," I shake my head.

I don't want to start on the wrong foot, Qophelo needs to believe that I fully trust him.

"Hey, I wanted to check if Qophelo Dladla is still in your care," What the hell! Sqalo had no right, this is my son.

"Oh, I see. Thank you," he says and hangs up.

"Don't look at me like that MaDladla. I had to make sure," I will deal with him in the privacy of our bedroom.

"It's okay, I understand that I've fucked up before. I am hungry, should I dish up for you as well?" My son has really changed.

The old Qophelo would have blown a fuse and told Sqalo where to get off. I am so proud of him.

"Yes please, I was only going to start with dinner later," he nods.

"Let me go place this bag down. You guys can go sit and watch TV, I'll bring your food," I'm smiling with a warm heart.

My whole body is sore, it feels like I was hit by a bus and it doesn't help that I'm freezing. I open my eyes and I'm met by my dining room ceiling. I look to the side and Sqalo is sleeping next to me, he's even drooling. I realize that we are sleeping on the tiled floor, what the hell? What happened last night? I remember eating and laughing

with Qophelo and everything after that is a blur. I sit up straight and gasp in shock, where is my furniture? The room is empty. Only a cushion is left in the middle of the room.

"Sqalo! Wake up, we have been robbed," I shake him roughly and he groans in frustration.

"Wake up!" His eyes open, he's pissed but I don't care. My expensive flat TV is gone.

"Ouw!" He says after trying to sit up straight. His head must be as heavy as mine.

"What happened?" he asks as I get on my feet. He's asking me stupid questions.

"I don't know," I walk out of the lounge to check the kitchen. Everything in here is gone too, even my cutlery. They would have taken these cupboards if they weren't built-in. Who the hell did this?

"Qophelo!" I am screaming his name, running to his bedroom. I push the door open and just like the other two rooms it's empty. This is not happening, Jesus no!

"Sqalo," tears are now streaming down my face. I find him in our bedroom with his hands on his waist. They took everything, our clothes, shoes, jewelry.

"Your son is the devil!" He says and I close my eyes. I cannot even defend him, it's clear that he did this.

"We need to call the police," he says, checking his pockets and finds nothing.

"Where's your phone?" I check the pocket of my dress and nothing.

Sqalo huffs out a humourless laugh, "Son of a b..." He bites his tongue. He was about to insult me.

"Say it, insult me,"

He blows out a sigh, "You know I didn't mean it like that," I smack my lips.

"We should go question Mawande, maybe she heard or saw something and from there we drive to the police to..." I stop talking and he looks as horrified as me right now. He's the first to run out of the bedroom and I'm hot on his heels, I just pray he didn't do it. The garage is open and both my cars and Sqalo's are gone.

Oh Qophelo no.

"Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!" He's kicking the air and I'm just standing here with both my hands covering my mouth.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 42

MAWANDE DUMA

I cannot wait to go back to my room and laugh my ass off, Qophelo is really something else. I want to buy him a bottle of whatever alcohol he takes, from today onwards I'm his biggest stan. It took him a couple of hours to do what I was supposed to do a long time ago. Aunt Nobantu is devastated and this just makes me so happy, from where I'm standing her beloved son is going to be her Karma. She cannot believe what he did, it hurts her to know that the snake she fed has grown big to bite her. I must applaud my parents, I believe they are finally fighting aunt Nobantu for all she has ever done. All I can do now is sit back and enjoy the movie, I just need some popcorn and slush.

Qophelo took everything, all the furniture, their clothes and jewelry. He even stole the groceries. My aunt and her boyfriend become very

numb when they think of their cars. They both called their tracking companies but they were told that the cars were last detected headed towards Lesotho and after that they went dark. The police told them that it will be a miracle to recover the three cars because they are surely getting repainted and waiting for new Kingdom of Lesotho number plates. This has to be one of the best days of my life, call me evil but this woman has caused me so much pain.

"I told you that he's a brat! He better pray that I don't get my hands on him," my aunt's Ben ten says, pacing in the empty lounge. This place is so empty the walls are throwing back the echos of their voices.

"I know Sqalo okay," he laughs in her face.

"You are responsible for how he turned out," she gasps in shock, "No, don't be shocked by what I'm saying. How many times have I told you to be firm with him? How many times Nobantu? Now he drugged us and robbed us clean," the man is mad as hell. My aunt's lower lip is quivering, argh shame!

"I don't need to hear you saying all these things to me. Don't you think I'm blaming myself as it is?" She allows her tears to fall and I wonder if she's aware that I'm still in the room.

"I should have never moved here, I should have just..."

My aunt quickly interjects, "Oh really now? You would have what? Stayed with Vivian?" This is getting heated and I'm here for it. I fold my arms and step back.

"Yeah, maybe I should have stayed with my wife. Maybe I should have remained faithful to her and our marriage because if I had done that then my car wouldn't have been stolen by your stupid son," my aunt laughs like the devil herself.

"You piece of shit! You're saying all of this to my face? How dare you Sqalo? After everything we have been through? After we have committed..." She pauses and looks at me before swallowing her words. What did she want to say? Why did she bite her tongue, I wanted to hear it all. This will make hot Gossip for Msebe when we talk on the phone at night.

"I don't have time for this, we need to go to the bank to check if he didn't wipe our accounts clean," he says and my aunt starts blinking rapidly. I would start going to church full time if God made Qophelo think of taking it all. Sqalo will be safe because there's no way Qophelo knows his bank pin but Nobantu? She knows where the danger is, Qophelo and Ndongolozza know her pins and passwords. She must be kicking herself right now.

"Let me go ask Ngema to drive us to Port Shepstone," she says and I press my lips into a thin line to muffle my laughter. Are they going dressed like that? Aunt Nobantu is wearing an over washed denim dress with morning slippers. It's not everyday where you get Nobantu looking like this. Her toy boy is in sweatpants and a vest, he's barefoot. I suspect Qophelo took those expensive Luis Vuitton slides.

"Yeah, you do that because we are in this mess because you failed in raising your children right," he says and walks away.

My aunt's jaw is on the floor, ziyakhala and she cannot believe it.

"Stop starrng at me and get the hell out of my house," she says angrily and I quickly leave. I was only called in the house because they wanted to find out if I didn't see or hear anything last night. I didn't because I had my headsets on while watching a movie on my phone and after that I fell asleep.

I should go to the graveyard with some flowers tomorrow, I have to properly thank my parents and ask them to keep the fight against Nobantu going. Aluta continua! I have been waiting for her downfall

for the longest time and it looks like it's finally brewing. The lighting is finally done doing push ups, she will regret ever treating me bad. She will regret going back on the promise she made, the promise of raising me like her own child.

I am making myself eggs to eat with bread and juice, I was interrogated before I could have my breakfast. When I'm done eating I wash the dishes and tidy around the room while listening to radio on my phone. Radio reminds me of my late father, he preferred it to television. That's probably the only thing he and my mom didn't have in common. Those two did everything together, they were the best of friends. My father showed me how a man should treat a woman and I'm glad I waited until Msebe came along. He makes me so happy, he respects me and most importantly he supports my dreams. He's not expecting me to shrink myself for him, he wants me to be everything I've ever dreamt of.

The radio stops playing and my phone rings, I look at the screen and the corners of my mouth curl up. It's Msebe, I still get butterflies.

"Sthandwa sami," I say as soon as his handsome face appears on my screen.

"Hearing your voice and seeing your beautiful face makes my dull days," I'm melting into hot liquid right this minute. This man is mine and it still feels surreal, I want to have forever with Msebeyelanga Ngidi.

"Baby, you mean everything to me," that twinkle in his eyes win me over every time.

"I can't wait to come home to you, I miss sleeping with you in my arms," that's my favorite thing ever. I sleep throughout and wake up

late when I'm with him, he's my safe place. I feel like nothing can get to me when I'm in his arms.

"I miss you more than you can ever imagine. When do you think you'll be back?" I ask and he heaves a sigh.

"Five or six days," that just sounds like a hundred years. You'd swear I don't know how to live life with him that far away.

"I can hang in there," he smiles.

"That's my girl," he says, "There's a knock on my door, I think it's room service," he says, getting up from the couch and heading to the door. His hotel room is amazing, he gave me a virtual tour the first day he checked in. I wish I was there with him.

"Hey," a female voice says after he opens the door. He quickly looks at me and swallows hard.

"Sauda, what are you doing here?" My heart drops into my stomach at the mention of her name and Mafube's words ring in my head. This is not happening.

"I saw that you checked into this hotel on Instagram and I just had to come see you. We have a lot to talk about; I thought you would have reached out after reading my letter but nothing," Sauda says and tears are burning my eyes at this point.

Msebe heaves a sigh and looks at me, "My love, let me call you back," he says and I hang up. I place my phone down and curl myself into a ball and close my eyes, Mafube is busy talking in my head. Why didn't he tell her to leave him alone? Why is he interested in hearing anything that she has to say? What if they talk and he realizes that he still loves her and wants to try again? It would break my soul, I love Msebe with every fiber of my being.

NDONDOLOZA DLADLA

I just got off the phone with my mom, she called me from another number and told me what my twin brother did. I cannot believe Qophelo, how can he do this to ma? After everything we have ever been through as a family. We are supposed to treat that woman like a Queen; all she has ever done in her life was to benefit us, to give us a comfortable life. My mom is broken, she says Qophelo cleaned out her personal account. The business account was spared because we don't know the pin. He also cleaned out her boyfriends account, he didn't need a pin because he used his fingerprint while they were passed out to open his bank app.

I just hope that the police find him and throw him in jail for doing this horrific thing to our mom.

I have been going through a lot lately so I asked Dedani if I could come to the mall. He agreed and gave me money to spoil myself, he feels bad that he can't be here for me. I understand that he has to keep up appearances, especially now that Hlubi's mother is in hospital fighting for her life. I have to be a big girl for him and not add to his problems, he promised to get me another job and I know he will. His power and influence has no boundaries, I'm truly blessed to have a man that can make things happen.

I shopped till I dropped and picked some groceries, I wanna cook something for him when he comes to visit. I even bought myself a sexy number, I'm hoping that it will get us back to where we were in our sex life. We have never gone this long without making love, I won't lie and say it's not bothering me.

"Friend," Londeka says with the widest smile and comes to hug me, I roll my eyes.

I came to this restaurant to clear my head, I don't wanna see this girl.

"Ndongoloza, I have been trying to call but your phone takes me straight to voicemail. What's going on?" She lets go of me and settles down on the chair across me.

"A lot has been happening," I say and she exhales sharply.

"You can say that again. I just got paid but I'm already left with nothing. I paid my rent, bought a little grocery and the cheapest toiletries. The rest I had to send home, my step father was fired. I am now the sole breadwinner, my salary is too little. My mom says he is losing his mind because now he can't support his children with the first wife and my siblings," what makes her think I'm interested in hearing anything about her struggles? My face isn't friendly with her right now, can't she see?

"That's sad," she frowns.

"Are you okay?" She asks, placing her elbows on the table. I didn't want to confront her but I really need to because it's clear Londeka hates me and is jealous of my relationship with Dedani. She hates that he loves me and provides for my every need while she struggles to make ends meet. She has to leave me be, I'm not the cause of her problems.

"No, I'm not okay Londeka," she raises an eyebrow at the attitude I just gave her.

"Haibo! Did I do something to you?" Oh she wants to play dumb? She knows exactly what she did to me.

"When will you stop trying to break Dedani and I up?" I ask, leaning back on my chair.

"Excuse me?"

"You picked up your phone and called me to lie about Dedani impregnating Hlubi. Why would you do that?" I ask and she laughs.

"Why the fuck would I lie about something like that? I heard from them that they were pregnant, I was their waitress at the restaurant," she says and I roll my eyes.

"You're lying, Dedani told me that she's not pregnant and you'll see that she isn't when she doesn't give birth," she laughs and claps once.

"You're so naive Ndondo, Jesus," my eyes widen. Now she's insulting me.

"No, you're jealous of me,"

She huffs, "What is there to be jealous of?"

"Let's see, the fact that I have a mother that does everything for me. A boyfriend who loves and spoils me rotten. The fact that I got to work before you even though you feel like you deserve the success," I count and she's shocked.

"Are you serious right now?" I nod vigorously. "I am happy with my life. It might not be where I want it to be but I'm happy with being me. I don't desire anything that you have. Why would I want a man that makes you a fool? A man who married another woman while claiming he loves you? Jealous of your job? If I didn't want you to succeed then I wouldn't have helped you pass and obtain your qualification. You struggled in varsity but I helped you out, if I didn't want you to win I wouldn't have wasted my time," she says in a low voice but I'm not buying it.

"From this day onwards, I want nothing to do with you Londeka. You're fake and I don't need you," I say and she wipes her tears and nod.

"I understand, I just hope and pray that you open your eyes before it's too late," I click my tongue and watch her stand up, she walks away and stops a few feet away from my table. She looks back at me with tears glistening in her eyes and shakes her head like she pities me then proceeds to walk out of the restaurant.

To think I genuinely loved this girl. I did everything for Londeka, I helped her out financially. She had a great time in university because of me, our other friends couldn't see that she was struggling because I picked up the bill every time. I am just glad that I noticed on time that she's a snake and cut off it's head before it could bite me. From now onwards my mother and Dedani are all the friends I need, I don't need to wonder with them. They love me and have my best interests at heart.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 43

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NTUTHUKO BUTHELEZI

MaHlomuka keeps on stealing glances at me, I can tell that she wants to say something but she's afraid. I don't want her feeling like she cannot talk to me, communication is very important. I need to always know what is going on in her head and what is bothering her. I push my plate away and lean back on my chair then check if Singa is still in the kiddies section playing. We are at spur to have a meal as a family, Nhlelo asked that we come here after picking him up from school.

He keeps coming to take a bite of his food then running back to play. He is such a happy child and I'm truly blessed to be a part of his life.

"Let it out sthandwa sami," I say and she raises an eyebrow.

"Huh?" I take a deep breath.

"MaHlomuka, I can see that you want to say something so please say it baby," she wipes her mouth with the paper napkin and pushes her plate before taking a sip of her drink.

"I know that you're going through a lot right now and I'm sorry that you're feeling all this pain. You're a good man Ntuthuko, an amazing human being and I want to see you happy," she says and I lick my lower lip, I'm getting emotional. My reality sucks right now, she and Singabakhe are the only good thing happening in my life.

"Thank you babe," she reaches for my hand and clasps it. Her touch is comforting, I love her so much.

"I know the recent revelations have hurt your heart and shifted your world and it's expected that you question everything and want to hold on to what you've always known. But remember how much you desire to use your father's surname, to know who you truly are. I think it's time to reach out to your father and have a conversation, try to build a relationship with him and your sister and discuss a way forward." I look away.

I honestly don't know how I feel about this whole thing, for the longest time I believed that my father was a Ndebele man from Mpumalanga. I cried for him because I thought he was dead so I don't know how to let go of all of that and accept that I am some rich white man's son.

"I cannot tell you not to be hurt Ntuthuko but I can tell you that holding on to that pain is not doing anything for you. In fact, it takes away the opportunity for you to be completely happy. I want to be your wife baby and the kids and I deserve all of you, not half because the other half is still held back by the pain you've experienced. I'm not asking you to forget what happened but I ask that you burn it down for your own benefit, for our future family," she says and I sniff back my tears. Thank God that we are not near other diners.

"I just don't know how to let it go, Nhlelo," I admit and she brushes my knuckles with her thumb.

"I'm here to help you figure it out. The first thing is to accept what happened, believe that it's not your fault and cut ties with it. Focus on the life you can have now, a life with me, Singabakhe, our future kids and your family. The family that came looking for you,"

I blow out a sigh, "I want to be a better man for you and our children," she smiles sweetly at me.

"I love you for that," she pauses, "Would you be open to talking to a professional?" She asks and I frown.

"A professional?"

"Yes, a psychologist," I quickly shake my head. I love her and I would do anything she wants but not this one.

"No, I don't want strangers knowing my business. I would rather talk to you about it all, MaHlomuka," she's nodding.

I can see it in her eyes that she understands me and where I'm coming from.

"It's okay baby, you don't have to. I'm here for you, we will figure everything out together," I relax.

Singa comes running, he picks up his creme soda and looks at me then at his mom. He places the glass down and comes to my side and gives me a warm hug.

"I love you, ntwana," oh my heart.

I look at Nhlelo and she has tears glistening in her eyes.

"I love you too, ntwana yami," he lets go and runs back to the kiddies section.

"Help me burn it all down my love," she nods. "I will call Megalo when we get home," she bursts out laughing.

"Oh baby, it's Galloway," she says and I smack my lips.

"Same thing," she rolls her eyes and I offer her a lopsided smile.

"Pronounce it right because that's your surname," she says and I take a deep breath before taking my glass of beer and gulping it down.

"Ai MaHlomuka,"

MaHlomuka, Singabakhe and I are on our way to Durban to meet with Megalo. I called him yesterday and he was happy to hear from me, the call was awkward at the beginning. We both didn't know what to say to each other, he asked if he can come see me and I don't know why but I said I'll come to him and he told me he will expect me today. I wasn't planning on meeting up with him so soon, I thought it would happen in a couple of weeks.

I couldn't do this alone so I asked Nhlelozenkosi to accompany me, she wanted us to leave Singabakhe with her mother but I refused. The two of them are my family, Megalo and his daughter need to know this. If you want Ntuthuko you get him with two more people.

We get to Ballito and Nhlelozenkosi keeps on exclaiming. I don't blame her because the houses here are absolutely beautiful. I will buy her a house here one day, it will be a surprise. I promised myself to give my family the best life ever, something they thought they could never have. She deserves everything because she loved me when I was nothing but a mere security guard, woman these days love what you have before they love you. Nhlelozenkosi is different, she stayed when she learned that I am a broken man, damaged goods.

Maps tells me that our destination is on the right, I gasp in shock when I see the house. How rich is this man?

"How much money does your father have?" Nhlelo asks, looking at me.

I shrug my shoulders, "It looks like he has a lot of it sthandwa sami,"

"Wow, people are living out here," she says and I press the intercom at the gate.

"Galloway residence," a female voice says.

"Hello, I'm here for Mr Galloway, this is Ntuthuko," I explain.

"Oh, yes. Please drive in," the gate slides open and I drive my girlfriends car in. There's a Bentley and a Range Rover packed in the driveway, I kill the engine next to the Range and look at my woman. She takes my hand and gives me a reassuring squeeze.

"You are going to be alright," I nod, for as long as she's with me I'll be okay.

We climb out the car and head to the front door, it opens before we ring the door bell. It's Megalo, he's wearing a pair of ripped jeans with a white shiny shirt that's not buttoned all the way up, his chest hairs are showing. Why would he dress like this at his age? He looks like a rich fuck boy. I love his sneakers and watch though.

"Nthuthuco, welcome son," he says, holding out his hand.

I shake him, "Mr Galloway, you have a beautiful home,"

"Mr Galloway was my father, your grandfather. I know it's a little early to call me dad so atleast call me Chadwick," he says and I furrow my forehead. I cannot call him by his name.

"Okay," he smiles and looks at Nhlelo and Singabakhe.

"We didn't have the pleasure of getting introduced the first time we met. My name is Chadwick Galloway," they shake hands.

"It's nice to meet you, my name is Nhlelozenkosi Ngidi, this is my son Singabakhe Botha,"

Megalo talks to Singa and makes him laugh, my little man relaxes a little and let's go of his mother's hand. We walk in and the interior matches the outside, this house is beautiful and every piece of furniture, painting and sculpture screams expensive. There's a huge picture of him and Vivian above the table with other photos. I will admit that I kinda look like his daughter.

We are led to the lounge where Vivian is helping a little girl fix her hair, she sees us and quickly comes to hug me and thanks me for coming. She hugs Nhlelo and Singa before the little girl comes to ask Singa if he would like to play with them up stairs. Vivian tells me that she has three kids, two boys and a girl. Her first son is 10 years old, her daughter 7 years and the last one is Singabakhe's age. I will be introduced to them later. I cannot believe I have nephews and a niece, Singa is the only child I've been so close with.

Vivian and Nhlelo are having a conversation about being a boy mom; Vivian seems like a warm and welcoming person. Nhlelo is hitting it off with them and I'm standing awkwardly, not knowing what to say.

"What would you guys like to drink? We have champagne, wine, beer, cognac. Whatever you like," Megalo asks and I look at Nhlelo.

"Can I please have champagne daddy," Viv says and her father nods.

"I would also appreciate a glass, thank you," that's MaHlomuka.

Megalo nods again, "What about you son?" I quickly shake my head, "Oh no, I'm driving," he holds out his hand.

"Don't worry about that. I will ask my driver to take over your wheel, another one will follow behind him so he can get back here," he has drivers? Why can't he drive himself? Rich people's problems ai.

"I don't want to inconvenience anybody," MaHlomuka looks at me with soft eyes, I know she's silently asking me to agree.

"Trust me, you are not," he is persistent.

"One thing about daddy bro, he doesn't take no for an answer," I can see that he's used to getting his way. That's where we are going to have a problem, I'm used to doing things my way. Only MaHlomuka can tell me to jump and I will ask how high in a blink of an eye.

"I will have cognac on the rock," I say and he laughs. Did I maybe say something funny?

"You are your father's son," he says and walks away to go get our drinks.

"Thank you so much for reaching out, he's so happy. I'm sorry that he wasn't there when you were growing up but he will surely make up for lost time. We mean everything to him," Vivian says and I just nod, I wasn't expecting her to say that.

"You grew up with him?" I ask and she nods.

"Yes, he has always been a part of my life. He is an amazing dad, he chose me over his family and their wealth," she says, you cannot miss the adoration in her voice.

"What do you mean he chose you over his family and their wealthy?" Thank God MaHlomuka asked.

"Well, our aunts and uncles are racist. My mother and daddy met when she was working at the sugar cane plantation, just like your mother. Daddy said their thing started shortly after your mother disappeared..." Megalo walks back in pushing the drinks trolley.

"Viv, please afford daddy the opportunity to tell your brother the story himself," he says and I mentally roll my eyes. I want to hear the story now, curiosity is having it's way with me.

Migalo hands us our drinks and tells us that lunch will be served soon, I hope they didn't cook these white people's food. I don't want to find myself having a running tummy in the middle of the night.

"Baby girl, I don't want to pronounce your name wrongly. Do you have a shortened version of it?" Megalo asks and my girlfriend laughs.

"Yes, you can call me Nhlelo and my son Singa," she says and he heaves a sigh of relief.

"Thank you and I promise to practice with Viv until I can get them right," he pauses and takes a sip of his drink. His daughters phone rings and she quickly looks at it.

"Excuse me, it's work," she says, walking away. Megalo rolls his eyes.

"Work on family time, your sister never listens," my woman and I laugh.

"When duty calls, I can understand her," MaHlomuka answers.

"What do you do? Are you also a workaholic?" She shakes her head.

"Not really a workaholic. I am a marketing executive for a Cape Town based company,"

"Impressive. If you're in Cape Town then how did you and my son meet?" He keeps calling me his son and I know that's a fact but God it's so awkward on my side.

Nhlelo tells him the story of how me met and she has this beautiful smile on her face the entire time, I cannot help but fall in love with her even deeper.

"You are planning of marrying her right?" I nod vigorously.

"I'd marry her even now," she blushes next to me.

"I'm glad I get to be a part of it," he raises his glass, "To love, family and happiness," we toast and his daughter walks back in.

"Sis'Nothende says we can move to the dining room. Lunch is served," I take MaHlomuka's hand and follow them through this big beautiful house. I pull a chair for my lady and she settles down and says thank you.

"Are the children not joining us?" They both laugh.

"They'll eat in the game room. You will never get them out of there," I nod my understanding.

"When they are visiting me they spend 90% of their time in that room. It will also be Singa's obsession when he comes over," if there were points being given then he would get ten for mentioning Singabakhe. I wasn't going to bother having a relationship with him if he was going to treat Singabakhe differently just because I'm not his biological father.

"He must be having a great time because he hasn't come down to check on me and Ntuthuko," father and daughter laugh out loud.

"I'm just glad he feels at home," that's Megalo. I'm not sure if he's aware but he is winning me over.

"Me too daddy," Vivian adds.

"Let's dig in guys," the man of the house says.

I didn't plan on sleeping here but when you have a kid and they give you puppy eyes you can't help but give in. His mother was also having a great time with Vivian and Megalo, the drinks were flowing and they ended up dancing and singing along to the music that was playing. I won't say I wasn't enjoying myself, It's just that it takes me

a long time to warm up to people. We went to bed around 2 in the morning, the three of them were out of it. I had to remove her make-up and tuck her in, she's going to wake up with a heavy head. But Megalo must know a couple of hangover concoctions.

I get out of bed gently so I don't wake sleeping beauty, I need to use the bathroom. I'm not even sure where the upstairs bathroom is, we were using the one downstairs last night. I don't want to open the wrong door so I'll just head down to the one I know. I put on my jeans and vest and leave the bedroom barefoot. I get downstairs and there's soft Jazz playing in the lounge. I quickly rush to the bathroom and do my business before washing my face and using the mouth wash. I bump into Megalo as I make my way to the stairs. He's wearing a black and gold Versace gown with a mug in his hand.

"Ahh, Morning. How did you sleep?" He asks.

"Morning, well thanks yourself?" He heaves a sigh.

"Slept well. Would you like a cup of coffee?" He asks and I shake my head.

I'm not a coffee person, I just have it at MaMokwena's house in the morning when I go pick up Singabakhe to take him to school. His helper appears from one room and greets me. Megalo uses that opportunity to ask her to get me a pair of his morning slippers and find something in his closet that might fit me. He also asks her to raid Vivian's closet for Nhlelo and for Singabakhe too. His daughter must be around a lot to have clothes here. I know she doesn't stay here, she lives with her children in Hillcrest.

"You'll find us in the garden," he says to the helper and we walk towards the door leading outside. We settle on the garden loungers, I can sense that he's nervous.

He clears his throat, "Thank you for coming. I honestly thought you will not want anything to do with me," he says and I look at him, his eyes are red and they were okay a few minutes ago.

"I want to ask for your forgiveness son,"

The helper disturbs him and hands me Megalo's slippers and they fit perfectly.

"You have nothing to be sorry for, you didn't know I existed until the sangoma told Vivian," I continue the conversation after the helper goes back inside.

"That's true but I should have tried harder to find her," he says and I raise an eyebrow.

"What do you mean?"

He blows out a sigh and crosses his legs at the ankles, "I was in love with your mother. She stole my attention and my heart the very first day she entered that plantation. I have never seen such beauty and innocence in my life. It took her a while before accepting that she loves me too and we started our relationship. We had to keep it a secret because my family wouldn't have accepted any of it but I had plans for us. As soon as my father gave me my own business to manage I was going to take Nomafu and go start a life with her far away from them. We were so in love and talked about everything; but one day I came back from a meeting with my father and she was gone. I asked the other workers where she was and I was told that she packed her things and said she had a better job offer. I looked for her everywhere I thought she could be but nothing, she disappeared into thin air. My heart was broken, I didn't understand why she would do that to me, to our love. Your mother recently told me that my siblings threatened her, they told her to disappear with the bastard she was carrying; they threatened to kill you both if she ever came back or tried to find me." My jaw is on the ground, I didn't know any of this. Why didn't Nomafu tell me the truth? I wouldn't have tried to

find Chadwick had I known that our lives were being threatened by influential and rich white people.

She didn't have to make me mourn a man that didn't exist just to keep me away from the truth.

"I should have tried harder. I failed you and for that I'm very sorry," he wipes his tears with the back of his hand and I tighten my jaw to avoid allowing mine to fall.

"Don't blame yourself, maybe life had to turn out this way. You wouldn't have had your daughter and I wouldn't have met the love of my life and a little boy who makes me want to be a better man," he nods.

"I guess you're right,"

"What did Vivian mean when she said you chose her over your family and their wealth?" His eyes darken, like the memory haunts him.

"After Nomafu left she was replaced by Viv's mother. She reminded me of the one that got away, I started something with her thinking it will help me forget about your mother. She fell pregnant shortly after, I told my family and they were furious. They wanted nothing to do with the black baby, they wanted Viv's mother to leave but I couldn't allow that. She was carrying my child, my flesh and blood and I wasn't about to turn my back on them. They wanted me to choose so I turned my back on them, the business my father had given me and left with Vivian's mother. It was very hard but we made ends meet, my mother also helped without the knowledge of my father and my siblings. She was also the one who got us a place to live. Vivian's mother and I only stayed together because of Viv, there was no love.

My father died when your sister was 3 years old, I was told and they allowed me to come bury him but my siblings were disgusted by me, they still are. Everyone was shocked when the will was read and my father had left me the same amount of money and businesses as my siblings. He also wrote me a letter asking for forgiveness, I decided to

let go of the hurt and focus on raising Vivian. Her mother and I finally decided to part ways and just co-parent. She got married shortly after and had other children, we are great friends," this is all hectic. I honestly don't understand why we are hated because of the color of our skin.

"I'm sorry you had to loose your family because you wanted to raise your child," he smiles.

"I am happy I did. I don't want to call people who carry that much hate in their hearts my family. I have Vivian and her children and now you, hopefully you and your girlfriend will get married soon and give Singa siblings and more grandchildren for me. I want to spoil them rotten before I die," he says and I laugh.

"I want to marry Nhlelozenkosi and I would have asked her already but I'm using a surname that's not mine," I explain and he nods.

"I understand what you're saying. You know your father now son and I know what I have to do. I did it with Vivian. I will pay the damages to your mother's family and we will do any ritual necessary," I raise an eyebrow and laugh.

"You're white," he is thrown into a fit of laughter.

"I know but I kept making babies with Zulu woman who have many many traditions," that's very true.

"Thank you for telling me the truth," he nods.

"You deserved to know. We still have a lot to discuss but we have time,"

"Yeah, I should go check on Nhlelo," I say and stand up.

"I'll go check on how far breakfast is," he gets up too and we head back inside.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 44

MAWANDE DUMA

My life has been a perpetual night, I don't even know what to do with myself. I last spoke to Msebeyelanga the morning Sauda showed up at his hotel, his phone has been off and his WhatsApp last seen is of that time he ended our video call. My heart is bleeding because it's clear that they fixed things and now I'm a thing of the past. I am a mess, I decided to love Msebe with my heart and soul and everything has exploded in my face. I don't even know how I'm going to move past this painful phase in my life.

I got a call from maMokwena last night, she asked me to come see her this morning. I just finished taking my bath and this will be the first time I'm leaving my room in 4 days. I've been in bed crying and praying that Msebe doesn't hurt me this way, hoping that there's a good explanation for all of this.

I lock up and head to the Ngidi homestead.

My nerves are getting the better of me as I near his home, what if his mother called me to her house to tell me some bad news? Oh my God what if... What if something bad happened to Msebe? Maybe Sauda hurt him and that's the reason why he hasn't reached out to me.

I quickly wipe my tears and pick up my pace, I need to get there and hear what she has to say.

I find maMokwena sweeping the yard, she's humming a song. She's not in a bad mood so I guess nothing happened to Msebe. She probably didn't even call me here to talk about her big headed son.

She turns and notices me, a smile quickly forms on her face. She's such a lovely woman, I would have loved being her daughter in law but I guess Sauda won the man, even though it wasn't a competition.

We exchange greetings and share a warm hug before she invites me inside for coffee and home baked cookies. I ask that she sits down and allow me to make the coffee, I mean I can't have an elder make coffee while I just sit there.

"You make the best creamy coffee Wandé, My children should take notes from you," she says and I giggle.

"I will definitely teach them," I hand her the coffee and the saucer with cookies before sitting next to her on the highchair.

"How have you been?" I heave a sigh.

I don't know if I should tell her what happened a couple of days ago.

"I'm okay, how about you ma?" I lie.

I don't think it's appropriate to discuss my relationship problems with my boyfriend's mother, that's if he's still my boyfriend. I'm gonna wait on Msebe to tell me where we stand and take it from there.

"I'm worried Mawandé. I haven't spoken to your boyfriend in days now, it's unlike him. When was the last time the two of you spoke on the phone?" My heart is thumping against my chest. He hasn't been in touch with his mom too? This is scary.

"I last spoke to him four days ago ma," she narrows her eyes.

"That long? That's not like him, something happened," I'm blinking rapidly, tears blurring my vision.

"Mawandé?" She coaxes me to say something because she can see that I know something she doesn't.

"When we were talking on the phone, his ex, Sauda showed up at his hotel," I say and she gasps in shock.

"What? Why the hell would Msebe keep in touch with that girl?"
Mama is not happy about this at all.

"I don't know ma but I'm scared that they are back together and having the time of their lives in Italy," she quickly takes my hand and gives it a reassuring squeeze.

"I know how this looks but Mawande he loves you and I trust that he will never hurt you intentionally," I press my lips into a thin line, trying so hard not to cry.

"I want to believe that ma, I love your son so much but I'm scared," she gets up from the chair and hugs me.

"I will ask Nhlelo to find me the numbers of the company he's working with and then we will find out what's happening with him," she's trying to calm me down and I appreciate it but it's so damn hard to believe anything else right now.

The door opens and we break the hug to see who it is. My heart stops for a minute, he's home and he looks besides himself. Msebe has dark patches around his eyes, the pair looks haunted. What happened in Italy that has him looking like this. He heaves a sigh and walks further in then pushes the door close, he places his suitcase next to the fridge and holds out his hand for me. I take a deep breath and take it. He pulls me in for a hug and I hold on to him like my life depends on it.

"I am so sorry habibti," he says and I just break down even more. I'm still his love but why did he put me through this silent hell? Not hearing from him was killing me.

"Msebe, where have you been?" maMokwena asks, worry laced all over her voice. A mother worried about his only son, the first fruit of her womb.

He blows out a sigh, "it's such a long story. Can we go sit down so I can tell you," I let go of him and he helps wipe my tears and peck my lips. I am just so happy to see him, to have him home. The three of us make it to the lounge and sit down, we are next to each other, holding hands.

"I firstly want to apologize, I didn't mean to disappear and make you worry about me," he pauses, "I'm sure Wande told you that Sauda showed up at my hotel in Italy," he says and mama nods, I hope he won't be mad at me for talking about our business to his mom.

"She did tell me, why was she there? Who invited her?" He shrugs his shoulders.

"She said she saw on Instagram that I was there but I didn't post anything; no one but my family and the company knew about me being there," haibo!

Then how did that witch know about my man being in Italy? What was she hoping to achieve by going there?

"I hope you didn't do anything that will jeopardize what you have with Mawande," he looks at me, I can see it in his eyes that he didn't do anything but something did happen and it caused him to be incommunicado.

"I know the past few days have been hell for you baby and I'm so sorry. I promise that nothing happened between Sauda and I. I was wrong in cutting our call short but I needed to say something to her and make sure she heard me properly. I love you so much Mawande and I'd never do anything that would cause us to break-up. You're the love of my life and that's the truth," I am melting right now, this is what I needed to hear.

"But why was your phone off Msebe, what happened?" He takes a deep breath and shifts on the couch.

"I told Sauda that I wanted nothing to do with her, that I wasn't interested in trying again like she was asking me to. I explained that I have found you, someone who I feel in my heart of hearts that she's my rib. She lost her mind at that, she was acting crazy. I told her to leave and that's when she grabbed the knife on the table and slit her wrists. She was bleeding heavily, I have never seen that much blood," I gasp in shock. How crazy can one be? She wanted to end her life because of a man? I love Msebe too, with all my heart but I'd never take my life for him.

Mama claps once, "Bathong! How is she?"

I would also like to know.

"Uhm, she was hospitalized and the doctors there have her on suicide watch," this is so shocking. "The Italian police arrested me, they thought I did that to Sauda. I have been in their custody since that day, I was only released when she woke up on Sunday and told them that she did it to herself," this sounds like an American drama storyline, "I couldn't call because she messed up my phone when she was acting crazy, before she slit her wrists. I didn't bother trying to buy a new one, I just wanted to come home. I knew you would've been more worried if I told you what happened over the phone," he further explains and I attack him with a hug, maMokwena will forgive him. Imagine if she had lied and said Msebe did it to her, my man would be in deep trouble in a foreign land.

"Shhh, I'm home now sthandwa sami," I'm happy he is here and safe.

He's rubbing my back in circles when his mother asks, "What about the project you went there for?"

"They were very supportive through that horrible ordeal; their lawyers represented and advised me. They understood why I wanted

to leave Italy and we agreed that I'll work from here and communicate via emails and virtual meetings," God bless them.

"Thank God you made it home safe," -MaMokwena.

"Me too ma," Definitely me three.

"Are you hungry? Can I make you anything to eat?" He nods.

"Please my love, I couldn't eat on the plane. I just wanted to get home and explain myself, " my poor baby. I get up from the couch.

"I need to get an animal for cleansing. Tomorrow morning we are washing away the bad luck of sleeping in a foreign prison," I catch that before disappearing into the kitchen.

Sauda better pray to her God that we don't bump into each other because I'd slap her hard.

DEDANI MKHIZE

My mother in law is still hooked on machines, she just won't die. I haven't found the perfect opportunity to end this woman once and for all. My wife now practically lives here, I don't remember the last time she slept on our matrimonial bed and I miss her so much. The house and big, cold and lonely without her; that's why I need her mother dead. Hlubi will mourn and get over it so we can focus of our marriage and starting a family.

I don't know why I'm sitting through this bullshit. A couple of woman from church came to pray over her life and offer Hlubi and Qaqamba hope. They are just wasting their time, their friend will be toast soon. I wish I could just stand up and leave but that would hurt Hlubi, I'll just play along and hope that hospital management comes and tells them to leave because they are disturbing other patients.

"Whoever did this has the heavens to deal with, remember the bible says touch not my anointed. Your mother served God in spirit and in truth so I know that those hijackers will be found and justice will be served," the one in the ugly purple hat says. I am so tempted to roll my eyes.

"Amen ma," That's Nomahlubi.

They sing the last song before leaving.

"I'm hungry," Qaqamba says.

Hlubi moans, "Me too, I have such an appetite today," that's good. I've been forcing her to eat since her mother was admitted.

"We can go out to eat," I suggest.

"I don't want to leave mama babe. Can you get us sea food boil from my favorite restaurant," she says and Qaqamba laughs.

"You have a whole sea in your stomach now sis. What's with the obsession," I smile.

My sister in law is right, Hlubi eats that meal like her whole life is depended on it.

"What would you like Qaqamba?" I ask.

"Nothing hectic bhut'Dedani. You can just drive through McDonald's and get me McFeast large meal," I nod and get up from the chair.

"Okay ladies, I'll be right back with your food.

I lean down and kiss my beautiful wife on the lips.

"You're the best, thank you" I walk out of the hospital room.

I started at McDonalds and headed to the restaurant where Londeka works. I want to have a word with her, to get her on board. She will

be starting the new job at eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality next Monday. I am going to make it known that she got the job because of me and if she wants it she will have to agree to being my girl. Madlabantu told me that isilwane sami is almost done with Ndondoloza and wants another girl in the picture to undergo everything before the time comes for her to satisfy it. Atleast I get to fuck her first.

I park the car and climb out with my wallet. Londeka is wiping the tables outside, good thing there's no one out here to hear our very important conversation. I tickle her waist and she jumps, startled. I'm smiling as she turns and her whole face wrinkles. She should really learn to like me because our situationship is inevitable, she will be mine wether she likes it or not.

"Never put you hands on me again Dedani," she says, wagging a finger at her. I know I want her submissive but them her fierceness makes me so hard and excited.

"We really need to take care of that anger. When was the last you had a body shattering orgasm?" I ask, folding my arms across my chest.

"Fuck you Dedani!" I chuckle.

"You really need to check your attitude babe. You're starting a new job and getting into a new relationship," she furrows her forehead.

"How do you know that and what relationship are talking about?" I lick my lower lip.

"The job at the municipality, I made it happen for you babe," she swallows hard, shocked to hear this.

"What do you mean?" It comes out in a whisper.

"You're smart Londeka. You deserve to get a job and I made it happen for you," she's blinking rapidly.

"Why the hell would you do that?" She asks, her voice is still low. Just look at how beautiful she is when she's calm.

"Because I take care of my woman," her eyes widen.

"I'm not your woman!" The attitude is back.

"That can change babe, be mine and have everything you need and want in life. As my woman you will have the opportunity to help your family," she huffs out a humorless laugh, "Londeka don't be stubborn. Give us a chance or you'll forever be stuck, you won't get any job in South African, I will make sure of it," she gasps in shock.

"You sick twisted bastard," tears are glistening in her eyes. This is the vulnerability I wanted to see.

"I'd rather die of hunger than to have anything to do with you Dedani," she says and I laugh.

I take out my card and slip it into her back pocket, she has a beautiful ass.

"You'll call me," I say and walk inside.

I need to call cadre and ask him to let me know if she doesn't come to sign the contract and report for duty on Monday. If she doesn't show up that will mean she wants nothing to do with me and I'll be forced to persuade her to decide otherwise. My name is Dedani Mkhize, I get what I want by all means.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 45

NOBANTU DLADLA

The police cannot find Qophelo and our belongings, it's like he disappeared into thin air. Sqalo told me to hire a Private Investigator to track him down and bring him back so he can face the consequences of his actions. I totally agree with him, he has to be taught a lesson. I was so happy to have him home only for him to rob us clean. I should have known that his sudden change was fake but I didn't and I'll forever slap myself because of it.

I thanked God that all my cars are insured and so is Sqalo's, we will be able to get new cars. I had to use the money I was going to use to rebuild the supermarket to buy us a couple of clothes and household essentials.

I don't have a choice, if I did then I wouldn't have bothered coming here. My life is spiraling out of control and the last thing I will do is sit back and watch it all come crumbling down. My relationship is hanging by a thread after what Qophelo did, Sqalo is mad and he mentioned that he should have stayed with his wife. He probably said it out of anger but I cannot take chances; I have been through a lot with that man to just let him go. He won't run each time we are faced with hurdles, this is a relationship, a mature relationship at that.

I had to ask Ngema, some old fool who lives not far from us to drive me here. I wasn't about to use public transport to come to Mbumbulu. I had to pay for patrol and an extra fee on the side, day light robbery but I was desperate. I told him to drop me on this road, I will walk to where I'm going. I don't want him seeing anything and going back to gossip about me with the other low lives of Mzumbe.

He will wait for me to be done with everything and drive us back home. This place carries so much, I lived here with a man that abused me and my children everyday. I never wanted to come back here and remember how I buried him in the kraal after my son killed

him. It's all just too much for one person but I need to do what I have to do.

I get to Madlabantu's house and the smell of muti is sickening, I want to vomit but I will get a grip on myself because I truly need his help. I find him sitting outside his rondavel, pounding some herbs using a medium mortar and pestle. He looks up and offers me a creepy smile, he has always given me the chills, he is one powerful sangoma. He stands up from the reed mat and I'm disgusted by how filthy he is. Does he ever take a shower, clip his nails and brush his teeth? Some woman are brave.

"Nobantu Dladla, still as beautiful as the last time I laid my eyes on you," he says then chuckles.

"Madlabantu, how are you?" He shrugs his shoulders.

"I'm good as you can see. But you are not okay, that's why you are here," I heave out a sigh.

"I need your help," he roars with laughter.

"I thought you'd be happy and free from problems after killing your own sister and taking over everything," he says and I quickly look around to check if no one is close to have heard him.

"Don't worry, I am alone," I exhale sharply.

Why must he bring that up? It's all in the past now.

"I'm not here because of Nandi. I need your help in making sure that the man I'm with doesn't go back to his wife, that he stays with me no matter what,"

He claps once, "You and men trouble. You know that nothing comes for free right?" He says and I nod.

"I have money," like I have just cracked a joke, Madlabantu is thrown into a fit of laughter.

"Money? right," I narrow my eyes.

What is that supposed to mean? I don't appreciate his tone.

"How bad do you want to keep this man?" He asks.

"I want him to never even think of going back to Vivian, or leaving me for any other woman. I want him where I am always," I say and he nods.

"That will not be a problem. We will have to strengthen your womanhood, make it sweet so he doesn't think of anyone else but you. I have the most powerful muti to do that,"

I quickly cut in, "I want that one," he rolls his eyes.

"Don't interrupt me again or I will not help you with anything," he says and I swallow my embarrassment.

"I'm sorry," he nods.

"You won't like how the muti is inserted inside your vagina," I love Sqalo so much, I would do anything to keep him.

"Madlabantu, I will do anything. Just insert the muti and help me keep the love of my life. My pillar of strength," he smiles and the yellow on his teeth has me gagging.

"I have always wanted to have a feel of your vagina," he says and I am disgusted to say the least.

"You have to sleep with me to insert the muti?" I ask, shocked out of my mind.

"Yes, I will rub it all over my spear and enter you. After that every man you sleep with will give you the world," he says and I'm shaking my head. There's no way I'm sleeping with this filthy witch.

"There has to be another way,"

He nods, "Maybe out there. That's the only way I know and Nobantu you know that my muti works wonders," he says.

"I will ejaculate quickly, my thirst for you is too much. We both get what we want out of this. I taste your honey and give you your heart's desire in return. Walk in that rondavel and strip naked before laying down with your legs spread out wide. Or, leave my house and watch as your toy boy go back to his colored wife," he says and I gasp in shock. How the hell does he know all of this?

"I don't have the whole day," he says, in a deep voice that sends chills down my spine. I'm going to regret this but what choice do I have?

I slowly walk towards the rondavel and he starts laughing, a thunderous laughter.

"Don't scream when you get in there," he says and my heart starts thumping. What is in there that would make me scream upon walking in?

MSEBEYELANGA NGIDI

I am just glad that I'm home, far away from Sauda. I never thought she would go that far, attempting to kill herself so that I can stay with her. I won't lie, I was so fuckin scared. I thought she was going to die and that would have turned my whole world up side down. I don't know why she is doing all of this, I mean she dumped me and that's something I'm grateful for because I got to meet the love of my life. Speaking of Mawande, God I was so nervous. I thought she was going to dump me as soon as I stepped foot back in Mzumbe; I mean I cut short our conversation when my ex showed up at my hotel door. I would have lost my mind if it was the other way around, that's why I always thank God that Mawande has never really dated

anyone. The thought of another man touching her would have been enough to send me to an early grave.

Sauda has been calling me with different numbers, I have blocked every one of them but the girl is persistent. She's back in Dubai because all the numbers she's calling me from have their dialing code. I sent an sms to her original number, saying exactly what I said before she slit her wrists in my hotel room. I don't want anything to do with that girl, she must not even try to come to South Africa because I will show her a side of me she never thought existed.

I got cleansed yesterday morning, it's in our culture to perform such rituals when you've been through a situation that's deemed to bring more bad luck in the future. It wasn't a big thing, it was mom, my sister and my woman. Wande has been sleeping here ever since I came back, I enjoy sleeping next to her and I know it's going to be a problem when she has to go back home. I left her laying on the bed, busy on her phone because I was catching up on the Italian project. I'm so grateful that they understood and allowed me to work while in South Africa; one of my favorite countries was quickly turned into something unpleasant, all thanks to Sauda.

I turn off the shower tap but the sexual edge is still there, I have fuckin blue balls. I swear my dick is going to fall off if I don't get any pleasure. I promised myself that I will not rush Mawande into anything but right now I need her more than ever. I tried, Lord knows I tried the cold showers and masturbation but nothing seems to take away the desire burning through my whole body. I step out and grab a towel to dry myself before walking out of the bathroom completely naked; I'm going to try my luck and hopefully she allows me in. I stop at the door and stroke my throbbing erection at the sight of her

exposed thighs. Fuck! I wanna make love to Mawande in every way possible.

"Sthandwa sami," my voice comes out in an almost whisper. She moves her eyes from her phone to me.

"Baby," she's no longer shaken by my nakedness. We have showers together all the time and we touch, that's where she's still shy though. Touching my dick, she can touch me everywhere but that part.

"I wouldn't be asking if I wasn't about to die Wande," I say and she quickly gets off the bed with her eyes widened. Fuck, she will think I am impatient.

"Is everything okay? What do you need love?" I swallow hard, causing my Adams apple to bob. I'm so nervous.

"No, baby. Can I just put in the tip?" she narrows her eyes, confusion clear on her beautiful face. How do I say this without sounding weird or forward.

"I don't understand," she really doesn't.

I take a deep breath, "It has been so long Wande and you know as a man, but I'm sure it's the same with woman. What I'm saying is, I won't mind if you're not ready but right now baby I'm dying with need but I don't wanna..."

She quickly interjects, "Msebe, sthandwa sami. You are mumbling and making zero sense," shit.

"I wanna make love to you," my voice is hoarse. She is blinking rapidly, fiddling with the skirt of her dress.

"But I will understand if you're not ready to go all the way," I add and she shakes her head.

"Uhm, I don't think I'll ever be ready because I'm scared by all that I've heard about losing ones virginity. But I know you'll be gentle

with me," I blow out a sigh of relief and slowly make my way to her, she quickly drops her eyes. I get in front of her and cup her chin to make her look at me. Wande bites her lower lip, turning me on even more.

"You're so beautiful," she gasps for air and I lean in and capture her lips, she immediately lets out a moan in my mouth and I'm closer to losing my mind. I have been with a couple of women before but never a virgin, I feel so special right now. I place my hand on the small of her back and pull her gently towards me, my erection is poking her belly. She snakes her arms around my neck as we both allow our tongues to dance slowly together. I have never felt this way before, I have never loved a woman like this.

I use my free hand to squeeze her round ass then make my way down to her warm soft thighs before trailing my fingers back up to the mini heaven between her legs. My fingers get to the destination and her panty is soaking wet, I start rubbing her sensitive area and she throws her head back and lets out a long, sexy moan.

"Ahhhhhhh mmmhhhh, oh Msebe, oh my love," this is music to my ears.

"I love you Wande, I love you so much," I say, nibbling her ear.

"You're my whole life, Msebeyelanga. Please don't leave me," I close my eyes.

I pray everyday that she doesn't leave me. I grab the skirt of her dress and pull it over her head. Her beautiful twins are exposed, the nipples are erect and pointing straight at me. I cannot help but cup one and suck on the other, I love how responsive she is to my touch.

"Today I'm finally putting my stamp on you, and you're doing the same to me," I say my honest truth and she cups my face and moves me from her breasts and attacks me with a sloppy hungry kiss. I can tell that she's hot and bothered and wants me deep inside of her right this minute. I move her back careful not to break this kiss, then lay

her down on the bed and get on top of her. She's closing her eyes, her breathing is shallow. I grab her underwear and remove it, she's left naked and gorgeous. I stroke my hard dick while admiring her beautiful sexy body. I rub my tip at her opening and she quickly bites her lower lip and her legs shake for a second.

"Msebe, please," she's fueling me and I will make this experience memorable for her.

"I know baby," I grab a pillow and put it under her before opening the drawer and taking out a condom. I tear the packet foil with my teeth and put it on my tip.

"Roll it down carefully," I instruct her and she shakes her head quickly.

"Baby, this is your dick. This is what you'll be feasting on for the rest of your life, greet him and tell him he is welcome home," I say and she giggles shyly. My baby is so innocent, I wouldn't trade her for anything in the world.

"Wande, he's dying to be inside of you. Roll down the condom baby," I say and this time she actually does it, that's my girl. I position myself at her entrance and I'm pleased to report that her arousal is dripping down her ass.

"Ahhhhhhh" she cries out when I push her hymens apart and I stop moving.

"I'm sorry baby, it's going to be uncomfortable but I promise that pleasure will soon come," she nods.

"Okay," I take her lips into mine and push through again and her body tenses up.

"Relax baby, it won't be painful," I love how she's listening to everything I'm saying. I start thrusting slowly and I won't lie, I wish I didn't have to use this condom but I know how scared she is of falling

pregnant before marriage. We had a conversation around this a while back.

Her pussy walls are gripping my dick so tightly, I'm not going to last long.

"You feel so good Wande, I love you with all my heart. Please believe this," I'm whispering in her ear as she digs her nails in my flesh.

"I...I lo...I love you too, baby," I jerk her thighs with my arms and thrust deeper, I'm not too far. It has been long and Mawande is so tight.

The fact that she's a moaner is making me crazy, I part her butt cheeks and pump a few more times before I stiffen my whole body and groan deeply as I come undone. I collapse on top of her and try to catch my breath, she wraps her legs around my waist and starts rubbing my back sensually. Once my breathing is equal I get up and kiss her forehead before her lips.

"Thank you so much baby," she blushes.

"It wasn't as painful as I thought it would be," she says and I smile.

"I'm glad to hear that babe. Let me get a towel," I get off her then remove the condom and quickly disappear to the bathroom and come back with a warm towel. Mawande is looking at the ceiling while biting her nail when I get back in the bedroom.

"Penny for your thoughts," I say, getting on the bed and parting her legs to wipe her clean. Her good girl is pouting back at me, all shaved and neat.

"I'm thinking about what we just did," she admits and I narrow my eyes with a grin on my face.

"What about it? Talk to me," she giggles, placing both hands over her face.

"I didn't think today would end with me no longer being a virgin but I'm happy you're the one who deflowered me Msebe. You were worth the wait," oh Wande.

Her words make me feel warm inside.

I caress her face and she leans into my touch.

"You have no idea what deflowering you means to me as a man baby, thank you for waiting for me," I place the towel on the pedestal and lie down next to my girlfriend before pulling her to me, resting her head on my chest.

"Is it sore?" I ask, spanking her gently.

"Yes, it's sore love," now I wish I had a bath tub in here, I'd be running her a hot bath with salts and oils to soothe her.

"I'm sorry. I will wait for an hour or two before going again," she looks at me in the eyes.

"You want some more?" I chuckle.

"Of course I do. I'm going to spend my time buried inside of you and trust me you'll always want me to," I am confident in my skills under the sheets.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 46

NOBANTU DLADLA

I have never felt so dirty in my entire life. Not even the showers and baths I took from yesterday when I got back home to this afternoon have cleaned up the filth I feel has covered every inch of my body. I can honestly still feel Madlabantu's breath fanning my face as he humped in and out of me. It was the most uncomfortable sexual

experience I have ever had, it was not that bad with the twins' father. My skin crawls as I think of how he shoved his dirty fingers inside my vagina before his manhood filled me up. He refused using a condom, saying it will not help transfer the muti I need to keep Sqalo. That man ejaculated inside of me, leaving his dirt for me to carry. I had to stop at the pharmacy to get morning after pills because I don't want to risk falling pregnant with that evil man's child. Yes, I'm on birth control but I didn't want to leave anything to chance. Let's not even talk about sexually transmitted infections, I'm just crossing fingers that he didn't give me anything nasty.

"Nobantu, what's wrong?" I look up and find Sqalo standing at the door with his arms folded across his chest.

"Nothing," he can never find out that I slept with another man, who is a witch just to keep him around.

"Don't do that. It's very clear that you are going through something. You were crying in your sleep last night and even today in the bathroom," oh God. I hope I didn't say anything incriminating in my sleep.

"What can I say? I'm going through a lot. My own son stole from me and the man I love is blaming me for it. He called me a bad mother and told me to my face that he wishes he could have stayed with his ex," he closes his eyes as if pained.

"MaDladla, I didn't mean any of that. I was just angry and hurt and I took it out on you, I promise I didn't mean any of it," he says and my heart relaxes a little. At least he's sorry but it doesn't change how that hurt me and saw me going to the extremes just to keep him.

"I hear you," he moves from the door and comes to climb on the bed then takes me into his arms.

"You're the most important person in my life, you and my children. I'm sorry for hurting you that way. I promise that we will get through this together maDladla," those words give me hope and make me regret going to Madlabantu in the first place. Sqalo loves me and he won't leave me for anyone, not even the mother of his children. I was stupid to believe otherwise.

"I love you, baba," he lets go of me and cups my face.

"You're my everything, Nobantu. I love you more than life itself," he kisses my lips and I deepen it when thoughts of Madlabantu's stinking breath attacks. I will not allow what happened to take over me and ruin this moment. My man and I are back to where we were and that's all that matters right now.

He breaks the kiss, "I'm going to make you a sandwich. You haven't eaten since yesterday," all I wanted in my mouth yesterday was toothpaste and mouthwash.

"Thank you, baba," he kisses my forehead and climbs off the bed.

I'm so glad that we are good now, I know we won't always be happy but the recent fights made me scared. I cannot undo what I did with that devil but at least Sqalo wants to stay with me so the muti won't hurt, it will just strengthen our love against the odds.

My phone rings under the pillow, I reach for it and it's Londeka, my daughter's friend. I don't like this girl anymore, she's the reason why Ndondoloza almost dumped Dedani. My daughter doesn't need jealous friends, they will ruin every good thing in her life.

"Yes," I answer.

"Hello ma, it's Londeka," I roll my eyes.

"Can I help you?"

She heaves a sigh, "I hope so ma. I cannot just sit back and watch my friend tie herself to the devil. She might think I'm against her but I love Ndongolozwa and I don't want to see her get hurt," I narrow my eyes, what is she ranting about? My child hasn't called me crying, she's been happy because she and Dedani are in a better place after her very lies.

"What are you talking about?"

She clears her throat, "Ma, Dedani is not good for Ndongolozwa. He is just playing with her. Did you know that he got married the day of her graduation? Recently he has been trying to get me to be his girlfriend," my heart starts thumping against my chest, how dare does this little whore call me to tell all these lies?

"What's your problem Londeka? What are you hoping to archive by lying like this?"

She gasps in shock, "Mama, I'm not lying..."

I quickly interject, "You are so jealous of my precious daughter. You want to see her relationship with Dedani over so you can have him for yourself but you will not succeed little girl," I say and hang up my phone, dialing Ndongolozwa immediately. Her phone rings for the longest time and she only answers when I'm about to hang up.

"My beautiful mom," just hear how happy my child is, which woman would sound so happy if her man was married while she was in the picture.

"My baby, how are you?" I ask.

"I'm great thanks. You are lucky I answered your call. I'm about to board a plane,"

I smile, "Haibo, where are you headed?"

"Johannesburg, Dedani wants me to shop in Sandton. He says I deserve to be spoilt like the Queen that I am," I start ululating.

"And that stupid Londeka wants to break you up. Can you believe she just called me saying Mkhize got married on the day of your graduation party," I click my tongue.

My daughter doesn't respond, "Ndondo, did you hear what I just said,"

She laughs, "Wow, she just won't leave us alone. She's mad that I told her that I don't want to be friends with her anymore. Why would I be with Dedani if he was married? Londeka is so desperate, I'm disappointed in myself for ever calling her my best friend," I am a proud mother.

"Exactly! You did well baby. You don't need people like her in your life,"

"I need to go mom, the gates are open," she quickly says.

"Have fun in Johannesburg and bring me a little something too," she giggles and we say our goodbyes before Sqalo walks in with a plate of my food. Urgh! He's simply amazing.

MAWANDE DUMA

I feel different after what happened between Msebe and I, I didn't plan on it but I'm glad it happened. He tried holding off but he's a man with needs and I'm glad I could take care of those particular needs. I am more in love with him now that we have done the deed and it honestly feels like we have grown closer as a couple. The first round was uncomfortable and I felt pain, I won't even lie. Msebe didn't even last long like I had read in the novels but he sure did make up for that. I have never ever felt that intense pleasure, the pressure that built around my waist until I burst was nothing I have ever experienced before. I was shy when he parted my legs and told me to relax completely; I almost suffocated him by locking him

between my thighs when he started licking me down there. He did things with his tongue and fingers, delicious things that made me wet the sheets. I only realized what I had done when I was done screaming and squirming on the bed from the pleasure. I was so embarrassed but Msebe had this proud look on his face; immediately after that he got on top of me and finished me off. I even bled after that, I teased him and said he only broke my virginity on the second round. He didn't take it in a bad way, in fact he agreed and told me that there was no way he was going to last longer during the first round coz it had been so long. He said the warmth and tightness of my vagina had him undone before he could even think about anything.

I'm still at his place but he had to drive his mother to town to do some groceries. He wanted me to go with them but I refused, what if his mom saw that we have started having sex. You know old village people are walking x-ray machines, they are even pregnancy tests. Nothing and I mean nothing misses their eyes. My vagina is still sore, that's expected because nothing has ever been in there.

I'm hungry and I have to go to the main house to make myself something to eat, at least it's only Nhlelo. I pause the series and climb off the bed.

The house is quiet when I enter but I know Nhlelozenkosi is in her make shift office working. I take out the bread then cheese and bacon from the fridge, I'll just microwave pepper pig's body part because I don't want to stand over the stove frying. I will drink the juice that's in Msebe's fridge, he always has it stocked with goodies.

"Just the person I wanted to see," Nhlelo says, walking in.

"Hey babe," she starts laughing. What's going on now?

"I never thought you could scream like that," she says and I quickly look down embarrassed.

"Oh my God, you heard us?" She nods, with a naughty look on her face.

"Yep, I was coming to get Msebe for mama last night and heard the surprise," she says and I place a hand over my mouth.

"Msebe never left the rondavel after that, what did you tell maMokwena," I'm panicking.

"Relax babe, I said he wasn't in and then she said I should text him the message she wanted to give him. Nothing much, just going to Port Shepstone today," relief floods through me.

"Thank you,"

"Now, you need to tell me everything, Wande," she says, pulling out a chair. I stop making my food and start telling her how it all happened, I'm not even shy sharing with her.

"You made my brother a two minute noodle," she's laughing.

"Oh come on Nhlelo," she stops and rubs my arm.

"Relax babe, it's normal. The first round is always theirs anyway. In your mans case it's understandable because he was experiencing drought, he should've jerked off before starting the round so he could go on longer," I raise an eyebrow.

"How do you know these things," she rolls her eyes.

"Ntuthuko is not my first boyfriend, but don't tell him I said that," we both laugh.

He's jealous over his girlfriend, he would freak out just thinking of Nhlelo with her past partners.

"You lucky bitch!" She holds out her hand for a high five, okay!

"You received head and had an orgasm on your first day of doing the deed. I had to wait for Ntuthuko to be muffed and Lord knows before him I had no more than five orgasms and two I gave myself," she's so dramatic, I can't help but laugh.

"Do you remember your first time?" she rolls her eyes inwardly and throws her head back groaning.

"I wish I didn't do it that day, we were both drunk and Daluxolo didn't show me any mercy. I bled the whole week. At least I was in Cape Town or else maMokwena would have noticed that I gave it up. Not that it helped because I fell pregnant at school and she eventually knew that her sweet daughter was bending over for a Xhosa guy," I don't regret it at all.

"Did he keep the bloody sheets like your brother," she shakes her head. Msebe folded the sheets and said he's keeping them as a souvenir, I found that very weird. I mean this is not the fifty's, proof of virginity doesn't matter anymore.

"My brother can't believe that he finally popped the cherry, let him keep it for remembrance," these siblings are insane, "Your brother is also weird. He won't wash the T-shirt he was wearing when I first hugged him to thank him for bringing Singa back home safe," I guess all man are weird.

"Fair enough, my blood equals your scent," she nods before we both laugh out loud.

"On a serious note now babe," that was quick.

"Yes?"

"You have dreams and ambitions Mawande and as much as my brother loves you please use protection or get on birth control fast. Yes, children are a blessing and Msebe would be thrilled to be a dad, to share a baby with you. But, you're not ready. You are starting

school next year and a baby will just derail your plans," she says and I nod vigorously.

"We have already spoken about it with your brother, friend. We used a condom yesterday and he promised to bring me pills from town, we are doubling up," she blows out a sigh of relief.

"Thank you. I want you to find yourself first, enjoy life outside Mzumbe before becoming a mom," I appreciate her friendship. She's not allowing the fact that she's my boyfriend sister to not advise me properly.

"I appreciate this talk, Nhlelo,"

"Always sis," she hugs me.

NTUTHUKO BUTHELEZI

"What changes would you like to be made in your bedroom?" My father asks and I frown.

"My bedroom?" He takes a sip of his drink.

"Yes, your bedroom here. This is your home and you should have your personal space the way you want it," I haven't thought about that.

Anyway, the room is okay. I don't see anything wrong with it.

"I will just add a picture of Singabakhe and his mother," he chuckles lightly.

"You are whipped son. I've never seen anything like this," he says and I smile.

"She's different from any woman I've come cross. She's beautiful, educated, supportive and loves genuinely. Nhlelo can have any man

she wants and yet she chose me, a nobody," he's shaking his head in disagreement.

"You are a somebody, you're a Galloway. Don't you ever think any less of yourself, do you understand me?" He says and I'm nodding vigorously. Tears burning my eyes, it feels so good to hear him say this.

"We have found each other son. Gone are those days where you have to wonder and question yourself and your life," that's very true.

"So, we are really changing my surname," It still feels so surreal. I came here because we had to discuss it fully before he approaches my mother's family.

"Yes we are, as soon as possible. I have a humble request," he says and I nod, "If it's not too much to ask, I would love to give you a name, I'm not asking you to change the one you're using. I jus..."

I quickly interject, "It's okay baba, you can give me a name," his lower lip is quivering as he clasps my hand.

"You don't know what that means to me. Thank you so much son," I squeeze his hand.

Our relationship is not hard at all, he didn't know about me and because of that I couldn't harden my heart and give him a tough time. He wants me in his life and that's all that matters really. We have been talking on the phone everyday and he asked me to visit him so it could be the two of us. To talk about important things and to just get to know each other better. MaHlomuka is thrilled for me, she's cheering this on. I wanted to come on Saturday because of Singa but she said a plan will be made. I am missing them already, this will be the first time I'm away for such a long time ever since they got into my life. But we will video call every night to catch up before we sleep. I'll be going back to Mzumbe on Sunday.

"Tell me, baba. Why didn't you ever get married?" I ask and he blows out a sigh.

"I figured love wasn't for me. I loved your mother and she disappeared, breaking my heart in the process. I didn't want to feel that pain again, the pain that love brings; so I settled for casual relationships. It sucks that I kept love out now that I know the truth," he explains and I genuinely understand him. I've been thinking about everything as well, even Nomafu. I guess the truth changes one's perspective on life.

"Now that you know the truth, will you let love find you?" He laughs, shaking his head no.

"I don't think so. I acquired a taste for younger woman along the years and I don't think any of them are marriage material, plus, I'm approaching my grave," I smile because it finally makes sense.

"Now I understand why you dress like a young rich spoilt brat," I say and he's dead with laughter.

"You and your sister want me to wear oversized jeans with what? Old people's painful legs slippers and checked shirts?" Oh so Vivian has also complained. His phone chimes before I can say anything. He smiles and looks at me.

"Come, I have something to show you," he gets up excitedly and I follow behind wondering what it is. We get outside and he takes something from the driver that picked me up from Mzumbe to bring me here in Ballito.

"It's just something small, to get you from point A to B," he says, handing me car keys. I cannot believe this, I look forward and only then do I realize a beautiful black BMW X6 in front of me.

"No, Megalo. You didn't," I say, my eyes threatening to pop out.

"I did. Please enjoy it and use it to drive up here frequently to see your old man," he says and tears are streaming down my face, no one has ever done something like this for me.

"I don't know what to say, thank you," he drapes an arm over my shoulder and pulls me to him.

"Your father is here now, life is definitely going to change,"

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 47

LONDEKA ZULU

I am working at the restaurant and it's a little slow because it's a Monday afternoon, things will only start to pick up in the evening. I'm just glad my boss managed to withdraw my resignation and allowed me to continue working here. I decided that I wasn't going to accept the job offer because Dedani obviously controls it; it was the hardest decision ever but I had to do it. Taking the job was going to tie me to Dedani forever, I was going to turn into his puppet just like Ndondoloza. I would rather work here and earn peanuts than to earn a lot and be under his thumb. I worked hard in university to bag my qualification and I know God will give me what is mine soon, after all his timing is always the best.

The people I was serving just left and now I'm cleaning the table they were occupying. I think I'm going to take my lunch break now since it's still slow around here. I take the dirty plates and head to the kitchen to drop them. I ask my manager if it's okay to take my break and she allows me to go eat. I take my lunchbox from my bag and head to the back where we normally have our lunch. I take an empty

crate and settle down before opening my lunchbox and taking my buttered bread with polony.

I decide to scroll through my Instagram, I can only do this when I'm at work because they have wifi. I have become the girl that cannot afford to waste data. I come across Ndongoloza's reel, she's drinking champagne while shopping at Gucci. It hurts that she has cut off our friendship for a snake. A man who got married while with her, a man who has the audacity to ask me, her best friend to sleep with him. I tried calling her mother but it looks like he has brainwashed them and made them believe that I'm jealous and after her life.

My phone rings in my money bag, I carry this one for the tips I receive.

It's my mother calling, "hey ma," Her piercing cry hits my eardrum, I move the phone away from my ear. I am so scared that my heart is drumming in my chest.

"Mama, what's going on?" I am literally shaking and I haven't even heard what the matter is.

"The worst has happened, Londeka. I don't know what the devil wants from our family, I really don't," she is hysterical.

Tears are burning my eyes, hearing her this broken is breaking me too. My mother is the only parent I have in this world.

"Mama, tell me what's wrong, please," my voice manages to come out.

"I am at the hospital my baby," I quickly get on feet, my bread is on the ground.

"What happened? Who is hurt?" I place one hand on my head.

"I went out after your siblings left for school. I just went to the shopping center to get some maize meal and milk, I didn't even waste time. I climb off the taxi and people are gathering outside our house, watching our home burning. My heart further dropped into my stomach when the fire fighters walked out with your father, rushing him to the ambulance. They said he passed out from smoke inhalation," oh God. Please protect my step father, my mother would be devastated if anything happened to him. My siblings and his other children still need him.

I send a short prayer to the heavens.

"How is he doing?" Tears are gushing down my face. Why is bad luck following us this way?

"The doctors say he will be okay but he won't Londeka. He will wake up and remember that our house has burnt down and we have nothing. I don't know what we are going to do. His UIF money won't come for another couple of weeks," my head starts spinning. What are we going to do?

"I am really sorry mama. I should be working a better job right now, helping you guys but I'm busy serving tables. A whole cum laude graduate ma!" I sit back down and cry.

Life is really not fair, it really isn't.

"Londeka, no! We are not God, we don't know what his plans with you are. Remain faithful and trusting in him, my baby. Don't look down on the job you have now, it is helping you and us. You will get what is yours in due time and you will help us out but for now don't worry please," right now I am so glad that I never told my mom about the job at the municipality.

"Where will you and the kids go? I should come home to help you figure it all out,"

She quickly refuses, "No, you need to work. Your siblings and I will go stay with my in-laws for a while," I blow out a sigh.

"Are you sure?" I ask because I know that those people hate my mom. If it was up to them, my step father would still be married to his ex.

"We don't have a choice. Please don't come and miss work, wait until you have a day off," she needs me but she doesn't want me coming and hearing my step father's mother throwing shade at me because I'm not her son's daughter.

"I won't mama. I will send you some money via Pep store when I knock off," I'm talking about my transport money, I am going to have to walk to work until I can make some money again.

"God bless you, Londeka," I cannot wait for that to happen. I am her last hope, life has to come together for the sake of my mother and siblings.

"I will call you when I knock off," I say and hang up immediately, burying my face in my hands and just cry my eyeballs out.

My phone chimes, alerting me of an incoming message. I raise my head and look at my screen. It's a text from Dedani, I saved his number so I know not to answer his calls. If I blocked him he would have pestered me with different numbers

Dedani: See what your stubbornness has caused your family? You know what you have to do Londeka. Take the job, become my woman and watch as your life change forever.

NTUTHUKO BUTHELEZI

"I will see you on Wednesday when we go talk to Nomafu," my father says and I nod vigorously.

"Yes, I will see you then," we share a side hug.

"Thank you once again for my car," it still feels surreal that I own this big beast. Not so long ago I was mourning my father and today I'm standing with him, thanking him for buying me an expensive car.

"And once again, it's a pleasure. I have to make up for so much in your life. We will start talking about other things when we are done with the process of changing your surname," yeah, right now the issue of my surname is more important.

"All in due time, baba," I say and he opens my door.

"Tell your little boy and his mom that I'm sorry for taking you so long," I blush.

I miss them so much and as much as they miss me too, MaHlomuka was happy that I'm having a great time with my father. The plan was to return to Mzumbe yesterday but baba and I went out to meet some of his friends and we had more than enough to drink. I was being shown off and introduced to anyone who cared to pay him some attention.

"I will tell them know," I climb inside the car and he closes the door for me. He's a little sad that I'm leaving.

"Cheer up, old man. At least your girlfriend will come visit you. She blew up your phone this entire weekend," he laughs, nodding his head.

"That she did, she probably thought I'm cheating on her," I start the engine and he steps back.

"I'll call you when I arrive," I let him know and he nods.

"Before I forget, there's a card with money for patrol in the compartment glove," I narrow my eyes.

"No, please. I can't accept it, you have already done too much," he holds out a finger.

"32 years son, there's a lot of catching up to do so please allow me," I nod with a smile.

"Thank you,"

"I love you, son," my throat goes dry immediately. I have longed to hear those words since I was a child.

"I love you, too, baba," my voice comes out hoarsely because of these unshed tears.

"Drive safely," I reverse and press the remote to open the gate. He gave me the keys to the house. I wave bye as he wipes his tears.

I started at the mall to buy my girlfriend flowers and chocolates. As I walked past the jewelry store I saw a nice watch and I just had to get it for her as well. MaHlomuka deserves the world, she deserves all that is beautiful in the world for loving me at my worst. I also got my boy a few toys because he would have cried if I showed up with things for Nhlelozenkosi only.

I get to Mzumbe after almost two hours on the road. I am going straight to the Ngidi homestead to see my people. I also have to go meet up with Mawande, we haven't had a brother and sister time in a while. We talk almost everyday on the phone but it's not enough. That girl is still the first person to see me as human and not a fighting machine. I am taking her with me to the good life because we struggled together.

MaHlomuka's car is parked outside, where did she go without me holding her hand? I don't want these men looking at my woman

without me present, I like it when they admire her and realize that she's taken. The look on their faces always make me so happy.

I stop next to her car in the yard and she appears before I can climb out of my machine. She's standing at the door, wondering who it is. I am excited to see her face when I climb out of this car and share with her how my father bought it for me. I open the door and she starts approaching, I climb out and Nhlelo screams, running towards me. I catch her and she wraps her legs around me and holds on tight.

"Baby, you're home," she whispers and I kiss her neck.

"I'm home MaHlomuka. I missed you so much," I place her down and he pecks my lips. maMokwena must not see us.

"I missed you more baby," she says then looks at the car with a frown on her face.

"Who's car is this, Ntuthuko?" She asks.

"Don't worry, I didn't hijack some Indian lady. My father bought me this car, nice ne?" She's shocked.

"Shut up?" She hits my arm and I laugh at her reaction.

"I cannot, my car is too beautiful," she attacks me with a hug.

"Congratulations baby," she's genuinely happy for me, Nhlelo is my biggest cheerleader.

"Ngiyabonga, baby,"

"Bekumnandi eMegalo mos," I'm thrown into a fit of laughter. I'm never calling my father after a song or is it a club?

"Do you want to go for a ride?" I ask and she nods vigorously.

"Yes please," she's clapping in excitement.

"Come," I take her hand and round the car to the passenger side. I open the door and she slides in.

"Wait, go get Singabakhe first," I remember my boy.

"He's sleeping baby," that's unlike him.

"Is he sick?" I ask and she shakes her head.

"Nope, he was asking after you. Cried for like thirty minutes and passed out on the couch," I'm smiling like a fool. Singabakhe loves me. I just feel bad that I stayed away an extra day when I promised to take him to school today.

"I'll make it up to him tomorrow. Ntwana day at Spur," I say and his mother rolls her eyes.

"Don't be jealous. Look in the back," I say, closing the door and rushing to the driver's side.

"Ntuthuko! Baby, these are so cute," she says, burying her nose in the flowers.

"I hope you like your gift too," she looks in the back again and comes back with the gift bag.

"Spoils, what did I do?" She asks, smiling at me. Just look at how beautiful she is.

"You don't have to do anything for me to spoil you babe. You deserve the world MaHlomuka," she opens the box and gasps.

"Oh sthandwa sami, I love it. Please put it on me," she holds out her hand and gives me the box with the other hand. I gladly cuff her wrist with the watch.

"I'll never be late again," that would be the day, my girlfriend is always late.

"Ready for your ride?" She nods.

"Yes, let's go home so I can show you my appreciation," she says and my dick twitches immediately.

"I like the sound of that," she giggles, "Now tell me how your day was," her smile disappears and she heaves a deep sigh.

"Nhlelozenkosi, what happened?"

"Daluxolo called, he spoke to Singa and he mentioned you and how you're his ntwana. He told him that you take him to school, play with him, buy him the things he likes. Daluxolo told him to give me phone and we had a heated argument, insults we exchanged. It was messy nje," I clench my jaw. This guy is starting to annoy me, honestly.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 48

LONDEKA ZULU

I cannot believe Dedani burnt down my home just to get me to be his side chick. He is a sick son of a bitch who thinks he can play God with people's lives. But he has reached a stop sign with me, I'm not the devils playground and I will show him that I can be as cunning as he is. I will show him that not every young woman is as naive as Ndondoloza. I am not desperate for anything in my life and I'm not afraid to wait on my turn to get what I deserve. After I am done with him he will run at the mention of the name Londeka Zulu.

This plan came to me last night after I prayed to God. I knew that the one I worship as well as my ancestors will show me the way, and true to my faith I have a plan to get this ugly ass guy out of my life. I spoke to my mom this morning and she said that my step father is awake and responsive to treatment, I was so relieved to hear that.

The problem, however is their living condition. The place is small and my step-grandmother has started complaining and they haven't even been there for long.

The taxi drops me off at the hospital, this is where I will find Dedani's wife. She posted on Instagram that her life is now here until her mother wakes up and they are able to take her home. I hate that I have to include her and her unconscious mother to get Dedani to back off but I don't have any other choice. He included my family when he planned the fire that burned down my home and almost claimed my mother's husband. Nothing is off limits with him so if he goes low then I will crawl.

I get to the ICU floor and there are no nurses at the station, thank Goodness. They are known to refuse entry to those who aren't family members. I pass a couple of rooms before finding the one I'm looking for. Hlubi is sitting on the chair with her back to me, busy on her phone. This woman has to stop posting so much on Instagram, I tracked her here because of it. And I know that church ladies have been coming here to bring prayers hence I came posing as one today. I quickly take my phone and snap a picture of her, this is what I need for my plan. Dedani needs to know that I can reach his wife anytime and tell her things about him she doesn't know.

"Hello," I greet, clutching at my Bible. She quickly turns to face me.

"Oh, hello," she doesn't seem shocked or annoyed that a stranger is in her mother's room.

"I'm sorry for just showing up. I haven't been able to come with the other church ladies because I've been working non stop. I just

wanted to bring prayer here, to ask God to see your mother through this," she smiles sweetly at me.

"That's very kind, thank you for coming," she's on her feet, holding out her hand for a shake.

"I hope you and your sister are still firm in the Lord. Your mother is a prayer warrior," I took all this information from her posts and insta stories. Don't worry, I follow her with a ghost account. Plus, I doubt she has time to go through her followers list.

"We are, mama taught us to always pray. Even when it feels like it's for nothing," their mother reminds me of my grandmother, my mother's mom. I believe that woman is my greatest ancestor.

"Hey sis, we are back," we both turn and my heart starts thumping hard against my chest. Dedani looks like he is about to drop dead right this minute. I wish I caught his reaction on tape.

"Thanks for hurrying guys," she pauses, "This is uhm..." she looks at me and I smile sweetly at her before looking back at her husband and sister.

"I'm Londeka, I brought prayers for mama here," I explain.

"Oh thank you for coming, it really means a lot to us," I nod at the sister.

"It's not a problem. I'm also here on behalf of my sister, Ndongoloza, she loved your mother dearly. But she couldn't travel all the way from Johannesburg," Dedani swallows hard.

I didn't plan for things to happen this way. I just wanted a picture of Hlubi to send to her husband so he can see that I can reach her and tell her everything if he doesn't leave me alone. I have proof, the endless texts he has been sending me. The threatening WhatsApp voice notes. I also have pictures of him and Ndongoloza I saved on my phone. Let's not forget the address of the apartment he is renting for her in Port Zimbali.

"How do you know my mom?" the sister asks and my phone immediately rings, oh thank God.

"Can you please give me a second, it's work," they nod and I quickly walk out of the room, answering my phone. My manager asks me to please come immediately because the restaurant is busy and they need me. I tell her that I'll be there in about thirty minutes.

"There's an emergency at work, they need me now. Can we just hold a short prayer so I can leave," I say, walking back in the room.

"I also have to leave. My love, I'll see you later," Dedani kisses her lips and walks out. I start a song and they follow then shortly after I start praying. I might have come here for my own agenda but this prayer is genuine.

I walk out of the building and someone grabs me by my arm, pulling me towards the parking lot. I don't even try to scream because I know it's Dedani, he definitely wants to know what the game I'm playing is. He opens the door of the front passenger seat of his car and shoves me inside, I giggle, watching as he angrily rounds the car. His reaction tells me that I have him by the balls.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" He asks, after banging his door.

"Didn't you see why in that room?" I ask with an attitude and he grabs my arm and tightens his hold on me. It hurts but I will not even wince, I refuse to show any weakness to this bastard.

"Londeka, don't play games with me. The arrangement I want with you has nothing to do with my wife, why include her? What if Hlubi recognized you from the restaurant?" I roll my eyes. I've only ever served her once, plus, I'm wearing a doek and glasses. I don't look anything like Londeka the waitress.

"You're playing games with my life, Dedani. I told you that I want nothing to do with you and as much as my family had nothing to do with this, you still burned down their home with everything else. This silliness ends here or I promise I will show your wife everything, the texts, voice notes, the dick pictures you've been sending me and most importantly the second life you have with Ndondoloza," he is blinking rapidly, not believing what I'm saying to him.

"Don't even try to harm me, Dedani. That would be pointless because the information will still make it's way to your wife and the media. There are a couple of journalists who want to see you down like a dog and if I disappear for any reason envelopes will find their way to them. It's better them than the police because they are your friends," he is clenching his jaws.

"Do you know who you are messing with?" I roll my eyes. I'm not folding, even if he turns into a demon right now.

"If you don't want any of your filth making it's way to Hlubi then I suggest you leave me the fuck alone. Call whoever that works at the municipality and tell them to give me the job. Bhuti, angithi you are an arsonist wena? You made my family homeless, it's now your responsibility to make sure that you hire a construction company that will replace the house you destroyed. Once all of this is done then leave me alone and I will do the same," he starts laughing.

"You stupid girl. I would have given you everything, thing's you never thought you could have. This is the life you want to settle for?" I nod with a smile.

"Yes. Now, please drive me to work," I grab the seatbelt and strap myself.

MAWANDE DUMA

Life is the most unpredictable thing ever, one day you're down and the next you're way up there. I am so happy for Ntuthuko, I don't know anyone who deserves all this happiness like him. He has faced so many things in his life, I can tell he has childhood traumas too. Finding his biological father is the best thing that could have ever happened to him. Finding out who he really is and having the love of his life and a little boy who has become his own son is a blessing from God. Everything he has ever been through in his life was preparing him for exactly this. I am just glad that he's still the same Ntuthuko, just happier.

I have been with Ntuthuko since morning, he came to show me the car his father bought for him and drove me around Mzumbe a little. He came with goodies from Port Shepstone, he bought them after dropping Singabakhe at school. I missed spending time with him like this, but I understand that we both have partners now and we spend more time with them. I'm just grateful that we both still know that we have each other no matter what happens.

"Would you look at the time," he says, placing down his glass of coke on the ground.

"Time to fetch Singa from school?" I ask and he nods.

"Yes and after that we are going for ice cream. He made me promise this morning before I dropped him off," I laugh, Singa and Ntuthuko are the cutest duo ever.

"You're a great bonus dad to that little boy," I say and he blows out a sigh.

"Thank you Wande, but his biological father wants to ruin all of that for us," he says, sadness laced in his voice.

"Don't stress yourself. Nhlelo and Singa love you. He can make as much noise as he wants but he won't break you up," he's shaking his head, like he doesn't believe what I'm saying.

"He is threatening to file for sole custody if Nhlelo doesn't move back to Cape Town," Msebe told me this already but he and his mother will not allow that to happen. They even called for a meeting with Daluxolo's family, they will be making their way to Cape Town this weekend.

"I understand why you're stressing but I can assure you that Daluxolo is a non factor. He is mad that his son has someone who gives and does everything he cannot," he smiles a little.

"MaHlomuka said the same thing," exactly!

"Believe us then and stop worrying about nothing," he nods.

"Thank you, Wande. I needed to hear this from someone else I guess," I reach for his hand and clasp it.

"Haibo! Is it Msebeyelanga or Sgora?" Aunt Nobantu asks, appearing from the corner of the main house. Didn't we agree to stick to our spaces? What the hell is she doing now.

"Can we help you with something?" I ask.

"I had to come check whose car is parked at my gate," I roll my eyes. This is the back gate, the one I use so it shouldn't bother her.

"It's Ntuthuko's car," she laughs out loud then claps once!

"I know I paid him well as a security guard but no. He will only drive such big cars because of his girlfriend. Which rich husband did she sleep with this time to get this big big one?" Sgora quickly gets on his feet and shoots my aunt a fulminating gaze. My aunt suddenly feels small, she knows Sgora would break her bones.

"Wande, I will call you later," he says and walks away.

"Mxm, did he really think Nhlelo would stay with a broke village champion like him?" Jealousy reeks from this devil. I pick up the glasses and plates we were using and leave my aunt standing there. Where is Qophelo to deal with this wicked woman?

My phone chimes as I walk inside, I left it charging. Maybe it's Msebe checking in, we last spoke this morning. He is very busy these days, the Italian project has him on lock down. I place the dirty glasses and plates in the plastic basin I use for washing dishes.

I have a couple of notifications, but the email icon has my attention first. I open it and read the email and when I'm done I scream at the top of my lungs. Tears streaming down my face, God has really opened the flood gates of blessings. My dream of leaving Mzumbe is going to happen, now I am certain. I was accepted at the University of the Witwatersrand a while ago. Now one of the many law firms I applied for bursaries have responded and they would like to fund me. I quickly go to Google and type Motaung Attorneys. Their offices are in Randburg and they specialize in most branches of the law. This is impressive, mostly because it's owned by a black man. You know what, I'll google more later. Right now I need to tell my man, I dial his number while going to check if aunt Nobantu is not eavesdropping. I don't want that witch knowing anything about my plans, she would do anything in her power to block me. The coast is clear, I close my door and go sit on the edge of the bed.

"Cheri yami," he answers and I'm left melting into liquid.

"Sthandwa sami, I'm sorry for disturbing you," my voice is high-pitched, that normally happens when I'm too excited.

"It's okay babe, I was about to take a break and call you. You sound happy, what happened?" He has come to know me very well in this short space of time.

"Great news baby, can you guess?" He chuckles.

"Wande, you know I'm bad at the guessing game. Please tell me, I'll give you a delicious orgasm later," he says and I'm thrown into a fit of laughter. Yes, orgasms have become currency in this relationship.

"So your girl got a bursary babe, a law firm called Motaung Attorneys wants to fund me. They even invited me to come to Johannesburg next week, to sign the contract once they have explained fully what what it entails," I tell him and he starts cheering, Msebe has become my biggest cheerleader. I'm grateful for him.

"I'm so proud and happy for you, themba lami. This is worth celebrating, please be ready because I'm taking you out," I would appreciate that very much.

"Now? What about work?"

"Work is not going anywhere, plus, I'm ahead of schedule. I'll pick you up in an hour. I love you so much MaDuma wami and congratulations," we ma!

"I love you too, thank you for cheering and supporting me. It really means a lot babe,"

"Forever, Wande, forever."

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 49

SPONSORED BY P.S

DEDANI MKHIZE

Londeka thinks she has won but she doesn't know me well. I am Dedani Mkhize, I get everything that I want. I wish she could stop

playing these stupid games and give in already because it's going to definitely happen. She will be mine before she becomes my sacrifice.

I give it to her for trying though, I'd be backing off if I didn't have Madlabantu in my pocket. Speaking of Madlabantu, I'm on my way to his house. I need to talk to him about Londeka face to face and to ask if there's nothing we can do spiritually with my mother in law.

This old man has a beautiful house in Mbumbulu, but he doesn't have a wife or kids. What I know though is that he has slept with almost all the woman in this village. He uses muti on them because there's no way a sane woman would sleep with him willingly. Madlabantu is the dirtiest person I know, he smells of muti and his mouth is not what I'm about to touch on. But, the man is gifted and that's all that I care about.

I leave my car outside his yard and walk inside, there's a woman sweeping the yard. She's wrapping a sangoma cloth around her waist and humming a song I cannot make out. I greet her and she responds then tells me that Madlabantu is in his rondavel, working. I thank her and go find him. I take off my shoes and call out for him, announcing my presence. He gives me permission to come in. I push the door open and walk inside the creepy room.

He's mixing muti with blood, I'm not sure what blood that is but I wouldn't be surprised if it's human blood.

"There are many woman in Durban, what's so special about this one?" He asks, even before I can greet him and sit down.

"How do you know why I came here?" I ask and he laughs.

"Don't worry yourself about that, Mkhize. What's so special about this girl? It's not like you get to keep her forever, she will suffer the same fate as the current one," he says and I nod because I know this.

"I want her because she will be the best revenge against Ndongoloza," I say and he narrows his eyes.

"What are you talking about? What revenge?" So he doesn't know everything?

"Ndongoloza is the reason why isilwane wanted my unborn baby. Had she stayed in that apartment like I told her to then my child would still be alive," I explain and he offers me a cold smile, it sends chills down my spine immediately.

"What do you want from me?" He asks.

"Cast a spell on Londeka, make me have full control over her," he roars with laughter.

He annoys me so much when I'm serious and he just laughs like I'm stupid.

"I'm not touching that girl, I'm not going to bring doom to myself," I narrow my eyes.

"What do you mean Madlabantu?"

He heaves out a sigh, "She is protected by her grandmother. Wherever Londeka goes the spirit is following behind. Whoever touches her will feel the wrath of that old woman," he explains and I laugh.

"Nothing scares you, do something," he shakes his head.

"I choose my battles wisely, Mkhize. I suggest you leave this girl alone and start looking elsewhere. If you still enjoy the life you have then leave Londeka alone," this is the first time Madlabantu is useless to me.

"Fine!"

"On the other hand your mother in law woke up about thirty minutes ago," he says casually and my eyes almost pop out.

"What! How do you know?"

He gives me a bored look, "The doctors just confirmed that she will not be able to use all her limbs. She will be on a wheel chair for the rest of her life. I'm busy mixing my things here because I want her mute too. What comes out of her mouth disturbs my things from working properly," he says and I'm just looking at him dumbfounded. So this is my mother in law's blood, the one he once asked me to collect. How did he keep so fresh?

"We are not killing her anymore?" I ask after a minute of silence.

He shakes his head, "That's not necessary,"

I groan in frustration, "You're not going to explain why we are changing plans?" He clicks his tongue.

"Your wife needs you, leave Mkhize,"

"Rethink this please," I say because I have realized that besides her being the perfect revenge on Ndongoloza, I am fuckin attracted to Londeka. Besides my wife, she is different from all the girls I've ever been with.

"I don't have time for this. When should I report for duty?" She asks and I heave a sigh.

She's damn stubborn, exactly what turns me on.

"Londeka, I can give you the world baby. Whatever you want me to do I'll do. Let's just give this thing a try, you'll see that I'm not the devil you've made me out to be," she laughs before smacking her lips.

"I really don't have time for this. Are you going to do as I asked or should I contact Hlubi?" I close my eyes.

"You can only start working on the 1st of next month. Go to the same person on Monday to sign your contract," I hate that I'm giving in.

Without her willingly getting into something with me I can't do anything because of what Madlabantu said.

"And my mother's house?" She has my balls in her hands. Just not in the way I appreciate.

"Find contractors and make quotations then email them to me, I'll send you the money you need," I say.

"The house was burned with furniture and clothes, Mr. Arsonist,"

"Damn it! Londeka I'll send extra money then," I say and hang up. She's just so infuriating.

We could be talking about her moving into the apartment and me spoiling her but no, she is just fucking with me.

The door opens and my wife walks in with three guys, all in safety gear. Their coveralls have a company logo, they are from a construction company. My mind rushes to Londeka and the stupid fight we just had.

They all greet me and my wife starts showing them around and explaining things, I'm not sure what this is all about.

Madlabantu was right, my mother-in-law is now quadriplegic, the bullets messed up her spine. She cannot speak and the doctors cannot explain that medically. They are running more tests, waisting my money because I know what's wrong with her.

"What's happening?" I ask my wife as soon as she steps back in the lounge.

"Hey love, the guys are going to work on the house. To make it more wheelchair friendly," I raise an eyebrow.

"I am not understanding, Nomahlubi,"

She places her hands on her waist, "My mother is on a wheelchair. So the house has to be accommodating,"

"She is going to stay here with us?" I ask, horrified.

"Yes, will that be a problem?" I laugh.

I cannot believe this.

"Are you serious? You didn't discuss this with me first. This is our home, you cannot take such decisions on your own," her jaw is on the ground.

"She is my mother, Dedani! Where do you expect her to go? Qaqamba cannot look after her alone, at least I am a nurse," I'm shaking my head.

"There are nursing homes for people in her situation, Nomahlubi," she gasps in shock.

"If you don't want my mother here just say it and I'll leave with her," no she didn't just say that to me.

NTUTHUKO BUTHELEZI

"Would you like anything to drink?" Nomafu asks, avoiding my eyes.

"I am okay, thank you," I say and she looks at my father.

"I would appreciate anything you can offer," he says and Nomafu leaves us sitting under the tree. We had to settle out here because her husband is screaming and swearing, demanding to know why a white man is in his house. By the look of things he doesn't have any idea that my mother had a thing with a white man and it resulted in me. I know this is not the nicest thing to say but I'm glad he's sick and cannot get up from that reed mat because he would mess this up for me.

"You don't look comfortable," my father says, placing a hand on my shoulder. I don't want to be here, this house holds many horrific memories.

"I'm okay, just nervous. I want this process to go smoothly," he gives my shoulder a squeeze.

"It will, I'll make sure of it if it's the last thing I do. I promise that next week you will be a Galloway," I nod and my mother comes back with a glass of juice and hands it to my father.

"Thank you," he takes a sip.

"Is everything okay?" She asks and my father nods.

"Everything is fine. Nthuthuco and I were suppose to come see you on Wednesday but I got caught up with work," he pauses then exhale sharply, "We came here to talk about changing his surname. I want to pay the damages and perform every ritual I need to in order for things to happen for our son," she smiles.

"That's very nice. When do you want to start with everything?" She asks.

"ASAP, I just need to know who I pay the damages to and how we go on about it," she looks at me with tears glistening in her eyes.

"I'm so happy for you Ntuthuko," I nod, "I recently reconnected with my elder sister in Tongaat. I will call her and ask her to prepare everything for next week Saturday," relief floods through me. At least

this will be done with her side of the family and not her husband's people.

"I appreciate it. Let me know if you need any help with the preparations, you know you have my number," my mother is nodding.

I know I have to sit down with my mother and have a conversation now that I know the truth. I believe I have to let go of some of the hate I feel towards her because if I'm being honest, Nomafu was also a victim. But I'm not ready to let go of other matters, especially because she has never really acknowledged and apologized sincerely for everything she allowed to happen to me and for things she pretended not to see happening.

My father and I are walking back to my house, I feel a little lighter with regards to the process of changing my surname. Now I'm worried about what's happening in Cape Town. MaHlomuka and her family went there to meet with Daluxolo's family, they need to discuss the threats the guy has been making because Nhlelo is now in a relationship with a guy his son adores. I'm nervous because I don't know how things will go, where our relationship will be standing after the meeting. She told me not to worry about anything, that Daluxolo will not come in between us or take Singa away.

"I am tired now," he says and I laugh.

I told him but he told me that he wanted to see the beauty of this place. This man is always in the car and only walks for a little while.

"We are almost there," he fans his face with his hand.

"Is that Scalo approaching?" he asks and I look forward and notice Mawande's aunt in gym clothes holding hands with Sqalo who is in gym gear too.

"Yeah, he's with his cougar. How do you know him?" His eyebrow is snapped.

"He's your sisters ex husband," What? Whoa!

"Seriously?" He nods vigorously.

"Yes, I'm glad it ended. He was not good enough for your sister. He treated her like trash, Viv deserves much better," Where was I to knock his teeth out when he was hurting my sister?

"Well, he's now living with a woman who is older than him," he chuckles, shaking his head. Sqalo stops walking, "Chadwick, what are you doing here?" He asks, darting between baba and I. He won't even greet?

"Scalo, I came here to see my son. Something you don't do as a father," ouch! Shots faired.

"Son? I thought Viv was your only child,"

Baba shakes his head.

"Well, as you can see. I'm with her brother, can't you see they look alike?" Sqalo looks at me and nods.

"Now that you mentioned it, I can see the resemblance," Nobantu looks like she's about to faint. She's probably swallowing the words she was saying about me and my car.

"Anyway, how's Viv and the kids?" He asks and I furrow my eyebrows.

"Who would you have asked if you didn't bump into him?" I ask with a flared nose.

"Exactly. You have my daughter's number and house address, she has never asked you not to call her phone or come by to see them," he swallows his embarrassment.

"Son, this heat is too much. Let's get going," we leave them standing there and continue on our way. My phone chimes in my pocket, I quickly take it out.

MaHlomuka: My heart beats for you, Ntuthuko Galloway. I have never known this kind of love, peace and happiness before you. I appreciate the man you are to me and our boy, we will come back home to you no matter what.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 50

NHLELOZENKOSI NGIDI

I drive in the yard with the Polo we rented here in Cape Town, I'm with my mother, Msebe and Singabakhe. We are here to meet with Daluxolo's family, me and him had the biggest fight over the phone because Singabakhe told him about Ntuthuko. He insulted me and threatened to take my son away if I don't move back to Cape Town. That's not going to happen and I'm here with my family to tell him to his face. My life is with Ntuthuko now and I will not leave him in Mzumbe and come to Cape Town. Singabakhe and I are very happy where we are, there's nothing here for us. Ntuthuko and I will decide together where we move to from Mzumbe, we will never be in different places.

We climb out of the car and my son holds on to the skirt of my dress. I lead my family to the door and knock, we wait for a minute before Daluxolo's elder sister, Zenani opens for us. She greets us with a smile and welcomes us; I've never really had a problem with her. She is the sister Daluxolo dumped Singa with after picking him up from me claiming to want to spend time with him. She tries talking to my son but Singabakhe is not interested, I don't blame my baby. These people never call to check up on him so he's not used to them.

We get to the lounge and find Mrs Botha, their mother. She stands up to greet us and asks how life has been and then we are shown where to sit. There's small talk happening, they are asking about Singabakhe and school. The younger sister walks in with a tray of drinks and a platter of finger foods. My mother and Msebe eat to be polite but I decline saying I'm full, they must know that I have activated violence here. Daluxolo walks in, chest puffed out and shoulders broad. Who is he trying to intimidate? Does he want me to expose him for having small testicles? The only reason I never exposed him is because he was my boyfriend and after we broke up he didn't piss me off as much as he has now. He greets us before settling on the single couch.

"Come to daddy boy," he says to Singabakhe and my baby shakes his head then places it on my chest. I want to laugh but I manage to get a hold of myself.

"Mommy," he whispers in my ear.

"Yes, baby?"

"I want to call ntwana," he says, like he wants to add paraffin to the fire. This one is Nhlelozenkosi's son, make no mistake.

"We will call him later. Go with aunty to get a drink, the elders have to talk okay?" I say, placing him down.

"You promise we will call him?" He asks and I nod. He leaves the room with Daluxolo's younger sister. I look up and find Daluxolo's fulminating gaze on me, haibo yin manje?

"Thank you for agreeing to meeting with us to talk about the situation at hand," maMokwena says.

"We had to sit down and talk before things escalated, thank you for reaching out sisi," -Mrs Botha.

"Before we start, I want to ask Daluxolo a question first," my mom says, her voice carries so much authority. I know she didn't come here to joke with this boy. His facial expression has softened.

"What do you think a father is?" Mama asks and Daluxolo swallows hard. I love this question very much.

He clears his throat, "Uhm, a father is a provider and protector," he says and my mother nods.

"That's all?" Mama asks and he shrugs his shoulder. I made a baby with a stupid man.

"Ousi, what is a father according to you?" Mama asks Zenani who is sitting next to her mother.

"Well, a father is a provider, protector, teacher, biggest cheerleader. He guides and helps shape the child," Mama is nodding, totally agreeing with Zenani.

"Mrs Botha, do you think your son has been what Zenani just mentioned to Singabakhe?" I love my mother, she's giving it to them. They weren't expecting it.

"You know Daluxolo works maMokwena, somethings he won't be able to do but he loves his son," excuses, excuses.

"I'm sorry but Daluxolo is not the first man to work and have a child. Your son threatens to take my grandson from his mother because she has moved on and the man has time for Singabakhe. Daluxolo what's Singabakhe's shoe size? Which sport does he play at school? Do you know which animation he likes at the moment? Can you tell us his favorite food or restaurant? Do you even know what he does when he throws a tantrum?" -MaMokwena.

Daluxolo and his family are tongue tied, they cannot even look at us. "I'm asking abuti,"

"I don't know ma," it comes out in a whisper. I'm going to buy my mother the whole South Africa, you will have to find a new place to live.

"Exactly. So what makes you think you can just take him from Nhlelozenkosi? You haven't even visited him since they came to Mzumbe, you call when you remember. Please don't say it's because they are far, it was all the same when they were still living here. You picked up your own son and dumped him with Zenani here then go out to drink with your friends," South Africa is too small, I'm buying her planet earth, everyone will move to Mars and figure things out.

"I promise that we will do better, sisi. We apologize sincerely for what our son said, we could never take Singabakhe from his mother," Mrs Botha.

"My sister is in a relationship now, one that's promising marriage. Her partner adores Singabakhe and he goes all out for the both of them. Even so, Ntuthuko understands that you are Singabakhe's father and he doesn't want to replace you. All he is doing is loving your son, you should be grateful because its rear these days. Step father's hate their partners children and abuse them, you don't have to worry about that with Ntuthuko. Your son is in safe hands, blessed to have two fathers. Daluxolo, Singa does not have a relationship with you because you're

not there, not because of Ntuthuko. I'm asking you to never threaten to take my sister's child again," Msebe adds.

"You're right," -Zenani.

"I have heard you. I will make an effort to have a solid relationship with my son. I'm sorry Nhlelozenkosi," oh wow, he can humble himself.

"Thank you," I say without looking at him.

"I'm going to spend a little time with him before you guys leave," he says, getting up from the couch and leaving the room.

LONDEKA ZULU

I signed a contract with eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, I cannot believe that I'm employed and I'll be earning enough to support my family. I haven't stopped thanking God, this can only be him. He watched an evil man trying to use what I needed more than anything to lure me into sin, then changed the situation around. Shamed Dedani and gave me the job without terms and conditions, I will never forget his mercy upon my life.

I called my mother earlier on and asked her to come to town because I didn't want to go to her mother in-laws house. I don't want to leave here with a broken heart because of her words, she's full of venom and I want to be far from it all. I get to KFC and my mother is standing outside, looking at her phone. She's probably sending me a please call me to find out how far I am, this girl is the most impatient person I know. She looks up and her eyes land on me, a smile forms on her face.

"Londeka," her arms are already open.

"Mama," her embrace is warm, I've missed her so much.

"Oh, my baby. You look so beautiful," she kisses me.

"Thank you for my looks," we both laugh.

"You're forward," she hits my arm playfully.

"Come, let's go inside and have something to eat. I have a lot to share with you," she narrows her eyes, wondering what I have to say to her.

We walk inside and go straight to place an order, I order two all star boxes and we go sit down to wait for our order.

"How is everything?" I ask and she heaves a sigh.

"It's not working Londeka, I have to make a plan to find iron sheets and erect a shack in our yard. My mother in law is always complaining about this and that, I don't want to think about what will happen when her son is discharged from the hospital, she will complain about food even more," At least the person who created this mess is fixing it.

"Hold on just a little longer mama. Things are about to change," I clasps her hand.

"What's happening?" I smile.

"Well, I went to sign a contract with eThekweni municipality. I got a job mama and it's good, I will be able to buy you guys a new home," I say and she gasps, placing both hands over her mouth. Tears are already streaming down her face.

"Oh Londeka," she gets up with open arms and I get on my feet to hug her.

"God is good my baby. Thank you for trusting in him, for waiting on your turn. Londeka you are a good child, you didn't give yourself to

men for materialistic things just so you can fit in. I am the proudest mother ever! Congratulations," I'm in tears, it's like she knows the devil was tempting me.

"Thank you mama,"

"275," the cashier screams.

"That's our food," we break the hug and I wipe my tears, going to get our meal.

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I had a good day with my mother and I wish I could've seen my siblings too but I will be able to sleep over soon and spoil them rotten. I'm back at my flat, sitting in my bedroom. I'm thinking of what my mother said about her mother in-law complaining. They can't continue living there and if we wait for the contractors to build then they will be forced to live there for longer. I will not be able to live here comfortably knowing that they are not okay. I take my phone and dial the last person I want to talk to, but he needs to know that there has been a change of plans.

"Mageba," he answers and I roll my eyes.

"Dedani, can you talk? I ask.

"MaZulu, of course I can talk. Do you need anything?" Why does he sound like a puppy? What happened to the pitbull he always is?

"Yes, my family is not comfortable where they are currently staying," I say and he heaves a sigh.

"I'm really sorry for that. How far are you with those quotations?" He asks.

I clear my throat, "Dedani, building will take forever to complete. They need a place now,"

I get off the bed and place a hand on my waist.

"I hear you, so what do you suggest we do?" Why is he talking like we are a team? He's merely paying for what he destroyed.

"Buy them a house," I say and he doesn't respond, he's still on the line though, I can hear him breathing. I'm crossing fingers that he doesn't tell me to go jump.

"Have you seen anything that will be good for them?" He's agreeing?

"Uhm, I...Not really,"

"Well, start looking so we can buy it. You'll send me whatever you like and I'll contact the agent and purchase it," I didn't think it would be so easy.

"Okay, but it has to be in my mother's name,"

He chuckles, "Of course, Mageba. Do you need anything else?" I frown.

"No, there's nothing,"

"MaZulu, please meet me for breakfast tomorrow, we need to talk," I click my tongue and hang up.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 51

NOBANTU DLADLA

Sqalo walks into the kitchen mumbling something under his breath, he has been in a foul mood since we bumped into his ex's father while taking a walk. I would be worried but after his reassurance and

of course Madlabantu's muti I am calm, Sqalo will never leave me for any other woman not even the mother of his children.

I stop stirring the stew and walk towards him, he is standing in front of the fridge not knowing what to take out. I wrap my arms around his waist and kiss his bare back, he heaves a sigh and closes the fridge.

"You can talk to me, baba," I say and he turns so we are face to face. I don't understand why he's allowing Vivian and her family to do this to him. He shouldn't have to feel bad for following his heart.

"Vivian and I just had a fight," I narrow my eyes.

"A fight about what?" I ask and he brushes his forehead. It must have been intense, it takes a lot to get Sqalo down.

"I called her to ask for the kids this weekend, I wanted to spend some quality time with them and have some fun. I don't want my children to think I don't love them, or even feel less important in my life," he pauses, exhaling sharply, "You'd think Vivian would appreciate that I'm trying but she told me that they already have plans she cannot change just because I feel like playing daddy," I roll my eyes. That insensitive bitch!

Does she know how many women would kill for the father of their children to call and ask to spend time with the kids? She is ungrateful, that's what she is.

"She's using the kids to spite you," I say and he nods vigorously.

"That's true, what would going to her long lost brothers ceremony do for my children?" He asks and I remember that Sgora is Vivian's brother, he is not the low class dog I always thought he was. I wish Mawande and I were doing alright so I could fish for more information.

"That's just insane, she could go to the ceremony alone and give us the kids," he scoffs.

"I would never see my kids again if I tried to bring them anywhere near you, she has made that very clear," I quickly step back, raising an eyebrow.

"What is that supposed to mean? Didn't you tell that little spoilt brat that I am your woman and I'm not going anywhere?" He holds out his hands.

"Nobantu, please. I don't want to fight with you too. Be my peace in this whole situation, allow me to make things right with the kids and once everything has settled I'll have a conversation with Viv. I know it's frustrating for you but we have to remember that she's still mad, we had an affair behind her back and she won't just give you her kids after you took her husband," that makes sense.

"I'll try to be understanding of where she's coming from as well," he pecks my lips.

"Thank you," I honestly have to learn how to pick my battles, not everything is worth a fight.

"So, how wealthy is your ex father in-law?" I can't let this one go, I want to know just how rich Sgora is by being that man's son.

"Phew! Insanely wealthy. His family owned sugar cane plantations back in the day. Chadwick got a crazy inheritance from his father and he has his own businesses and investments, he has his hands in different pies," hau we ma!

"So everything will go to your ex and Sgora when he dies?" I ask and he nods.

"Everything was Vivs but I guess the brother will also get his share now," Sqalo shouldn't have divorced Vivian first, we could have waited for the old white man to kick the bucket so we could have a piece of his wealth during the divorce proceedings.

"I need to go shower. Will the food be ready when I'm done?" He asks and I nod.

"Yes, my love."

He walks out of the kitchen and I go back to the stove and switch it off before taking out a plate from the cupboard and dishing up. I cooked seven colors for him, everything he has been craving during the last week. I enjoy taking care of him in everyway.

My phone rings in the lounge, I quickly cover the pot and hurry to get it. It's my daughter calling, a smile forms on my face. I miss her so much, Dedani has to stop sending her away for shopping and allow her to come see her mother.

"The most beautiful girl in the world," I answer and she giggles.

"Hey mommy," she sounds happy and content.

This is all I've ever wanted for my children.

"How is Sandton treating you?" She takes a deep breath.

"Ahh, what can I say? I am a Queen ma. Dedani has made sure that I'm comfortable in every way possible," God bless my son in law for treating my princess exactly how I have always treated her. He didn't take my treasure only to turn it into a stone.

"I hope you got me a gift,"

She clears her throat dramatically, "Mommy, relax. I got you a couple of expensive things. We even have an item to match, I don't want to say more," oh I cannot wait to see what she got me. It's going to take me a while before I can be able to go shopping in Sandton with my own money. Qophelo did a serious number on us.

"When are you coming home?" I ask.

"Uhm, well my flight back to Durban is on Saturday, I'll land at 2pm. I think I will only be able to come to Mzumbi during the week," I can hold on for another week.

"I'll be waiting, there's some hot gossip I need to give you, Ndongoloza," I say and she laughs.

"Village gossip ain't really my thing," I roll my eyes. I gave birth to a drama Queen.

"This is premium village gossip my dear,"

"Then I can't wait to hear all about it,"

DEDANI MKHIZE

Things in my matrimonial home have been cold, Nomahlubi has decided to go above my head and continue with changing our whole house for her mother. She knows how I feel about all of this but she doesn't really care, she threatened to leave with her mom if I don't want her living with us. I never thought things would get to this point in our marriage, where she resorts to threats to get what she wants. I honestly thought she was different from all others but this situation has shown me her true colors. Maybe I should have taken more time to know her before rushing to get married.

I walk into the kitchen and take out cereal from the pantry, this is what I have for breakfast now. Ever since her mother was admitted to the hospital my wife hasn't cooked a single meal for me, I eat cereal like a struggling university student in the mornings and have lunch and supper at different restaurants. She made a vow to always take care of me, to put me before all others but look at what's

happening right now? I am at the bottom of her priority list and it's sad because I have always put her above everything else in my life.

"Good morning, baby," she walks in the kitchen all excited.

"Hi," I open the fridge and take out a carton of milk.

"The contractor is starting today, he said they'll be done in two weeks max," I guess that's good news for her and her mother.

I decide not to respond to that, Hlubi has to know that I'm only allowing this because of the threat she made. I don't want her mother here and I won't pretend like I do.

"Haibo, Dedani. You're not going to say anything?" I raise an eyebrow.

"What do you want me to say?" I ask, pulling the high chair and settling down to eat my cornflakes.

"I am telling you about something that's going to be happening in your house," she says and I laugh.

"Oh! Now you want me to know? Why don't you just continue doing as you please sis wami? Or will you threaten me with something else if I refuse to talk about the changes made to this house?" She's blinking rapidly, she wasn't expecting this at all.

"Dedani, my love. I am really sorry..." My phone vibrates on top of the counter disturbing her, I look at the screen and it's Londeka. I push away the bowl and get up from the chair, grabbing my phone.

"Mageba, how are you?" I answer, leaving Hlubi standing there.

"I have emailed you the picture of the house that I want for my family and the real estate information," I smile, shaking my head. She is so used to fighting with me that she's not even aware that I've put down

my weapons. I have a new strategy for her now and that's killing her with kindness.

"Okay, when would you like us to go view it?" I ask.

"Why do you like using words like us? We are not a team," yet, we are not a team yet is what she means. I have accepted what Madlabantu said about her grandmother and I'm no longer interested in hurting her. I will find another girl to give to isilwane sami, there are plenty of them out there dying for me to look their way.

"You're reading too much into my words. What I mean is I cannot make a payment to the real estate before we view the house. Sometimes these people false advertise," I say and she heaves a sigh.

"I'm sure you are a busy man, Dedani. I will call the estate agent and ask to view the house tomorrow," I roll my eyes, her stubbornness is what caught my attention but sometimes it annoys the living shit out of me.

"MaZulu, can we please just work together on this. We go tomorrow to view the house and if you are certain that it's what you want for your family then I buy it on the spot," I say and she's silent for a while, thinking about what I have just said. She needs to realize that she has to stop fighting me over everything.

"Fine, set up the meeting with the agent coz I don't know your schedule," was that so hard?

"There's no schedule where you are concerned," she clicks her tongue before hanging up. I laugh and walk back to the kitchen with a smile that disappears as soon as my eyes land on Hlubi who looks sour.

"Really, Dedani? You took a call while we were in the middle of a conversation?" I roll my eyes in her face.

"Hlubi, I don't need this noise so early in the morning," she gasps in shock.

"What is wrong with you?" She asks, tears glistening in her eyes. Oh no madam.

She cannot expect me to hold her in high regard when she hasn't been doing that for me. I'm going to give her a taste of her own medicine.

"I should go to work to make money that's going to pay for all these renovations you want," I leave the kitchen once again.

My phone chimes after I close the door and I'm about to start the engine. It's Ndongoloza saying good morning, I quickly reply her and put my phone away. Juggling three women is taking so much of my energy; Ndongoloza's time in my life has come to an end, at least I gave her the best last experience of being with me. When she gets back from Johannesburg it's over for us, she has suffocated me it's enough now.

I should check my email before I forget and have Londeka squeezing my balls for not making an appointment with the realtor. I grab the phone again and open my emails. Not bad, it's an upgrade for her family and the price is not something that will leave a dent on my account.

MAWANDE DUMA

I am on my way to see Msebeyelanga, I miss him so much. I didn't see him for the whole weekend because they were in Cape Town to meet with Daluxolo's family. We spoke the whole time he was there but it was not the same as being with him and touching him. Plus, I don't like him being away anymore because of what happened in

Italy. I know he was with his family but my mind couldn't help itself, it kept thinking Sauda would show up and do something far worse than what she did in Rome. That girl is a lunatic and I hope she stays away from Msebeyelanga and never sets foot in South Africa.

I get to the Ngidi homestead and there's no one outside. I know I should start in the main house and greet maMokwena and Nhlelozenkosi but I need to see Msebe first.

I knock on the door of the rondavel and push it open before he can give me permission to enter. He said I should stop knocking like I'm a visitor here, so I just knock and walk in immediately. He's sitting on the couch with his legs stretched out, one of his favorite series is playing on the TV. He smiles widely when he sees it's me, I close the door as he gets up from the couch. We kiss hello before he picks me up and spins me around, I'm giggling like a school girl.

"You should have went to Cape Town with us, I was missing you terribly," he says and I hide my face in his chest, blushing.

"Next time," he kisses my forehead.

"Definitely. So, how has my pretty lady been?" He asks, settling down then guiding me to sit on his lap. I snake my arms around his neck.

"I've been panicking about leaving for Johannesburg alone tomorrow. It's going to be a long and scary bus ride," I say and he grins. He can't be finding this amusing at all.

"Msebe, don't smile. I'm scared," he caresses my face, still smiling.

"No need to be scared, babe," he says then reaches for his phone next to him. He scrolls for a few seconds and hands the phone to me.

"Baby, are you serious?" I ask with widened eyes. He just showed me our flight tickets to Johannesburg tomorrow evening. Now it makes sense why he asked for a picture of my ID.

"Yes, I am going with you to Johannesburg. I want to hold your hand through everything, to prove to you that I'm in full support of your dreams Wande," I attack him with a hug.

Msebe is just amazing, I have been telling him how scared I am of going to Johannesburg alone for the first time and he did this.

"I appreciate you, sthandwa sami," I say and he holds me tighter. It feels really good knowing that he listens when I talk and he thinks of ways to make me feel better about things. I can now be fully excited about this trip and signing my bursary contract.

"Will we be back for Ntuthuko's ceremony?" I ask and he lets go of me.

"Definitely, babe. It's an important day for him and you need to be there because you two are like siblings. I wouldn't keep you away on his special day," I kiss his soft lips.

May I never stop doing the good that made the universe to bless me with a man like Msebe.

"We land in Durban on Friday night, I've booked us a place already. Then we will drive to Tongaat Saturday morning," he thinks of everything.

"How do I show you my appreciation?" I ask and he licks his lower lip.

"I have a few ideas, my baby," he says, trailing a finger up my thigh.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 52

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NTUTHUKO BUTHELEZI

"So he will not try to take Singabakhe from us?" I ask Nhlelo and she nods vigorously.

"No, he won't baby. Everyone made him understand that he cannot dictate my life as if I belong to him," she explains and I honestly hope that he didn't just agree to leave Nhlelo alone for the sake of it. He is an arrogant man and people like him don't just step back because he was told to.

"So, how will this co-parenting thing work?" I don't like the guy but I'm going to be civil towards him because I want to make this journey easy for MaHlomuka and Singa.

"We haven't spoken about it yet, Singabakhe was fed up and just wanted to leave. Daluxolo said he will come here so we can sit down and talk about it," she says and my body freezes, I don't know how I feel about him coming to my territory, "I want you to be present, you are in Singa's life and he adores you. For his sake you and Daluxolo need to know each other and try to get along. I know it's too much to ask and..." I quickly interject, "Nothing will ever be too much to ask where you and our little boy are concerned. I would go to the ends of the world for you both, so being friendly with that guy is a small price to pay," she gets up from the couch then sits on my lap before kissing my lips slowly.

"You are an amazing man, Ntuthuko. We are so blessed to have you in our lives," I shake my head.

"I'm the one who is blessed and grateful to have you in my life. MaHlomuka, having you in my life has opened these doors I always thought were shut for a man like me. I will love you forever," she has absolutely no idea what being with her has done for me. I have

spoken about things I swore to take to the grave; I am in the process of using my real surname because she made me realize that I needed to have a relationship with my father before it was too late. She made me want to be a better man because she brought a little boy into my life who looks up to me and loves me.

"My heart has found its home, I'm with you until God calls us back," loving someone who loves you back is the best feeling ever.

"So, did you get the animals that you wanted?" She asks and I nod.

Yesterday my father and I went to find goats and cows that are needed for Saturday. He is not only paying inhlawulo but he's also paying lobola for me so I can be able to use his surname.

"Yes, we did. Even though baba made us go from place to place. We also got vegetable's and on Friday we will only go buy drinks," I say and she nods her understanding.

"It's going to be a party," she says, dancing with her shoulders and hands.

I'm so excited, I just want to see myself calling my rightful surname. I will be at peace knowing that I finally belong, also because I can marry my woman as a man who knows exactly who he is. Our children will not have a borrowed surname like I did up until now.

"So you and Singa are driving on Friday after school, right?" She nods.

"Yeah and I haven't booked a place to sleep. I need to get that done by tonight," I narrow my eyes at her and she raises an eyebrow.

"My father's house has room for you and Singabakhe, MaHlomuka. You will sleep there with my boy," she smiles.

"Oh, okay. That's still fine. I will start at Ballito to drop our bags then head to Tongaat to help out with the preparations. I cannot just show up on Saturday, your mother's side of the family will think I'm not wife material," I am thrown into a fit of laughter.

"Please don't break a nail while playing Makoti. I pay so much for those plastics," she hits my shoulder playfully.

One thing about my girlfriend is that she makes me feel like a man, even before we knew that I am the son of a rich white man.

Nhlelozenkosi takes the money I give her even though she makes her own; she even tells me what she's going to do with the money and she always counts her nails.

"You can't be calling my nails plastic, babe. These are dick grabbers," kahleni bo!

I'm smiling like a fool, she just made my dick twitch, craving the grabbing she's talking about right now.

"Who is going to marry your naughty self?" I ask and she giggles.

"Uhm, some colored guy from the village. He's such a lucky guy, don't you think?" I'm about to kiss her when a knock comes through the door. I cuss under my breath as Nhlelozenkosi gets off me and gives the person permission to enter.

Nomafu walks in looking nervous, I wasn't expecting to see her at all. She has been communicating directly with my father about everything. She greets us and we respond and show her where to sit. Nhlelo rushes to the kitchen to make her something to drink while they make small talk about the weather. Thank God that she's here right now, I wouldn't even know where to begin with Nomafu. Yes, I am going to ask for a sit down with her and have a conversation about all that happened in the past, but besides that I have nothing to talk to her about.

Nhlelo comes back with a tray that has juice and assorted biscuits, Nomafu says thank you and my woman comes to sit next to me.

"I'm sorry for showing up unannounced," she says, looking at MaHlomuka, she's avoiding my eyes.

"It's okay. You would have missed us though if you came an our from now," I say, hoping that it will make her relax. I know there's a lot that she did to me but there's a lot that happened to her for her to do those things to me. Being a cold bastard towards her won't help our situation at all.

"Oh, yes. We have to go get Singabakhe from school in an hour," Nhlelo adds, looking at her wrist watch.

"You have a handsome young boy," I smile.

My biggest enemy would soften me up by just mentioning my boy in a good way.

"Thank you, ma," -Nhlelo.

Nomafu washes down the biscuit with the juice, "Ntuthuko, when are you leaving for Tongaat?" she asks, sounding nervous.

I know I was John Wick in this village but there's really no need for her to be so stiff around me. But I guess I have to understand because I have scared her before.

"I'm going to my father on Thursday, I'll show face in Tongaat the same day," I explain and she nods.

"If that's the case, can I please ask for a lift," she says, "If it's no bother, I don't want to..."

I quickly cut in, "It's no bother, I can give you a ride," her shoulders sag in relief. Do I frighten her that much?

"Thank you. So what time do you want to leave?"

"Around 9am," she nods, looking at me this time. She's relaxing a little.

"I will be ready,"

"Who will you leave you husband with?" I ask without even thinking about it.

Nomafu is blinking rapidly, shocked that I asked after the man I hate the most. I don't even know why I asked, why I care.

"Uhm, I don't have anyone helping me with him. I cannot miss what's happening on Saturday and I don't want to show up like I'm a visitor. He will have to manage without me there, I'll leave enough food for the weekend," for the first time she's choosing me over that man. I never thought I'd live to see this day.

MAWANDE DUMA

Believe it or not this was my first time on a plane and I loved every minute of it, I have always wanted to experience being thirty thousand feet above sea level. As much as I've traveled with my parents, we never flew because they preferred road trips as we got to bond as a family. I have Msebe to thank for making this dream of mine come true. We landed at OR Tambo a while ago and right now we are in an Uber headed to the hotel. It's night but the lights are illuminating in different colors, maMokwena did say it's Jozi Maboneng. I cannot wait to explore it during the day.

"Welcome to the richest square mile in Africa, baby," Msebe says and I am failing to pick my jaw.

"Wow, it's really beautiful," he opens his door and climbs out, I do the same while looking around. He and the driver take out our bags from the boot, he thanks the guy then wheels our bags towards the entrance. We are staying at DaVinci hotel and suites, this place doesn't look cheap. We go straight to the reception and he checks us in, I'm right by his side. The receptionist is very kind, she has the

perfect smile for this job. She gives Msebe the keys to our room and we head towards the elevator.

"Do you want room service tonight or should we change and come back down to eat at the restaurant?" He asks and I bite my lower lip.

"Uhm, how about we shower and order room service. We can go out for lunch tomorrow baby," he nods.

"Anything my Queen wants," I pout my lips, trying to hide my smile.

The elevator doors ping open and my heart drops into my stomach. I didn't think I'd bump into anyone I know while here, let alone my cousin. She's going to call her mother.

"Haibo! Are my eyes seeing right?" she says, rubbing both her eyes, "Mawande!" she claps once, laughing.

"Yes, Ndongoloza," she looks at me from head to toe then moves to Msebeyelanga.

"Right, he's the only reason a person like you can step foot in such a place," she insults me and I just smile. I've grown a thick skin over the years, the venom that comes out of their mouth no longer paralyzes me.

"A person like me cannot afford to bring themselves here because people like you have taken over everything that belongs to a person like me," I say, softly and Msebe coughs a little next to me. My cousin has an eyebrow raised.

"You've grown some wings," she keeps on disturbing the elevator doors from closing.

"Can you please step out so we can make our way up. My woman is tired," Msebe says and Ndongoloza rolls her eyes.

She walks out and Msebe ushers me in first and follows behind with our bags.

"I hope you're not allergic to Egyptian cotton," she says with an evil smile.

"Sisi, you don't have any class. The expensive clothes and hotels can't hide that," my boyfriend says and Ndongoloza looks like she was just hit with baby poop in the face. The elevator doors close and the car moves up.

"Don't let her ruin your mood babe," he says and I laugh.

"Trust me, nothing can kill my vibe," he holds up his hand and I high five him.

"That's the spirit baby," we step out of the elevator car into the hallway and make our way to our room; Msebeyelanga is stealing glances at me like he's nervous about something.

We stop outside the door and he unlocks it then steps to the side for me to walk in first.

I gasp in shock, immediately turning and finding him behind me with a smile on his face.

"Babe, are we in the right room?" I ask and he comes closer to me, taking my hands into his and bringing them up to his lips to kiss my knuckles.

"Yes, we are in the right room," his eyes are twinkling.

"This looks amazing, sthandwa sami," he leads me further into the room and I feel so loved right now, "I have to take pictures," he nods vigorously.

"I should have taken a video to capture your surprise," I giggle, taking my phone out of my handbag. These pictures are so beautiful, I cannot wait to show Nhlelo.

He pulls me to him and circles his arms around my waist, "I wanted to make up for the day I took your virginity, you deserved a special

night and I pray this whole trip does the trick," tears are burning my eyes, I wasn't expecting this at all.

"You're one of a kind, Msebe. I am a lucky girl," I say and he kisses me passionately.

"I am a lucky guy, Wande. You don't complain or demand, you take what you're given and be so grateful for it. You deserve the world, themba lami. Thank you for drinking more than you should have back at the lodge and telling me how you felt. Thank you for always being so honest with me about everything. Mawande Duma, they don't make them like you anymore. I love you so much baby, it's an honor to be called your man," I'm crying, real tears. I already love him with my heart and soul, what more can I give him after saying these words.

"I have shown you my heart, Msebe. You know you don't have to wonder with me," he is nodding in agreement.

"That's very true, I don't question my position in your life and your heart. I'm going to marry you one day, Mthombeni," he says, caressing my face. Our eyes are locked, communicating things only our souls can understand.

"Let's toast," he says, letting me go and going to take out the champagne from the ice bucket that's on the stand. He pops the bottle and pours in the first glass, hands it to me then pours his own.

"To a beautiful future together," I click my glass with his.

"Cheers," we take a sip from our glasses.

"Do you want to soak in the tub with your man?" He asks and I nod.

"Yes, please," he holds out his hand and I take it. Msebe leads us to the bathroom and it's also decorated with roses and candles, there's another bottle of champagne. I notice two pairs of morning slippers on the floor and white robes hanging up.

"When did you plan all this?" I ask.

"When I was booking, I asked them for this," he is so romantic, I love this for me.

I drink my champagne as he fills the tub with water and pours bubble bath and salts.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 53

MAWANDE DUMA

If anyone told me a year ago that this would be my life, I would have laughed at the person. I thought I will never amount to anything and I would die being a slave to aunt Nobantu and her children. But look at God in my life, when he shows up he definitely shows off. I am in Johannesburg with the most amazing man to sign my bursary contract with the most prestigious law firm in the country. Dreams delayed are not dreams denied, I am living proof of this and glory be to the almighty.

This opportunity is big and I'm going to do everything in power not to mess it up, in five years time I will be a qualified lawyer. I'll use what I've learned to fight for all that belongs to me, aunt Nobantu will feel the heat.

Last night was perfect, I fell deeper in love with Msebeyelanga. It was a night of passion, we made love and spoke about our hopes and dreams for the future. Our dreams align, we are on the same page about majority of things and where we had a difference in opinion we spoke of how we could both compromise; that showed me that we were meant to be together.

This morning I was woken up with breakfast in bed, he ordered room service just like last night and it was delicious. I can definitely live like that forever and ever for as long as it is with him.

The Uber just dropped us off outside Motaung Attorneys in Randburg, the building is big and modern and the staff parking lot is full of expensive cars. They must really pay their employees very well. Msebeyelanga is with me, he will wait at the reception while I go to the conference room. We walk inside and head straight to the reception, the lady behind the desk tells me that I should go to the second floor and I'll see the conference center with other recipients. Msebe wishes me good luck and I go to the elevators.

I get to the second floor and step into the hallway, there's a conference center in front of me, it's all glass so I can see everything going on inside. There are about eight or nine other recipients already waiting, I'm nervous as hell. I push the door open and walk inside before greeting everyone. They are kind enough to respond to my greeting, thank God coz it would have been awkward if they just ignored me. I take the vacant chair at the corner of the table. Everyone is looking at their phones so I take mine out and find a text from my aunt. Ndongolozza must have been in touch and told her she bumped into me and my boyfriend.

AUNT NOBANTU: YOU'LL ONLY BE GOOD ENOUGH TO TAKE TO HOTELS, HE HAS TURNED YOU INTO HIS MATTRESS.
DON'T COME BACK HERE PREGNANT, MAWANDE!

I mentally roll my eyes, I don't have time for her nonsense and insults. I mean this is the same woman who is living with a younger

guy, someone she should be seeing as a little brother. As if that's not bad enough she calls him Baba, jokes on her. Her text doesn't even shake me, I'm not at her mercy anymore. She can make all the noise she wants and I won't be moved by any of it. Let her focus on her toy boy, her thief of a son and the air head Ndongoloza. She honestly doesn't have to concern herself with anything that has to do with me.

The door opens and two men and a lady walk in laughing about something. The old guy in the front is too hot not to notice, just look at his salt and pepper beard and hair cut. He has a wedding band on his finger, his wife is a lucky woman. Msebe better age like this man right here. I put my phone away and give these people my attention.

"Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to Motaung Attorneys, we are glad that you all could make it today," we all respond to his greeting nervously, "So uhm, my name is Molemo Motaung. I am the managing partner of the firm. This lady next to me is Mrs Amukelani Nkovani-Sisulu, she joined our team not so long ago. She is still somewhat fresh from university so she knows the struggles, because of that she has volunteered her time to help out with our bursary and mentorship programme. She is still a lawyer but she wants to do more to make the journey easier for you guys and the firm as we want to help you become the best lawyers after us," we all clap.

"This gentleman here is Mr Vusi Khumalo, he is one of our baddest. He has been working here for the longest time, fresh from university as well. He was wet behind the ears when he first came, I showed him the ropes and he became the best. We hope that you all turn out to be sharks like him. Mr Khumalo and a couple of other lawyers have promised to take a student each to mentor while in school. We want you guys to have real experience so when you are done with

your qualification you are familiar with the industry," that's amazing, they are equipping us right from the beginning.

"Amukelani, can you please explain the terms of their contracts and benefits," he says to the beautiful tall lady who doesn't look much older than me. I cannot wait to be standing like her addressing new blood.

"Hello everyone. Firstly, let me congratulate you all. This bursary is the best you could have received, we aren't just sending you to school only to wave goodbye when you are done. Our bursary will pay for your tuition, accommodation, groceries, study material and we will offer you mentorship. That means you'll be mentored by different lawyers who are working in different brunches of the law. You will get the chance to see them in action and ask questions, do some practical work for them and learn real law work while studying. This will equip you for the future, I wish I had that when I was still studying," this is an opportunity of a life time, I am close to tears right now. I don't have to worry about anything while in school, all I have to do is focus on my books. "You will also do your articles here with us and be employed permanently," we all gasps in shock, "That's if you pass, and very well that is," she picks up a stack of papers and starts calling out names, she hands each of us our contracts and asks us to go to page 5.

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I am super excited and hyped up for next year, I cannot wait to move here and start studying. I am going to do my absolute best to pass all my modules with 70% or higher so they can continue funding me, and be employed after graduation. That's all they ask from us, 70% and above on all tests and exams for everything they give you. That's honestly a small price to pay if you ask me.

After they explained everything we signed our contracts then we were offered refreshments and given gift bags. It was nothing big, just a coffee mug, key holder, flash drive, a pen and diary for next year; all branded Motaung Attorneys.

"Baby,"

"Mmhh," I respond, still closing my eyes with my head on his shoulder. I am day dreaming about the future.

"I have a surprise for you," he says and I quickly sit up straight with a smile on my face.

"I love your surprises," he chuckles then leans in to peck my lips.

"We won't go in but I just wanted you to at least see it," I narrow my eyes, what is he talking about now.

"See what?" he looks out the window and the Uber suddenly comes to a stop.

"Come," he opens the door and I follow him out with curiosity. We are at the University of the Witwatersrand, can Msebe be anymore thoughtful? I didn't even think about coming here, I was just so excited about the contract.

"Baby," I whisper and he's smiling, proud of himself.

"Pose for the camera," I'm blushing as he snaps pictures of me with his phone.

"This is where you'll be studying in about four months time. I'm so proud of you, Wande," I am starring at the building in front of me feeling all sorts of emotions. This is really my life, I am finally going to make something of it. I will no longer be Mawande the shopkeeper, I hope my parents are proud of me.

"Thank you for being here with me and cheering me on like this, it really means a lot to know that I'm not alone anymore," he places a hand on the small of my back.

"Allow me to spoil you rotten," he says and I narrow my eyes.

"How rotten?" He throws his head back and laughs.

"So rotten I cannot even explain,"

"I am up for that," he kisses my forehead before we go back into the waiting Uber.

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This has been the best day of my life. I am so happy, beyond happy and blessed. Msebe and I went to some Asian restaurant called Tang in Mandela Square, he reserved a table for us while I was in the conference room. The food was amazing and we even tried oysters and hated it. We laughed at each other so much at our reactions from tasting it, I'm glad we have a video for memories. The waitress said we should give it a couple more tries and we will start to enjoy the taste. After eating we went shopping and I'm still shocked, he really spoiled me rotten. I have never bought so many clothes in my life, we went from shop to shop. I tried telling him it was enough but he kept insisting that I needed more. I'm going to need a big suitcase to fit everything. As if that wasn't enough he tricked me into going to iStore, saying he needed an upgrade because his phone was acting up. After paying for the same phone he had in his pocket, Msebe handed it to me, saying it will take better pictures to send to him. I cried in that store, I was so overwhelmed. I didn't expect him to spend so much money on me. He kept saying I deserve everything and more, that I'm the first woman who gives him everything without asking for things in return.

"Your ass is amazing in those jeans," he says, sipping his champagne. I am modeling my new clothes for him while he's relaxing on the bed, taking a video with my new phone.

I spank myself, "I think so too," he chuckles.

"Haibo! Who are you and what have you done to my sweet innocent girlfriend?" He asks playfully.

"Uhm, this is the Jozi Wande. An up and coming baddie, I'm practicing for next year," I say and he raises an eyebrow.

"Oh madam, I will drag your sexy ass back to Mzumbe right this minute," I look at him and roll my eyes, he huffs then places the flute on the bedside table before getting on his feet.

"Sisi, did you just roll your eyes at me?" He asks and I press my lips into a thin line, trying to hide my smile. That's futile because my eyes are smiling instead.

"No, answer me sis baddie," I roll my eyes again and he places the phone down, stares at me for a few seconds before picking me up bridal style and spinning me around.

I am laughing with my head thrown back. "Baby, I'm dizzy. Please stop,"

"Oh so you know how to be respectful?" He throws me on the bed and quickly gets on top of me, kissing my lips hungrily.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 54

SPONSORED BY BOH.M

DEDANI MKHIZE

There's no peace in this house, the contractors are working from seven in the morning to seven in the evening; I can't even hear myself think in my own home. Hlubi told me that they will even be working weekends to stay on schedule, can you imagine?

Madlabantu asked me to come see him because we have something important to talk about face to face. I'm driving to Mbumbulu in a few minutes and from there I'll go see my mother. It has been a while since I went home, plus I want to be away from the chaos in this house. The door opens and Nomahlubi walks into our bedroom.

"Why are you packing?" She asks, eyes widened.

"Uhm, I won't be home for the whole weekend," she raises an eyebrow and I heave a sigh.

"I'm going home to see my mother, it has been long since I've been there," she chuckles.

"You didn't think to tell me before now?" She asks with an attitude and I offer her a lopsided smile.

"I thought that's how we do things in this marriage now. I mean you told me that you're moving your mother here without discussing it with me first. You even started the renovations knowing I wasn't on board," I say, shrugging my shoulders and the hostility in her eyes disappears.

"Mkhize, my love. I have said sorry so many times. What more do you want me to do?" She is defeated but I don't care. She started this so she must be able to deal with me throwing it back at her.

"I don't want you to do anything, continue doing as you please. I don't want to stand in the way of you running this household as its head," she closes her eyes, pained by my statement.

I zip my bag and put it down, "I'll see you on Sunday," I wheel my suitcase past her and she holds my arm.

"Dedani, please don't go. Let's sit down and talk about everything," tears are glistening in her eyes.

"Talk about finding a good nursing home for your mom?" I ask and she swallows hard, that's my answer.

"Bye, Nomahlubi."

I pass the guys hard at work down stairs and head to my waiting car, my phone chimes as I put my bag in the boot. I take it out of my pocket and it's a bank notification, Londeka deposited some of the money I sent her back. Why the fuck would she give it back? What kind of woman is this? I honestly don't understand Londeka, she just numbs every part of my body. An sms from her comes through before I can dial her number.

She's telling me that the money I just received is what was left after she bought everything that was needed for the house and for her siblings.

We went to view the house on Tuesday and she loved it, the offer went through and we are only waiting for the transfer of property. I paid the agent something on the side to make sure that everything moves quickly. Londeka's family is not comfortable where they are staying at the moment and she's stressed over that. When Londeka is stressed she's impossible to deal with, I need her calm and happy. I call her number but she doesn't answer, instead she sends me another text that asks what I want. I don't respond, I will try her again later.

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I am sitting on the reed mat in Madlabantu's rondavel, he's humming a song while grinding some muti. We have been sitting like this for some time and I'm annoyed now but I know better than to rush the man. He will start talking when he is ready, I just have to sit and patiently wait for that to happen. He pours the muti into a container then walks out of the rondavel chanting things I cannot make out. My mother must be calling my phone to find out where I am, I should have long been home and spending time with her. I just hope she doesn't call Nomahlubi to ask where I am, that wife of mine will start a fight. Lately she's just someone I don't understand nor like, I'm even starting to question our relationship.

"Yah, Mkhize," he says, walking back inside.

Something about how he said those two words sends chills down my spine.

"Madlabantu, is everything okay?" I cannot even make small talk, I've been anxious since our call yesterday evening.

"On my side, yes. I'm not sure how you'll receive the news I have for you," I narrow my eyes. That doesn't sound good.

"What news?" I shift uncomfortably.

Madlabantu heaves a sigh, "Isilwane sakho came to see me, it wants me to relay a message to you and hear what you have to say," oh fuck, what is it now?

"I'm listening,"

He laughs, "You were told that with time the type of sacrifices required will change," I nod in agreement. I know what I got myself into, he was kind enough to explain everything in detail.

"Well isilwane sakho asked me to tell you that it no longer wants a woman, it has had too much sex," he says with a smile and I narrow my eyes.

"Okay, what does it want?" He smiles and those yellow teeth makes me vomit in my mouth.

"Innocent blood," he says in a deep voice.

Not this again, "My unborn child? Is Nomahlubi pregnant?" I ask with a heavy heart. Remembering how I had to give up my first child for riches.

"No, she's not pregnant. But you need to make sure that she falls pregnant soon. Isilwane wants blood of a soul that has never set foot in this wicked world," I rub my eyes.

"I hear you, Madlabantu. I have a question though," he nods, "How frequent will this sacrifice be required?" He looks behind him as if he's listening to someone, he keeps nodding and saying he understands.

"Well, it says blood of an innocent soul will keep it happy for a very long time and it will reward you more than it ever has," things between Hlubi and I aren't good right now. I can get her pregnant and when she miscarries I will blame it on her taking care of her mother and not taking it easy for our child. That will surely have her sending the old hag to a nursing home.

"It's not like a have a choice," he roars with laughter and I just roll my eyes.

I signed a deal with the devil, if I don't do what it wants then all the money and power vanishes. I'll be left with nothing and living like a dog until it finally kills me.

NTUTHUKO GALLOWAY

I am so overwhelmed, I never thought this day would come. I am finally calling my rightful surname, I am at peace now. A part of me healed today and I'm grateful to God and my ancestors for not turning their backs on me and for bringing my father and I together.

Inhlawulo and lobola were paid early this morning, my father's delegates made sure that everything went on smoothly. Since his own family wants nothing to do with him and his black children, he had to find people to help him out. Vivian's step-father came with his brothers to stand as my father's family. Baba told me that my sister's mother and him are close friends but I didn't think the husband was part of the mix too. It's actually nice that there isn't any bad blood between the two men, it would have put my sister in an awkward position.

I had to excuse myself because I was at the verge of crying in front of people. I mean something ticked inside of me when I realized that all these people came to celebrate with me, that everyone is gathered for me and not because I beat someone to a pulp.

I'm ready and excited to start this journey as a new man, today is all about me being reborn as a better version of myself. From here onwards I'll be a better partner, father, son, brother and human being.

The front passenger door of my car opens and my eyes shoot open too, Nhlelozenkosi climbs in wearing the most beautiful smile. My forever gorgeous Queen.

"Hello, Mr Edward Galloway," she says.

That's the name my father gave me, he named me after his mother's father. Baba says his grandfather was a great man who taught him all life lessons. He told me that the most important thing his grandfather always said to him was, be kind to everyone. Those words didn't

miss his mother because she was able to be kind to my father and Vivian's mother when they needed it the most. She helped to provide a roof over their heads during a difficult time.

"That's me, baby," she giggles.

"Why are you hiding in here? It's your party," she says and I heave a sigh.

"I needed a minute alone to digest everything," she clasps my hand.

"Everything is beautiful. I'm so happy for you, Megalo," she throws me into a fit of laughter.

"You're stupid, yazi," she sticks out her tongue.

"You still need a second alone?" She asks and I shake my head.

"No babe, we can go back," we both climb out of the car and head inside the yard hand in hand. My aunts and their children start ululating when we appear from the corner of the house and everyone laughs. They liked Nhlelo from the minute she walked in yesterday. I was told not to waste time in making her my wife.

Everyone has their own circle and they are in deep conversations, each with a beverage of their choice in hand. My parents are sitting with my aunt's, Vivian's mother and her husband as well as his brothers and also the elders in my mothers family.

I wonder how my father feels about having two of his chocolate chips in one circle, I'd be so awkward.

My cousins are with their friends in their own circle too and they are having the time of their lives, one is using her car to play music. My circle is just my woman, her brother and Mawande. Vivian hasn't arrived yet, something unforeseen delayed her. Then it's just the neighbors who were invited and those that invited themselves

"Where is Singa?" I ask, looking around.

"Oh panic mechanic," MaHlomuka jokes and the couple laughs. I don't feel comfortable when I don't see him running around. He got lost once and we were lucky I found him.

"He is inside watching TV with your cousins kids," she says with a smile and I'm relieved.

"Hey, Edward," Vivian mummurs from behind me and I smile, standing up from my chair.

"Viv, you finally made it," we share a hug.

My sister is the reason why this is all happening. If she didn't go to our father to tell him what the sangoma said then we wouldn't have found each other.

"I'm sorry, an emergency happened at work. I even had to take the kids with me," she says and I totally understand.

"Let me introduce you," I say.

"Hello, sister in law," she says to Nhlelo and hugs her from behind before greeting Mawande and Msebe.

"Viv, this is Nhlelo's big brother, Msebe. That is his girlfriend, a sister God gave me when life was tough. Her name is Mawande. Guys, this is my sister Vivian," they shake hands and exchange pleasantries.

"Oh Viv, guess who Mawande lives with in the yard," this is us gossiping now.

"Tell me already," I laugh.

"Well, she lives with her aunt and her toy boy who happens to be your ex husband," I say and she gasps in complete shock.

"Shut up! Are you serious?" I laugh, nodding my head.

"You are Sqalo's ex wife?" Wande asks, she's also knocked for six.

"Yes, I give all the glory to God that it ended. He is your aunt's problem now," they all laugh.

"Haibo! Vivian, aren't you coming to greet us?" Her mother shouts.

"Edward, please organize something for me to drink. I heard you and dad bought the whole bottle store, I'll be back just now," I wink at her and she walks towards our parents.

"How does Sqalo leave such a gorgeous woman for my aunt?" Mawande asks then claps once!

"He didn't leave Viv. She threw him out after she found out that he wanted to sleep with her niece," they all gasp in shock.

"Sick bastard," Msebe says, disgusted.

"He has been sending Vivian messages asking that they fix their marriage, he is begging her to go to marriage counseling," my sister told him to go fuck himself. I am glad that she knows her worth.

"That time my aunt is busy calling him baba," Nobantu doesn't fear anything.

"Chile, she's brave," my girlfriend says then flips her weave back. Turns me on every time.

"Mommy," Singabakhe jumps on MaHlomuka.

"Yes, Singa," she responds and I ruffle his hair.

"Can I please have sweets," he is giving her those puppy eyes. He knows Nhlelo is strict when it comes to sugar intake.

"Ask your ntwana. He is the one who feeds you sweets angithi?" I knew that was coming.

"Daddy, can I please have sweets. I want enough to share with the others," he says and MaHlomuka quickly looks at me and I'm frozen on the spot. A part of me has always wanted him to call me baba but

I didn't want to tell him to do so. I didn't want to cause any drama with that Xhosa lunatic.

"It's your last treat for the day, okay?" He nods vigorously and I take him from Nhlelozenkosi.

"Daluxolo is going to explode," Msebe says as I walk away with my boy.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 55

SPONSORED BY DITSHWANELO

NDONDOLOZA DLADLA

I have been trying Dedani's number since I landed but it's ringing until voicemail, I texted him but he doesn't respond. I am worried now because he promised to pick me up at the airport but didn't show up; I had to request an Uber to take me to my place. He doesn't like me using these cabs for safety reasons but he can't get mad at me because he's the one who didn't show up. I was really hoping to spend the night with him, it has been so long since Dedani and I were intimate. He doesn't touch me or look at me like he used to, it hurts but I told myself that I won't rush him. We had a rough patch this year and he is still trying to trust me again after all that I did. What I know is that he loves me and wants to make this relationship work between us.

The Uber stops outside the gate and I roll my window down to place my thumb on the biometric access machine to open the gate. My fingerprint is not recognized so I wipe my thumb and try again but it's the same response. I know my hands have been touching expensive

brands for the last couple of days in Sandton, but jeez my fingers still carry my print. I try again and cuss out in frustration, what the fuck is happening here? The security guard appears from the office at the gate and approaches the car.

"What's going on here?" He asks, narrowing his eyes.

"Hello, I live here. 25 C," I say and he nods.

I don't recognize this guy, he must be new.

"Are you Ndongoloza Dladla ?" I roll my eyes.

What's it to him?

"That's me, yes. Is something wrong with this machine?" I ask and he heaves a heavy sigh.

"No, ma'am. The machine works very well," clearly not! Can't he see I'm not getting access?

I place my finger and it denies again, "Something is obviously wrong with it. Can you please open up, I am tired," he shakes his head.

"Unfortunately I cannot do that because the person who leased the apartment told us not to open for you," that's absurd.

"Dude, I am the one who leased the apartment. What the hell are you talking about?" He pulls his beard, he is so going to lose this job. Does he have any idea who he is messing with right now?

"Sisi, a man named Dedani Mkhize leased the apartment. He came here and told us not to allow you inside, he ordered us to remove your print from the system. On Thursday he came with a moving truck and loaded your things, wait here a second" is he joking me? Dedani would never do that to me. "Here, he told us to give you this card. That's where he kept your things," I don't understand, what's going on here?

"There has to be some kind of mistake, let me call him," I say and he exclaims something.

"Sisi, I am on the job. I can't be camping outside with you like this," the Uber driver says, looking at me through the review mirror.

"I will pay you for your time, please just wait," I say in a deep voice caused by the tears I don't want to shed.

I dial Dedani's number and it rings until voicemail, I try again and when I'm about to hang up he picks up.

"Yebo, Ndongoloza," he answers.

"Baby, I am outside the apartment and they won't let me in. They say you told them not to, that you moved my things out. What's happening Dedani? I don't understand,"

He heaves an exasperated sigh, "What is it that you don't understand?" Why does he sound so cold.

"You got me this place, why are you saying they shouldn't let me in? What's happening?" I fail to keep my tears in this time.

"I don't want you living in my apartment anymore because you are nothing to me. Go back to your mother, Ndongoloza. There's nothing left for you in Durban sisi," it feels like someone is ripping my heart out of my chest.

Why is he saying all of this to me?

"Dedani, it's me, Ndongoloza," I whimper.

"Udume ngani?" I gasp in shock, tears streaming down my face.

"Did I do something to make you mad? If I did please forgive me, I will do anything you want just don't do this to me," he huffs out a humorless laugh.

"Listen, your time in my life has come to an end. Don't ever call this number again, don't try to come to my office or my house to beg me.

Stay far away from me," I am shaking like a leaf, "I am going to send you a number. Call that person when you're ready to pick up your car," with that said he hangs up.

Somebody please wake me up from this nightmare, it has to be one because the Dedani I know wouldn't do this to me; he loves me too much to hurt me this way.

"I cannot park here the whole day listening to you cry. It's either you tell me where to take you next or climb out of this car," the driver says angrily. Doesn't he have a heart?

I am trying to make sense of what's happening to me right now and he is being an asshole.

"Uhm, Can you...please take me to the nearest hotel," I say and he starts the engine and makes a U-turn. I am watching the apartment with tears streaming down my face as he drives off.

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Where do I go from here? I didn't sleep a wink last night, Dedani's words kept ringing in my head. I cannot believe that he is doing this to me, after everything we have been through together. All night I kept asking myself if he ever truly loved me; I kept asking myself what I did for him to treat me so badly. I kept calling his phone last night hoping he answers but he ignored me and when he finally answered around 2am he swore at me I felt myself on fire; he called me with every nasty thing in the book. My heart is beyond broken, I never thought a man I love would hurt me this badly.

A knock on my door comes through, the person on the other side tells me that it's past check out time. I didn't have enough money in

my account, I only managed to pay for one night. I used everything Dedani gave me in Sandton because I thought I'd get more when I got back. He has always told me to never worry about money, that he will always take care of me. What am I going to do with my life now?

The person tells me that I only have five more minutes to leave the room or they will remove me themselves. I have been humiliated enough, I don't need people taking videos of me and posting on Twitter.

I slowly get up from the bed and head to the bathroom to wash my face and pee. The room is still in the state I found it, I just walked in yesterday and threw myself on the bed.

I am wheeling my two big suitcases out of the hotel, they are full of brand new designer clothes and accessories. Dedani spoiled me so much only to dump me when I came back; who does that really? Who makes a girl feel like a princess one minute and a one dollar hoe the next? Dedani is cruel.

I find a bench for me to sit down and call the number he sent me yesterday, I need my car to be able to drive to Mzumbe. That's the last place I want to go to but I don't have a choice, I have no one in Durban to take me in while I figure things out. Dedani didn't want me to have friends, it was only Londeka and in the end I ended our friendship. Speaking of Londeka, it looks like she was right about Dedani this entire time. She was never jealous of my relationship, she just saw right through him. I lost a sister because of a man who ended up taking my heart and crashing it.

The guy answered my call and told me he will bring my car to me here at the hotel in thirty minutes.

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This drive reminds me of when I found out that Dedani married Hlubi on the day of my graduation party, I was devastated to say the least. God, why did I ignore all the red flags with that man? He has always shown me who he is but I chose not to see because of the love I have for him. What kills me the most is knowing that I would go back to him running if he told me to; despite everything he did and said to me. I pity myself for loving a man more than I love and appreciate myself; I made Dedani my lifeline and now that it's over I feel something choking the life out of me. Jesus, it hurts so bad.

With every kilometer I cover my heart wrenches because I am scared to get home and tell my mother what happened. I won't be able to lie because I already look like a mess from all the crying and my clothes will be brought to me tomorrow. She will see that something is wrong, my mother will put two and two together and realize that things between Dedani and I are over. I am not looking forward to seeing the disappointment in her eyes, she wanted this relationship to work out. We are going to be the laughing stock of Mzumbe, they will drink tea in our name.

As absent minded as I was during the drive from Durban to Mzumbe I made it home safely. There were times I was wishing for a truck to push me off the road and I die instantly so I don't feel this pain, but as much as what I'm going through is devastating I could never take my life for a man who is happy. After how he insulted me, Dedani wouldn't even be moved by my death, he would find my replacement if he hasn't already.

I park my car in the yard and rest my forehead on the steering wheel. I am scared to go inside and hurt my mother's heart, she's already going through a lot with the Qophelo situation. I don't want to be another problem or a burden to her, she hoped I would be the child that makes her proud always. I take a deep breath and open the door and get out of the car. I drag my feet towards the door, my chest is closing in on me but I still manage to breathe.

I open the door and there's no one in the kitchen, the TV is playing in the lounge so maybe they are in there. I take a deep breath and walk towards the lounge, I cannot keep my tears in so I allow them to fall. I stand at the door and they both look my way, panic flashes through my mother's eyes. She quickly gets up from the couch and comes to me.

"Ndondo, what's going on?" She asks. My knees are suddenly too weak to carry me so I sink down to the floor, "Haibo! What's wrong? You are scaring me," I wail painfully, clutching at my chest like that will ease the intense pain that I'm feeling.

"It hurts so bad, mama. What did I do to deserve this?" She's brushing my back in circles, "He won't even tell me what I did for him to do this. I just want him to tell me so I can at least understand," it feels like someone is constantly punching me in the stomach.

"I don't understand, please talk to me," she says softly.

"Babe, help her sit on the couch. I'll go make her sugar water so long," Sqalo says, hurrying past us at the door.

My mother helps me up and leads me to the couch where she settles down next to me.

"You are breaking my heart, Ndongoloza. Please tell me what's wrong, maybe I can make it right," she says and I shake my head.

Dedani told me that he will never get back together with me even if I was the only woman left on the planet. He called me used, rotten goods. I don't know why he would say all those things because he is the only man I have ever been with in this life.

"D-Dedani mama...he hur...he hurt me so bad," I manage to get the words out despite having a huge dry lump clogged in my throat.

"Hurt you how my love?" she asks and Sqalo walks back in with a mug in his hand, he gives it to my mother and she helps me drink.

"I'll give you some privacy," he walks out.

"Ndondo, what did Mkhize do to you? How did he hurt you?" I slowly start narrative everything that happened yesterday, when I'm done my mother is on her feet with both her hands placed on top of her head.

"He can't just end a long term relationship like that. He was invested in it and I saw how much he loves you. I mean he came here and kneeled down for you, begging you. What did you do for him to end things this way?" She asks I shrug my shoulders.

"I also want to know mama. Dedani and I have been cool, happy. I didn't do anything shady in Sandton, I informed him of my every move. I didn't entertain men and I definitely didn't go out to get drunk. I am so confused, hurt," she's pacing up and down.

"Maybe I can get him to open up to me. Give me his number," she takes her phone from the coffee table and I call out the number phone.

The line is trilling, my mother put it on speaker. I just hope that he tells my mom that this was just some prank, that he would never hurt me and he wants no other woman but me.

"Yebo," he answers while laughing.

I can hear that he's walking away from a rowdy group.

"Mkhize, how are you?" My mother is so calm.

"I'm fine thanks, yourself?" The insults he rained on me starts playing in my head again.

"I am not okay, my daughter just arrived home crying. What's going on?" Mama asks and Dedani heaves a sigh.

"Please ask your daughter what I said yesterday," he says, sounding bored as hell.

It's not a prank, it's not a nightmare. Dedani is really done with me.

"She told me what happened. What we don't know is why you did it. Maybe we can drive to Durban and meet at your house to talk ab..."

He quickly interjects, "Weh mama! Don't you dare show up at my house. Do you think my matrimonial home is a playground for desperate girls and their lawless mother's? Keep your stick legs away from my property and don't ever call me again," he roars then hangs up the phone. My mother's jaw is on the floor.

"Ndondoloza, Dedani is married?" She asks and I close my eyes.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 56

NOBANTU DLADLA

My enemies are going to have the time of their life when they hear that Ndondoloza is no longer working and that her relationship with Dedani is over. I went around bragging about my daughter's achievement, I told everyone who was willing to listen how my son in law is a rich businessman. I was already planning the wedding of the century for them and now it turns out that he is already married. Londeka called to tell me about it but I gave her an attitude and

accused her of being jealous of my daughter. What I want to know is why my daughter stayed with that man after he went to marry another woman the same day as her graduation party. Doesn't she know that the woman who comes after is the one who is loved? I mean look at my situation, Sqalo was married with children but he met me and realized that I am his soul mate. I am so disappointed in her, she allowed herself to be used by a man and now she's left with a broken heart and absolutely nothing to her name. I would have poured hot porridge on that bastard had Ndongoloza told me that he married another woman while in a relationship with her.

Yesterday I didn't even have the energy to lash out because she is already going through a lot. I didn't want to rub salt on her fresh wound.

I raised her better than this, I told her to never settle for less and she went to do the opposite. She saw what taking a mans bullshit did to me and to them, why did she subject herself to that? I hope this is a lesson learned, she must have the upper hand in her next relationship.

I am going to vet the next man she brings to my house, I won't just accept a stranger and take his word for the intentions he has for my child.

This has been the worst year since I left Mbumbulu, it's like a dark cloud is following me. My supermarket burned to the ground, Qophelo stole everything from us. I was forced to sleep with the dirtiest man and now my daughter is going through the hardest time in her life. Having your heart broken by a man who was supposed to love and protect you is one of the hardest things to deal with. She will definitely get over the bastard that said I have sticky legs but she will be left with a lifetime scar.

I am sitting outside under the tree, I'm waiting for the moving truck to bring Ndongoloza's things from Durban. I called them earlier this morning and gave them the directions to this place, they said they will arrive today but they weren't sure about the time.

My daughter has been closed up in her bedroom crying since yesterday, there's nothing much I can do to ease the pain. I wanted to protect them from everything but this is one of the things she has to go through in life that's out of my control.

Msebe's car parks at the back gate, the one Mawande uses. I can see everything from sitting under this tree. This girl is really shameless, she went to Sandton without telling me anything and has the nerve to park at my gate with a man that's only using her for sex. I hope Nandi can see the harlot she gave birth to.

They both climb out of the car and go to the boot, a very big suitcase and a medium one are offloaded with a few plastics. I want to laugh at the top of my lungs, she packed all the hand me downs from my daughter for Sandton. Did she think she wasn't coming back to that one room in my backyard? Poor thing.

I watch them carry everything inside the yard and the pair pretends not to see me sitting here, they are disrespectful if you ask me.

My attention is taken away by a truck at my gate. They chose to arrive when that witch Mawande arrived, these bloody idiots. I quickly get on my feet and signal them to drive inside the yard. Once they have reversed in, I go show them Qophelo's room. That's where we will keep everything until she is ready to unpack or maybe she will just throw them back into a moving truck and go back to Durban. We will have a conversation when she is much better because

Ndondoloza is too good for this village. I will not allow her to waste away like the likes of Mawande.

The boxes are full of her clothes, shoes, handbags and some decorative things. Everything is packed neatly, it shows that whoever was packing my child's things wasn't in a hurry. Which makes me believe that Dedani planned this, he might have even sent my child to Sandton to be able to do this without her resistance. He will burn in hell for hurting my Ndondoloza like this.

The guys leave without asking for a payment, it can only mean that the heart breaker has already foot the bill. I decide to go check on my daughter and tell her that her things are home. I start in the kitchen to get water and some pills, she must have a headache from all the crying she has been doing. I open her bedroom and walk in, she's sitting on the bed, eyes closed with tears streaming down her face. Dedani is shouting through the speaker, my whole body freezes as I listen to this man.

"Did you honestly think that a man like me would love and marry you? Sisiza, you aren't that girl that gets the ring. You are something men like myself use, accept that. You're just like your mother, play things. Isn't she shacking up with a toy boy that has a wife and children?" This son of a bitch!

"Dedani, please. I am begging you not to break me this way, Khabazela," hearing her beg this man shatters my heart.

"You are the one breaking yourself by calling me," he answers lightly, "Andile!" He shouts for someone.

"Yes, sir," the person answers him.

"How does one block a number from calling? There's this nuisance that doesn't want to leave me alone," I cannot stand here and listen

to this man take what's left of Ndongoloza. I place the glass of water on the bedside table and pick up the phone from her thigh.

"Lalela la wenja, this is my child and you won't treat her this way. Who raised you?" I am shaking with anger.

"A mother who is nothing like you, thank God for that," he answers and I gasp in shock.

"You know what, go to hell Mkhize,"

He laughs, "I reside there," arrogant piece of shit. I hang up the call and watch my daughter scream in agony, her cries are heart wrenching.

NHLELOZENKOSI NGIDI

I'm so glad it's my lunch break now and I can relax a little before going back to work. I am so tired, this weekend was hectic. Saturday we were in Tongaat and Sunday the festivities were in Ballito, his father's house. Everything went amazing, I am so happy for Ntuthuko. This morning Singa and I had to wake up extremely early to be able to make it to his school on time. We had his uniform because I picked him from school on Friday and drove to Durban. My baby must be tired where he is, I wanted him to miss school but he refused saying school is important. He used my words against me but I'm glad that my teachings are instilled in him at such a tender age. Like my mother would say in Sesotho, "Thupa e kojwa esale metsi", which loosely translates to bending a twig while it's still wet because once it's dry it will break. This means it's never too early for children to learn anything.

I find my mother in the kitchen, peeling potatoes. I know she's about to make chips, her obsession is insane. I greet her and take out a snack from the pantry before pulling out the high chair and settling down. I remember that I didn't tell my mother about what happened on Saturday. I want to hear what she has to say about it because everyone else had the same reaction and comment. I clear my throat dramatically and she looks at me with a raised eyebrow.

"Yes, Nhlelozenkosi. I am waiting for all the details of the past weekend," she says and I laugh.

"The weekend was amazing but I have a highlight," I say and she stops peeling, giving me all her attention.

"Don't tell me someone wanted to ruin Ntuthuko's day," she says and I shake my head.

"No, the person actually made him more happy," he melts each time Singabakhe calls for him, I get emotional too because of how effortless their relationship is.

"Bathong! Nhlelo, must I wait for Jesus to come down before you tell me?" She asks and I want to roll my eyes, I forget that she's a drama Queen sometimes.

"So we are sitting and Singabakhe comes and jumps on me, asking me to give him sweets. I tell him to ask ntwana because Ntuthuko gives him treats however he wants. My son turns and looks at him then goes, "daddy..." My mother covers her mouth with both hands.

"Ntuthuko was shocked for like a second but when it finished processing in his head I could see the joy in his eyes. He loves Singabakhe so much mama and him calling Ntuthuko daddy just filled his heart," I explain with tears burning my eyes. I am so overwhelmed with happiness.

"It was bound to happen, I personally saw it coming. Ntuthuko has been a father to that boy since day one," I totally agree with her.

Daluxolo has never done anything close to what Ntuthuko does for Singabakhe. He doesn't know his child the way my man does.

Ntuthuko is my son's daddy and Daluxolo is just his father because his sperm created him.

"I'm just worried about the Xhosa boys reaction to this," mama laughs.

"I should hire a videographer. I want that caught on camera, he's going to die from a heart attack," I cannot help but join her in laughter, "But in all seriousness, who will his anger be directed to? I mean no one told Singabakhe to call Ntuthuko daddy," that's very true, everyone was shocked.

My phone vibrates in the pocket of my gown, I take it out and it's Daluxolo calling. We talk about him a little and he calls, Satan!

"Hello," I answer after putting it on speaker for mom to hear.

"Nhlelo, unjani?" He asks and I shrug my shoulders.

"All good, unjani wena?" Not that I care, I'm just being polite.

"I'm fine, just busy with work," isn't he always.

I don't respond to that, I wait for him to tell me what he wants, "I am calling because I wanted to ask if you'll be available to meet up with me this weekend to talk about how we are going to co-parent Singabakhe," he says.

"I cannot come to Cape Town..."

He quickly cuts in, "Oh no, I'll come there. I'll book a place in Port Shepstone and we can agree on where to meet up and talk," mama has gone back to peeling but I know she's listening attentively.

"Okay then, we will talk logistics as the week progresses," I agree and he heaves a sigh of relief.

"Yes. Have a good day," this is the first time Daluxolo and I are having such a smooth conversation, it's always Armageddon with us.

"You too, bye," I hang up and look at my mother who has a lopsided smile on her face.

"I want to take Ntuthuko to the meeting with me, is that wise?" I need my mother's guidance on this one.

"He has been doing Daluxolo's job for a while now, he plans to marry you and live with Singabakhe so it's only fair that he goes too,"

I will tell Ntuthuko when he calls me, he said he will ring me when he and his dad are back from Home affairs. They went to apply for his new Identity card.

"Yeah, Daluxolo will have to accept this," mama nods.

"He doesn't have a choice, he is the one who gave another man the chance to be daddy to his own son. Ntuthuko is a peaceful boy he won't even cause drama; just talk to him about what you plan on discussing with Daluxolo and hear what he has to say," I'll do just that.

"Where's Msebeyelanga? I want to ask him to fetch Singabakhe from school," I say.

"He has a meeting in Port Shepstone so I asked him to come home with him," Ntuthuko's life has changed now, he will not always be available to take Singabakhe to school and fetch him, we have to come up with a plan.

"Thank you ma,"

"He asked to talk to me about something very serious when he gets back, do you have any idea what that is?" I shake my head.

Hopefully he's not planning on moving away again.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 57

DEDANI MKHIZE

I wish I didn't have to come back to La Lucia, things between Nomahlubi and I are colder than when I left. I cannot seem to get over the fact that she's not the woman I fell in love with and ended up marrying. She was always so considerate of my feelings and definitely submissive to me as her husband and head of this household. I understand that she's stressed out and only wants the best for her mother but it cannot be at the expense of our marriage. This is not what I envisioned our marriage to be like, I mean we have been married less than a year. This should still be our honeymoon phase, I should be excited about being around my wife not thinking about Londeka the whole freaking time.

Speaking of Londeka, God knows I'm going to lose my mind because of her. I haven't heard a word from her since Friday when she texted me; I have been trying her phone but she doesn't bother answering my calls or texts. I have decided to just let her be for a couple of days then I'm going to show up at the municipal building to talk to her. She started working there this past Monday.

I know I should focus on getting Hlubi pregnant but I can't get Londeka to fall in love with me if I just disappear on her. I have juggled two women before and I'm sure I can do it again. At least Londeka isn't as annoying as Ndongoloza. That one is also another topic on her own, she won't accept that I'm done with her ass. She has been calling me with different numbers so I don't bother answering those anymore.

"Babe, look who's here," Hlubi says and I move my eyes from the TV, I wasn't really watching it because of these million thoughts in my head.

"Ma?" I get on my feet. What is she doing here? "Is everything alright?" She laughs.

"Everything is fine, I just came to visit," I narrow my eyes.

"But Dedani was just there to see you this past weekend," that's my wife, she doesn't seem or sound happy about this.

"Yes, he was. I missed him when he left so I had to come spend some more time with him and you. I haven't seen you since you left after your wifely duties. Plus, you haven't been calling me like you used to," there's some hostility from my mother and I immediately know what's going on. My mother and I are very close and I grew up talking to her about everything and anything. I mentioned the situation with Nomahlubi and I know she came to have a word with my wife. I appreciate this because right now we need to start trying for a baby, I cannot afford to anger isilwane sami.

"You are welcome ma, let me show you to your room," I say and she laughs.

"I hope it's not as dusty and chaotic as the rest of the house," I'm honestly over these renovations, I want my peaceful and neat home back.

"There's nothing happening upstairs so it's very clean, I can assure you mama," Hlubi quickly answers, "I will take the bags up and prepare the room, but let me firstly get you something to drink," she adds, leaving the lounge.

"How was your drive?" I ask as we both settle down on the couch.

"Smooth, the car is really amazing. Your brother even wanted to take it from me but I almost killed him," I laugh, she really loves the Ford Ranger. She was overjoyed when I gave it to her on her birthday.

"Keep that car away from your son, you know he would mess it up so quickly," she nods in agreement.

"So mama, why are you really here?" I inquire and she offers me a mischievous grin.

"I came to make sure that things between you and your wife go back to normal, Dedani. I couldn't just sit and watch her trying to dance on top of your head. Someone needs to remind her that this is the Mkhize household, we married her and not the other way around," oh boy! Mama bear is out to play, there's no stopping her now.

"I swear it's like I knew you'd be coming. I bought hot cross buns today, they are so fresh," Hlubi walks back in with a tray.

"Oh, thank you makoti wami," my mother can eat these buns for breakfast, lunch and supper. She is an addict of note.

"Babe, please help me carry mama's bags upstairs," she says and I nod, getting back up on my feet.

She's leading us upstairs while mumbling something under her breath and shaking her head while at it. I know we are about to have a disagreement right now and I'm not in the mood for any of it. The more she acts like someone I cannot recognize is the more I pull myself back from her and this marriage. I don't want to treat her like Ndongolozza but her attitude is pushing me to it and soon I will snap and all she will be to me is a baby making sacrifice.

"Why didn't you tell me that your mom will be coming babe?" That's the first thing she says as soon as I close the guest bedroom door.

"Because I didn't know, Nomahlubi. You saw I was surprised when you walked in with her didn't you?" I say, dropping the bags down on the floor.

"Well, when is she leaving?" She folds her arms across her chest and I heave a sigh.

"She just got here, I cannot possibly ask her that question," is she insane right now?

"I hope it's soon because my mom will be here with Qaqamba in a few days," she says and I raise an eyebrow.

"You want my mom gone so your family can come here? Nomahlubi, who the hell do you think you are?" I ask and she swallows hard.

"This is a Mkhize household, this is not your family home. You cannot expect me to be welcoming of your mother who has hated me from day one and want me to show my mother the door. A woman who has loved, accepted and treated you like a princess ever since she met you," anger is bubbling in my stomach. I cannot believe this girl.

"Mkhize, I didn't mean it like that," I click my tongue.

"Of course you did. You think your family is more important than mine, forgetting that all of this belong to me. You haven't said thank you to me for paying the hospital bill, a very huge one. You are spending my money on renovating this house, you're doing everything possible for your mother's comfort but here you are fuckin asking me when my mother is leaving when she just got here," her eyeballs are about to fall off, I have never spoken to her like this before.

"Dedani..."

I hold out a hand, "Don't Dedani me," I snap before walking out of the bedroom.

MSEBEYELANGA NGIDI

What I feel for Mawande scares me, sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night with my heart thumping against my chest. I don't think the word love gets close to what I feel, I just use it because it's a word that many understand. Every time I think about the possibility of losing her I feel my chest closing in on me, I find it very difficult to breathe. I have never been more afraid of losing anyone like I am of losing Mawande. This alone has showed me that there will never be anyone else for me in this world. My heart beats for her, she is my lifeline and my home.

I was supposed to have a conversation with my mother on Monday, but I was on a long zoom meeting with the Italian architects. We had to go through what I came up with so far and I'm happy to announce that they are thrilled with my creations. I managed to modernize their building without taking away the originality of the place.

I walk inside the main house shouting for my mother, she shouts back telling me she is in the bathroom. I'm glad my sister isn't home and she won't hear what I have to say to our mom. I know Nhlelozenkosi gets too excited and she might slip and tell Mawande of my plans before me.

"You bellowed my King," maMokwena says, walking in the lounge.

I laugh, "Yes, I did. Please have a seat. We have something really important to discuss and I need it to stay between us for now," she narrows her eyes, lowering herself on the couch.

"I am all ears, Lango," she leans to the side and places both hands on the arm rest.

"I thought I found my rib when I met Sauda but that was not the case and as heart broken as I was I'm glad she wasn't. Being with Mawande has shown me what I deserve, what I need and what I want. Sauda was what I wanted but Wande ma, she is all that I deserve and need. No woman had ever made me feel so important, so appreciated, so adored. God, the list is super long. We have melted into each other that it's scary to think of a life without her in it," I say and she has tears glistening in her eyes.

"Are you saying what I think you are saying?" She asks and I nod.

"Yes, I have found someone who deserves my father's cows. A woman who is worthy to have my surname. Wande has completed me in a way I cannot explain. Ma, I want to make her my wife," her tears fall.

"You know Msebe, I have always loved that girl for you. I am glad that you took a chance with her and you are happy because of it. I am so proud of you," she gets up with open arms and I go into her warm embrace.

"Thank you mama,"

"Have you bought a ring yet?" she asks and I laugh.

"I have my eyes on one, I just need to find her ring size. I don't want it going back to be resized, once I slide it on her finger it has to stay there forever," I explain and she kisses my cheek.

"I hope it won't be this western engagement," she says and I shake my head.

"I am sending a letter to her family as soon as she accepts my proposal," she starts ululating and I'm shaking my head.

"MaMokwena, she's in the rondavel," she places a hand over her mouth. I don't want Mawande knowing until the day I go on one knee.

"I'm sorry, I'm just so happy," I know she is, I can see it in her eyes. Her first born son who happens to be her only son is finally getting hitched.

"She is moving to Johannesburg next year, are you going with her?" She asks and I nod vigorously, I don't have to think about it. I would not survive being far from her.

"Definitely ma but I won't be a distraction. I want Mawande to accomplish every dream she has. That means you will not be getting grandchildren anytime soon," her face falls and I burst out laughing.

"You can get her pregnant and bring the baby to me. You both can see my grandbaby on weekends or holidays," I don't think my woman would want to live far from our baby. She has mentioned many times that she wants to be a present mommy. Wande is going to be a mother before anything else that's why I cannot give her a child before she reaches her goals. It would be selfish of me to do so.

"We will see how everything goes. Right now I want to propose and get a yes," she fixes my shirt.

"She is already your wife," Amen and amen!

"Let me go back to my wife then," I say with a huge grin on my face.

"Wait," I pivot to face her again, "When are you planning on doing it?" She asks.

"I will let you know ma." She says okay and I leave the house. I know she would be rushing to get her phone to call our relatives if I didn't ask her to keep this between us for now.

I feel a little lighter now that my mom knows about my plans to propose to my girlfriend. I wasn't worried about getting her blessing because maMokwena adores Wande, this is her dream come true. I am also glad that she didn't cry when I said I'm moving to

Johannesburg with Mawade, I guess her worry was me leaving South Africa again. The only thing I'm a little worried about is Mawande's aunt, she clearly doesn't like her and I'm scared she might make the process a little harder for us. That's why I'm going to ask Wande about her father's side of the family, after all Wande is a Duma and not a Dladla.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 58

SPONSORED BY MANDISA

NTUTHUKO GALLOWAY

I had to come back to Durban on Tuesday because my father wanted to take me to the businesses he owns. He wanted me to see all that he has built for Vivian and I.

I will be going back to Mzumbe this Saturday because we are sitting down with Daluxolo to discuss the issue of co-parenting. I am not looking forward to that meeting because I don't know if he will be matured about the situation or he will want to show me that he's Singa's biological father. Whatever his reaction, I am going to keep my cool because this is important for both MaHlomuka and Singabakhe. They don't need a pissing contest between two grown men; I choose to be mature about the whole situation and I hope he does too.

Yesterday my father took me to the sugarcane plantation, not the one where he met both his baby mamas though. After receiving his inheritance he went on to buy a struggling field and fixed it up; he said he did this because that's what his family did for decades. He

didn't end there in the industry, he opened his own sugar mill. Eighty percent of his raw material comes from the sugarcane farm he owns and the other twenty percent he gets from another supplier.

Today he took me to his pulp and paper mill, the place is huge. I found paper production very interesting and I'm looking forward to spending my time learning the ropes of the business. Other than the mentioned companies, I also found out that my father has investments all over the place. I am inspired by the man, I want to do the same for myself so I can give my children a comfortable life. He said he will teach me all about generational wealth.

We have been back at the house for over an hour now, I took a shower and now I'm sharing a drink with my old man. More like I'm having a drink while listening to him lying to his young girlfriend over the phone. From the one sided conversation I'm listening to, I think the girl is asking my father why he has been blowing her off these days. Baba is telling her that he is working hard because she's a girl who likes the finer things in life. I honestly don't know how these women do it, sleeping with a man old enough to be your father just for money.

Why am I judging again? I was sleeping with an older woman myself, but it wasn't for money. I hit it because she didn't have drama, didn't ask for anything I couldn't provide then -emotional availability and my heart. The girls my age wanted a man who could provide financially, give them great sex and love them. I wasn't ready for that, let me rephrase. I hadn't met anyone I was ready to give everything to.

"She's a piece of work," My father says with an amused smile on his face.

"It's clear you don't want her anymore. Why not just tell her?"

He heaves a sigh, "You won't understand, son," I shake my head before taking a sip of my drink.

"I think I do. My mother makes a come back and suddenly you aren't giving your barbie girl any attention. What's up? You want Nomafu back?" He is blinking rapidly and I know I hit the nail right on the head. He is still very much in love with my mother.

"I still love your mother. She's my first love Edward, if not my only love. It's sad that we were separated but years have passed now and she's a married woman. It's too late for us, all I can do is love her without being with her romantically. We share a child so it's only fair that we become friends for your sake," he explains and I feel for him. I wouldn't know how to survive if Nhlelozenkosi and I lost each other like my parents.

"I'm sorry that things didn't turn out great for you both," he shrugs his shoulders.

"It's okay, I accepted the situation long ago. I am just happy to have you in my life now," I share the same sentiments.

"Enough about this. Which business would you like to be hands on with?" He asks and I immediately get excited.

"The pulp and paper mill, I found it very interesting," he nods.

"That's okay. I will talk to the managers there and ask them to teach you the in's and outs of the operation. Even so, I don't want you working there full time. I want you to tell me what your passion is so we can capitalize it. Nothing feels as good as making money doing what you love," he says and I try and search my brain but I come back blank.

"I never really took the time to identify my passions. I had to survive in my life, I found myself growing and selling weed. It become big and I made money for myself," his eyes are widened. He didn't expect to find this out about me.

"Edward, I am really sorry you had to resort to those means while I was alive and able to take care of you," he has to stop blaming himself, I've told him countless times.

"I will have to think about my passions, I guess," he is quiet for a while, thinking deeply.

"Cultivating and distributing cannabis is a dangerous territory son, you really need to get rid of it. I promise to fund any business you want for as long as it's legal," I totally agree. I stopped selling because I now have Singabakhe looking up to to me. Back then I did what I had to do to survive but now I don't have to hustle like that. I have so much to lose.

"I'm done with that life, I just need to burn everything," I say and relief flashes across his eyes.

"Anyway, have you had a conversation with your girlfriend about moving up here," he asks and my heart stops beating for a second. This is another important thing my woman and I have to talk about.

NDONDOLOZA DLADLA

I keep going back to the picture Londeka posted on Monday because I cannot believe that she's the one who replaced me at work. I cannot help but wonder if she got the position on merit or she got it because she is now sleeping with Dedani. She did say that he was asking her out, what if she finally agreed and he is now giving her everything he once gave me. Oh my God, my amazing apartment in Port Zimbali. How can Dedani do this to me, dump me for my own best friend. The one he always told me to get rid of, what kind of monster did I fall in love with?

I have been back home for almost a week and I have barely left my bedroom. I only go to the bathroom to take a shower because I would stink if I didn't. The smell from my vagina is now worse than before, that's another thing stressing me out. I don't know what's the cause, the gynaecologist said I'm clean so why the hell am I smelling? Maybe that's why Dedani didn't want to sleep with me anymore and ended up dumping me; he couldn't stand the smell. This is the millionth reason I've come up with as to why he would suddenly end our five year relationship, but I will never know for sure. I'm desperate to know why, I've been calling him to beg him to tell me where I went wrong but he won't answer.

The bedroom door opens, "I know this is hard Ndondo but you cannot allow that bastard to reduce you to nothing. You can't continue to live like this," my mom says. This is the speech she gives me these days.

"I think he is with Londeka now," my voice is barely audible.

"What makes you think that?" I sit up straight then clear my throat.

"Because she is now working at the municipal house, the position that belonged to me," mama gasps in shock.

"That little bitch!" She laughs, "I hope he hurts her ten times more than he hurt you," that will not make me feel better. Seeing Dedani's life in shambles might do the trick though. I want him to suffer the way I'm suffering right now.

"This should be another reason why you pick yourself up and move on with your life. He is not worth your tears, he has moved on like you never existed. Stop holding on to him, there are many fish in the sea," she says and I want to laugh. Which guy would want me now that I'm smelling for no reason at all?

"I'm not interested in going fishing," she sits down on the edge of the bed.

"You don't have to because the fish is near us. All we have to do is make it notice you," she says and I narrow my eyes in confusion.

"Like here in Mzumbe?" I ask and she nods with a smile, "Are you serious ma? You want me to go from Dedani to some village champion," she rolls her eyes.

"Learn to listen!" She hits my shoulder, "You deserve a man who will be able to take care of you. This time I want you to put your claws in him, I want you to do everything in your power to get him to marry you," she says and I'm still not following. Mzumbe doesn't have my type.

"Who is this guy?"

" Sgora?" Say what?

"Sgora the security guard? Are you kidding me? I'm not that desperate," she heaves an exasperated sigh.

"Calm down! Sgora isn't just anyone. He recently found out that he's the son of some rich white businessman from Durban. He goes by the name Chadwick Galloway," shut up!

I cannot believe my ears.

"Dedani spoke of the man so much, he looks up to him" her eyes light up.

"Bonus! Imagine how he would feel to learn that you're married into the family of a man he admires," ma says and I bite my lower lip.

"It will also help me shut Vivian down. She thinks she's above me," what is she talking about now?

"Vivian?" She clicks her tongue.

"Sqalo's ex wife. She is Sgora's sister," right!

This is about her settling scores with her boyfriends wife.

"So I'm just a chess piece in your game?" She furrows her forehead.

"What? Of course not. I have always wanted what's best for you, how could you even think otherwise?" I didn't mean to sound ungrateful.

"I'm sorry, it's just that right now I'm going through a lot," she takes both my hands.

"The best revenge is showing Dedani that you can do better than him. Show him that someone else can see what he saw in you in the first place," I'm not sure I want that. A part of me still has hope for our relationship, "Do you think he takes time out to think about you? Like you said, he's with Londeka now, giving her everything he once gave you," it hurts so much hearing it from another person's mouth, "You are my daughter, don't allow anyone to walk all over you. Burn whoever burns you and don't feel bad about it. Think about everything we have just talked about and make a decision that will change your life," she says and I swallow hard.

My mother gets up from the bed and kisses my forehead before she walks out of my room. She has given me a lot to think about but the last part is ringing in my head. I allowed Dedani to do everything to me all our relationship, it was as if he's the most important person and I was just in it for his pleasure. My mother is right, I have to hurt him how he has hurt me. The man doesn't care about anyone else but himself and maybe his wife, since it has come to light that he didn't really marry her for her contacts like he told me. It's time to give him a taste of his own bitter medicine.

I reach for my phone on the side table and the sim cards fall, I kept a few to be able to call Dedani from them when he didn't answer my calls. I had to go to those extremes while in a relationship with that

man. Why must a girlfriend call with other numbers to see if her boyfriend is ignoring her or simply not picking up any calls. It's really so sad.

I log on to my fake Instagram account and go straight to Hlubi's profile, she just posted a picture of herself and Dedani's mother. Did she steal my life or Dedani never planned to give it to me in the first place?

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 59

SPONSORED BY P.S

DEDANI MKHIZE

Paying bribes really speeds up things, I got a call from the estate agent this morning telling me that the property transfer is complete. The house is now in Londeka's name, the initial plan was to put the property in her mother's name but I managed to convince her otherwise. Her mom and step father are married in community of property and he has kids from his previous marriage. They would come claim the house if -God forbid- Londeka's mother died first. That's the first thing that came out of my mouth and earned me a genuine thank you from the fire cracker.

I had one of the driver's that work at my office to go and get the keys to the house because I want to surprise Londeka at work. The agent said she will sign the remaining paperwork when she's around Petermaritzburg.

Today is Friday so she can make a trip home to help them move in over the weekend. I'm not really sure what she's going to tell her

parents but I know she's a smart girl and will come up with something that doesn't make them raise eyebrows.

After getting the key from my driver I had to come home because my mother called and asked me to bring her Nandos. I am about to leave now, I need to go pick up flowers and buy champagne before driving to the municipal offices. I cannot wait to see her face when I hand her the keys, I know she's going to be so relieved. Her family means so much to her and that's one of the qualities I have come to love. She goes all out to take care of those she loves, proof of that is how she managed to get a house and furniture out of me. That's a smart woman right there, I can achieve so much more with her by my side.

"Ma, I'm out. I'll see you later okay?" I say and she just nods. All her attention is on the chicken.

"Dedani!" Nomahlubi walks in looking like she's ready to murder me.

"What's wrong?" She's now going to argue with me in front of my mother.

"Can we please talk in private before you leave?" I look at my wrist watch and time is not on my side. I still need to go pick up the flowers and go to the bottle store. I cannot afford to miss MaZulu. If she knocks off before I get there then I'll have to wait for Monday and that's too far. I need to put a smile on her face today.

"Can we do that when I get back," I can tell that she's fuming but I don't care. We have all the time to fight when I get back.

"Where are you rushing off to that you cannot hear me out first?"
Nomahlubi is tiring.

I don't know what's going on in that head of hers.

"I have an important meeting I need to get to at eThekweni municipality," I say and she huffs out a humorless laugh, "I'll talk to you later," I say, rushing out of the house.

I managed to pick up the roses from the florist and rushed to get the champagne and a gift bag to put it inside. I am so excited about this, I feel like a little child who has just been given all the junk in the world and was told that he will never be forced to eat vegetables. I called Zweli, Londeka's boss and he told me she's still working at her desk. It's past 4pm, she should be heading home now. I hope she doesn't kill herself for this job. I am watching the front door when Zweli walks out with some guy, they are headed to his car. What the hell is Londeka doing inside? It's only at 5pm on the dot does she walk out of the building. They don't pay her enough to stay behind for an hour on a Friday. I quickly climb out of my car, taking with me the flowers and gift bag. The house keys are in my pocket.

"Mageba," she's startled, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you," she rolls her eyes and I smile.

"What do you want Dedani?" She folds her arms across her chest.

"How is work?" She presses her lips into a thin line and I know I'm not going to get an answer.

I heave a sigh, "Hopefully what I have for you will cheer you up," she chuckles.

"I don't want your stupid flowers, go give them to your wife or girlfriend," this is one difficult woman to deal with. She's not for the faint at heart.

"I don't have a girlfriend anymore, I ended things with Ndongoloza," she is shocked but quickly composes herself, "These flowers are just

to decorate the new house and I wanted you to pop the bottle when your family moves in," I explain and she narrows her eyes.

"The property transfer is going to take a while so these aren't necessary," oh but they are my darling.

"Please hold these," she shakes her head so I have no other choice but to put them down.

"I made sure the property transfer takes no time at all. Let me drive you home today because your family deserves to be comfortable in their own space. I don't want you stressing anymore," I say and take out the keys from my pocket.

"Are those..." She points at my hand and I nod vigorously with a wide grin on my face.

Londeka starts jumping around in excitement, she does something I wasn't expecting. She attacks me with a hug.

"Thank you so much Dedani, my family will be so happy," she says and I snake my arms around her waist.

"So its fuckin true?" I quickly let go of Londeka.

It's Nomahlubi, what the fuck is she doing here?

"What are you doing here Hlubi?" I ask and she laughs.

"Don't ask me that bullshit. The DM I got on Instagram was right, you are cheating on me with this girl," she says and I close my eyes.

"Whoa! Mrs. Mkhize, I am not your husband's side chick. I don't know where you got your information from but it couldn't be anymore wrong," Londeka says and Hlubi tries to grab her but I quickly stand in front of MaZulu, protecting her from the angry Hlubi.

Who the fuck sent my wife a message on social media.

"Oh you are protecting her?" She screams.

"You are causing unnecessary attention right now, go to your car and drive home Hlubi," she is not listening to me. She wants to beat Londeka right this minute and that only angers me.

"Hlubi, you don't want me putting my hands on you," I warn her.

"You would hit me for this basic bitch?" Who is this woman? I didn't marry this crazy person.

"Stop insulting Londeka, just stop it," she knows next to nothing about Mageba to be insulting her like this.

"Dedani, you are a bastard! Do you hear me?" she can insult me all she wants I don't care, but this woman behind me is a no go area. I won't allow her to be attacked for absolutely no reason at all.

A cab drops someone just a few feet from us, their eyes are on us so I don't have to get his attention. I ask if he has somewhere to be and he says no.

With Hlubi still trying to grab Londeka and me protecting her we move to the cab and I manage to get Londeka inside without Nomahlubi touching even a hair on her head. I hand the driver R200 and tell him to get Londeka home safe.

My wife is busy hitting me with her fists and insulting me, I'm not fighting back or saying anything. I just want to get the flowers and champagne and leave this place. She has made me a joke for the people watching and it's enough. I am about to pick up the roses when she kicks them and they scatter all over the place. Those were really expensive but it's alright, I'm good for it. She grabs the bottle of champagne and pops in open, following me to my car still hailing insults at me. Nomahlubi pours the champagne on me and that makes me snap, I push her and she falls. She's crying as I climb into my car and drive away angrily.

I got home and my mother wanted to know what happened, why I was wet and smelling of alcohol. I was so angry I couldn't talk so I went to take a quick shower and packed a few of my things. I won't be able to live in this house with Hlubi while I'm this angry, I am going to go stay at the apartment in Port Zimbali this weekend. I walk downstairs and mama is waiting in the lounge, I know she won't let me leave without an explanation.

"Can you believe Nomahlubi mama," I say, pacing up and down.

"Yes, tell your mother that you're a cheater and I caught you in the act," Hlubi walks in and I want to go strangle her. The stunt she pulled has definitely scared Londeka away more.

"You stupid girl!" I say, wagging a finger at her.

"Haibo! Will you two calm down, there are people working in this house. You want them to hear your problems?" Mama says.

"I don't care, they can hear what a stupid, insecure wife does to her husband in public," I roar.

"What happened?" Mama asks.

"I got a message on social media, they were telling me how Dedani is cheating with a girl named Londeka who works at eThekwini municipality. I asked him to talk in private before he left but he told me about an important meeting there and I knew he was going to see her so I followed him. I found them hugging mama, he even had champagne and roses for her," she says and I laugh, clapping once.

"You are going around listening to strangers on the internet? That girl you scared is someone I've been mentoring from university. I got her the internship at the municipality last year and Zweli, comrade Zweli ma, remember him?" I ask and my mother nods, "Zweli called and told me she is going to get a permanent contract on Monday. He said I can do the honors of telling her because he knows how hard

Londeka and I worked to get her out of poverty. I went today with those flowers and champagne because I won't be around next week. You insulted that girl for absolutely nothing," I lie with a straight face and regret flushes across Nomahlubi.

"Not only did you call that young lady names, you insulted me. What kind of husband do you take me for? I love myself, I respect you and the vows I made in front of God and both our families. I am so disappointed in you, I'm ashamed to call you my wife," she's crying with one hand covering her mouth.

"Nomahlubi, has my son given you any reason not to trust him?" She shakes her head, "Then why did you follow him like that? Couldn't you wait for him to come back like he had asked and addressed the message you received?" I click my tongue.

"I am out of here, I cannot stand this woman right now," I grab my bag on the couch.

"Baby, please don't go. Let's go talk please,"

"Go talk to whoever that fed you lies about me and that amazing young woman whose only crime was to look up to me as a mentor,"

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 60

NHLELOZENKOSI NGIDI

My mother asked Msebe to take them out with Mawande, they went to Margate to eat because she didn't want to be here when Daluxolo arrived. She has never really liked my baby daddy, firstly for getting me pregnant out of wedlock and mostly because of how he has been treating me after we broke up. I cannot really blame her because no parent wants to see their child being mistreated and unhappy. I know

I would jump on anyone who makes my son miserable, I am mama bear like that.

I didn't go all out for that arrogant prick, I just prepared finger foods and drinks because I was raised right. When he leaves I'll make my man something heavy to eat, I know he must miss my cooking.

I made sure to clean my mother's house then I bathed my son, the little man is looking handsome. I also glammed up, I want Ntuthuko to melt when he sees me. I have placed the platter with finger foods on the dining table as well as drinks, everything is presentable. I hear a car park outside and I quickly run to the kitchen to peep through the window, it's a car I don't recognize. Daluxolo climbs out, I guess he rented a car. I take a deep breath and prepare myself to deal with this guy. A few seconds later a knock comes through the door and I give him permission to come in.

"MaHlomuka," he says and I cringe. Only Ntuthuko calls me like that and if he hears Daluxolo call me this he will freak out for sure.

"Just Nhlelo please," he narrows his eyes in a questioning manner but nods anyway.

"How are you?" I am honestly not used to him being so polite. I have programmed myself to always activate violence when dealing with him.

"Okay..."

"Mommy, is daddy here?" My son asks, his footsteps approaching the kitchen.

Daluxolo smiles proudly and I heave a sigh.

"Daddy is here my boy," he says when our son walks in. Singa's face falls, he is disappointed.

"Not happy to see daddy?" His father asks and I know it's about to be a war in here.

"Daddy is not here," he says and Daluxolo quickly looks at me with a raised eyebrow.

"Which daddy are you talking about?" He asks and I can tell that there's invisible smoke coming out of his ears.

"My daddy," Singa answers innocently, not knowing he just started world war three.

"Are you fuckin kidding me right now, Nhlelozenkosi?" He better not try that bull shit in front of my child.

"Whoa! Watch your mouth, there's a child in this room," I say, holding out a finger, "Baby, go to mommy's room and watch cocomelon," he nods, already pressing his iPad.

"Will you call me when daddy gets here?" He asks once he reaches the hallway.

"Yes, I will," it's a starring contest between me and Daluxolo, he is shaking with anger.

"Do not use that language near Singabakhe again," he closes his eyes.

"My reaction is justified Nhlelo. You have my son calling your so called boyfriend daddy!" This stupid fool. This fact should have him realizing that he failed his own flesh and blood that he sees another man as daddy.

"You think I coached Singabakhe to call Ntuthuko daddy? No dude, he did that all by himself and do you know why that is?" I ask and he widens his eyes, his expression saying, "tell me already."

"He calls Ntuthuko daddy because that's what my so called boyfriend is to him. He does everything with him and for him, your son feels a father's love from him. That's why it was so effortless for him to open his mouth and call another man daddy. You are his father but you

aren't his daddy, that's no one's fault but yours. We broke up but I never asked you not to be involved with Singa, infact I begged you to give him attention. So please don't come here swearing at me because of your mistakes and understand this; I'm not going to tell Singabakhe to stop calling my so called boyfriend daddy," his adams apple is bobbing like a monkey on a stick.

"If you aren't going to be matured about the situation please use the door and drive back to your guesthouse. Book your flight ticket back to Cape Town and call me when you are ready to accept that you fucked up as a father and also accept that Ntuthuko is not going anywhere. If you want to co-parent with me then you have to know that it's going to be us three when it comes to that little boys life," I say then fold my arms across my chest.

"You have two options, no one is holding a gun to your head," he mops his face with the palm of his hand.

"I want to be a part of my son's life. I realize that I wasted time in having a relationship with him and Nhlelo it hurts hearing him call another man daddy. It breaks my heart that he wasn't even happy to see me," he says and for the first time I can say Daluxolo is sincere.

"We are here to discuss a way forward, a way that will help you and your son to have a relationship. Ntuthuko and I want that for the both of you," he clenches his jaw at the mention of my boyfriend and I don't care. He doesn't have to like him but he has to respect him as the man I'm with. The man that's helping raise his child.

There's a knock on the door, I peep through the window again and notice my baby's BMW. He is finally here, I practically run to the door to open. I melt into liquid when my eyes land on him, he is so handsome. I love his outfit, he has on a pair of light blue jeans, a white shirt that's not buttoned all the way up. Where did Ntuthuko take a Luis Vuitton belt and sneakers? He must have been in his father's closet.

"MaHlomuka, sthandwa sami," he says smiling.

"Hey baby, come in," he pecks my lips before stepping inside. We will play lovey dovely when Daluxolo has left, I don't want him thinking I'm showing off.

"Bafo," he says, holding out his hand to Daluxolo.

"Sawubona," he shakes Ntuthuko's hand.

"Daluxolo, this is Ntuthuko. Babe, this is Daluxolo," I introduce them with no titles because they already know. They just nod.

"He is joining us?" Daluxolo asks.

"Yes, he is. Like I mentioned, Ntuthuko is a huge part of Singabakhe's life," he doesn't say anything.

"This way please," I lead them to the lounge.

"Oh babe, please go greet him first and make sure he stays in the room while we talk," Ntuthuko nods vigorously.

"Your bedroom?" I nod.

Yes, my boyfriend now knows the four walls of MaMokwena's house. He had to because when his boy is throwing a fit he is the one who has to find him and talk some sense back into him.

"After this meeting you can sit with him in the lounge and spend some time together," he doesn't answer me. We settle down and I pour him a drink and hand it to him, he says thank you and takes a sip immediately.

Ntuthuko comes back after a few minutes and sits next to me.

"I would firstly like to remind everyone that we are sitting here together because of Singabakhe and what is best for him. Our little boy needs us to make this work so he can grow up happy and healthy. It's not going to be easy but if we have open communication

we can make it work. This is not about us, that's the first thing we should always remember," I put it out there.

"Can I say something if it's okay," Ntuthuko says and I nod.

"Daluxolo, I want you to know that I am not trying to replace you in Singa's life. I love that little boy and there's nothing I wouldn't do for him and his mother. They have become my whole world and I hope that you and I can be able to get along for both their sakes," I am so proud of my baby.

"I'm happy to hear that," he doesn't fully mean that but I understand. It's a bitter pill to swallow. "So how will this work?" He asks.

"I was thinking that he visits you and your family during school holidays. We can share him equally during the festive season, say he spends Christmas with us then the new year with you. We can also share public holidays and you can simply ask for him when you have things planned with your family; things like gatherings, trips and so on," I say and he nods.

"Can I also come this side on weekends I'm free and spend time with him?" I am nodding vigorously.

"That's totally fine, for as long as we communicate on time so our plans with him don't clash," this meeting is going better than I expected. I am glad he put his pride to the side this once.

"Singabakhe loves sports, would you like us to tell you when he has games so you can come watch him if you have time?" Ntuthuko suggests.

"I would love that very much, thank you," it's going to rain holly spirit tonight.

"I'm guessing you won't be staying in the village forever, where do you plan on moving?" he asks and I look at Ntuthuko.

"Well, that's a conversation MaHlomuka and I need to have. But I'm guessing Durban," -Ntuthuko.

"Galloway is right, we still need to have a conversation but Durban is definitely at the top of the list. It's closer to both our families, I can find a new job there and it has great schooling options for Singabakhe. You can fly directly to see him too, no hassle," his shoulders have sagged, he is a little comfortable now.

"Will I have a say in the schools he goes to?"

His questions are very valid, I'm glad he thought that far. It shows that he wants to make this work.

"Daluxolo, you will have a say in every major decision that concerns him," he takes a sip of his drink.

"Thank you. Can we talk finances?" I nod, "I have been thinking about starting an education trust for him," that's very smart of him.

"I don't have a problem with that. Infact thank you. University is expensive now so I don't want to think of what it'll cost when it's time for him to go. Life is full of surprises so it'll be great to have something for that purpose secured,"

My little man walks in crying, what happened now?

"Mommy," he is pressing the iPad in frustration.

"Yes, Singabakhe,"

"This thing won't play," I want to laugh.

God, it takes something so little to get him worked up.

"Let me have a look at it my boy," Daluxolo says and Singabakhe looks at him then back at me and Ntuthuko. I nod for him to go to his father and I can see how hurt Daluxolo is.

Singa hands him the iPad and stands there watching so he will do whatever Daluxolo is doing when the iPad gives him problems again. He is a little mechanic.

"It's just a little network problem, let's restart the iPad,"

"What is network?" Oh boy. There's that curious mind. Daluxolo tries to explain it in a way Singa will understand. He gets a few more questions that has us laughing.

"Can I please watch your cartoon with you?" Daluxolo asks and he nods.

"It's okay. Mommy can we watch on the big TV and have a snack?" I nod.

"Go switch it on so long," I say and he runs to the lounge, leaving behind his iPad.

"You can go watch TV, we will discuss what's left as time goes. I believe we covered the important things," he gets up from his chair.

"Thank you, Nhlelo. Our son is a very happy boy, you raised him well," oh that was unexpected.

"Thank you. I'll bring you a snack in the lounge," he walks away.

"That went smooth," Ntuthuko says, clasping my hand.

"I'm shocked too baby,"

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 61

SPONSORED BY ANONYMOUS

DALUXOLO BOTHA

My trip to KZN was fruitful, I honestly thought it was going to be war. My son's mother and I always fight about one thing or the other. I'm obviously relieved that it went well because I really want to have a relationship with my son. It's just sad that it took me this long to want to step up; thing is I thought I had time to grow up and get them back. I wanted Nhlelo to stay on hold for me while I was working on my career and chasing other women. I was stupid to think I can have my bread buttered on both sides, I lost a diamond because I was busy chasing pebbles. I thought Singabakhe will make her love me forever, I believed a child would tie us together no matter what. It broke me when Singa started telling me about this ntwana that was doing almost everything with him. I connected the dots and figured out that Nhlelozenkosi had moved on. The little I had left was shattered yesterday when I heard my son call another man daddy; it felt like someone was punching me in the stomach as I had to sit there and watch another man be a part of parenting my child.

"I hope you took pictures of him," my mother says, walking back in the lounge.

I came home straight from the airport to give her feedback before going to my apartment.

"A lot of videos. He is such a bubbly boy," her smile widens.

"I'm so happy that you are finally doing the right thing," but it's too little too late as I only get to have my son. I wanted the both of them back and knowing that is not going to happen rises bile from my stomach.

"He calls Nhlelozenkosi's boyfriend daddy, ma," It comes out in a whisper.

"Oh Dalu, I'm so sorry son. I wish we could say it's wrong but like the Ngidi's said, the man has been more of a father to your son than you have been," hearing my own mother say it stings a little. I kind of

wanted her to side with me, not because I'm right but to make me feel better.

"He seems to make them happy," it eats at me to admit that. I failed to make Nhlelo that excited to see me. I failed to make her glow and I definitely failed my boy in every way.

"That should put you at ease, most stepfathers are not good people but your story is different," still, he took my people and gave them things I couldn't when I had them.

"I wish I did so many things differently with Nhlelo. I wish I didn't take her for granted and if I could I would take back the hands of time and do everything differently," I am trying hard not to cry.

"Learn from this and ensure that you don't repeat your mistakes. You will find a good woman and you'll be happy too," I chuckle.

"They don't make them like that Zulu girl anymore, ma. Nhlelozenkosi is a special woman, she knew how to hold me down but I wasn't ready for her and now that I am she's not available," Life is something else.

"There's no use crying over spilled milk. All you need to do is focus on co-parenting my grandson with her. How did that talk go?" I shrug my shoulders.

"Surprisingly good, we almost fought at the beginning but she put me in my place quickly. We will be seeing Singabakhe more now, I just pray it doesn't take him long to warm up to all of us," she shakes her head.

"You don't have to worry about that. He is still very young, he will get used to this side of the family soon," I'm crossing fingers.

"Hopefully ma because he has warmed up to the Galloways," my mother narrows her eyes.

"The what?" I'm still in disbelief.

I was hoping that Nhlelozenkosi's new guy is beneath me but dude isn't.

Last night when I got back to my room in Port Shepstone I went to social media and searched for Ntuthuko Galloway. He has no online presence but I found a Vivian Galloway, she happens to be the guys sister. She had pictures of her, Ntuthuko and an old white guy who is their father. I saw some pictures of my son with other little kids. They were having some sort of family gathering in Ballito. Her page is full of flashy things so I knew I had to Google the surname Galloway. I wasn't ready for what I saw, their father is a tycoon. Ntuthuko can give my son everything I can only dream of.

"Nhlelo's boyfriend's family," I explain.

"Isn't he Zulu? What's with his surname?" I chuckle lightly. The surname is what intrigued me too that's why I wanted to know more about the guy.

"He has a white father," mama gasp in shock.

"Hai! We cannot compete. Let's focus of doing right by your son and creating a healthy relationship with both Nhlelo and her boyfriend," I guess mama is right.

DEDANI MKHIZE

My mother was blowing up my phone demanding that I tell her where I am, I wanted to be alone but I knew she wouldn't give up. I gave her my location and asked her not to tell Hlubi where I am, this apartment will be my safehouse when I don't want to deal with a nagging wife. Mama arrived here about two hours ago and she has been cooking some seven colors for me in the kitchen, she brought all the ingredients.

"Come eat," she shouts from the kitchen and I get up.

The food is mouthwatering, I cannot wait to devour everything.

"Thank you ma," I say as I wash my hands.

I settle on the high chair and start eating, her eyes are on me the whole time. She must be wondering why I am eating like a hungry man when I'm married.

"Dedani," she says softly.

Mmhmm," I don't raise my eyes.

"Whose flat is this?" She asks I place down my spoon.

"It's mine mama. You know property is a good investment," she nods with a raised eyebrow.

"I know, son. Who decorated for you? It has a woman's touch," She asks and I swallow hard.

"The interior designer was a woman, that's why," Its not a lie entirely. Ndondo did decorate this whole place.

Mama chuckles, "I wasn't born yesterday. Did you buy this flat for the girl Hlubi caught you with on Friday?" I shake my head.

"Absolutely not, ma. Londeka and I don't have that kind of relationship," where's the lie?

She even blocked my number. It was better when she was just letting it ring to voicemail.

Hlubi really fucked up everything, the keys gesture softened her. Londeka hugged me, that's big but now we are back to square one.

"What do you see written on my forehead?" I furrow my eyebrows, there's obviously nothing.

"Nothing is written," she nods.

"Exactly, I was not branded a fool. I cannot give birth to a child for him to only lie to me. Dedani, I can see right through you. You lied to your wife on Friday and you are lying to me right this minute," can the ground open and swallow me whole. MaMkhize won't let this go, she knows me too well.

"What's your deal with that municipality girl?" She asks, placing both hands on the island.

"Eish, mama," I scratch my beard.

"I'm listening, what's going on? Are you cheating on Hlubi?" I shake my head.

"Ma, Hlubi is not the same woman I married. She has changed, what am I saying? She hasn't changed, she's just showing me her true colors. The sweet girl I fell in love with was just a fraud, she was just trying to get me hooked and I fell for it," she laughs.

"You're only seeing this because you're lusting over another woman," that's not true.

"No, Londeka has nothing to do with this. The girl doesn't even want to give me a chance, I'm trying everything in my power but she just won't give in. I have never met a woman so stubborn," she narrows her eyes.

"Dedani, are you in love with this girl?" I bite my lower lip.

"I don't know, really, I don't,"

Claps once!

"You are a married man. I need you to stay away from that girl. You and Hlubi need to sit down and talk about your issues, tell her how she's making you feel and hear her cries as well. I cannot watch you throw away your marriage over a girl you don't even know," I feel like I know Mageba enough. She's not pretending to be someone

she's not. I know to always expect fire from her, she's the realest woman I have ever known.

"She won't listen to me, she hasn't in a while," she rolls her eyes.

"That poor girl has been going through a lot, give her a break," whose side is she on?

My phone rings from my pocket, its Nomahlubi. Can't she catch the hint? I don't want to talk to her. She should stop ringing me and wait till I come home to say whatever it is she needs to say. My mother bangs the island and instructs me to answer the call because Hlubi is dying of worry. I shouldn't have given her my location, she's making my head spin too.

"Nomahlubi," I answer.

"Oh, thank God. Baby where are you? I'm worried sick," I roll my eyes.

"I'm safe, I'll come back home when I'm calm enough," she heaves a sigh.

"Baby, I am really sorry. I allowed my emotions to get the better of me. I should have waited till you came back to address the issue of the text I received. I acted immaturely and embarrassed you and that innocent girl," I take my beer and gulp it down.

"How will I expect Londeka to respect me after the stunt you pulled?" I want her to beat herself up so she doesn't do something that crazy again in the future.

"I'm sorry. I am so ashamed of myself," I smack my lips.

"I'll see you soon Nomahlubi," at least I answered her call, that should put her at ease.

"I'll be waiting, my love," I hang up without saying anything.

"Dedani, uyi demeti. Who taught you how to lie and manipulate so effortlessly? You need ocean baptism," I'm just doing damage control.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 62

LONDEKA ZULU

Happy? That's an understatement of the year, what I feel is something I cannot begin to explain. I am relieved that my family finally moved into the new house and everyone loved it. I went home over the weekend to help them move, everything went smoothly. My mother and step father obviously sat me down to ask how I could afford the "rent" because I just got employed. I couldn't really tell them the truth so I convinced them that I was renting to buy. I told them that my official letter of permanent employment managed to get me a little loan to pay for this months rent and the furniture. My parents don't know much about such things so they believed my story but made me promise that I won't kill myself with debt trying to help them out.

We had a little braai yesterday before I had to leave and knowing that they are at peace and comfortable in the new space makes me relax. It was stressful knowing that they were in a place where they were constantly reminded that they were a huge inconvenience and somewhat a burden. My stepfathers mother wasn't happy when I showed up and told my family that I got them a new place to stay. You would think she would have been relieved to get her space back but she wasn't because of jealousy.

My phone vibrates on my desk and it's my mother calling, this is the sixth if not the seventh call today.

"Mama," I answer with a smile.

"Londi, how is your day going?" She asks and I want to laugh. Did she forget that I'm working now?

"My day is okay, I'm busy working. I have so many reports on my desk right now," I say, hoping she hears me and doesn't call until I knock off. Don't get me wrong, I appreciate that she's calling but I'm at work right now.

"Oh I'm sorry for disturbing you baby. I just wanted to tell you that I'm done washing the windows. I wish I had taken you up on your offer on Saturday to help me with them," she says and I chuckle. I was just being polite, I'm glad she refused and said she will clean properly today. I am one lazy person.

"At least you are done now. How are you enjoying the place?" I ask and she heaves a sigh.

"It's amazing Londeka, I cannot believe we are living in such a beautiful place. Thank you so much, may the good Lord bless you," I cannot cry at work.

"Mama, you have already thanked me. I am your daughter and it's my job to show up for you and my siblings when you guys need me to and I am in the position to help. I want you guys to be happy and comfortable," I take a deep breath so I don't cry.

"Let me leave you to work, we will talk later on," she says with a shaking voice, I know she allowed her own tears to fall.

"Okay, later mom." I hang up and place my phone down on the desk.

I think I'm going to head back home again this Friday. I'm not going to knock off at 5pm again because I don't want to take the last taxi like I did last Friday. I'm going to come to work with my weekender bag and head straight to the taxi rank after I knock off. I just want to spend as much time with my family, especially my sister's. They are growing up and at this age they need someone to talk to about things, I know my mother is not the easiest to talk to. Our relationship wasn't always so smooth, she's a strict parent. I think now she's soft with me because I finished my qualification.

"Londeka, there's someone here to see you," I raise my eyes and find my boss walking in with Hlubi, Dedani's wife. My heart is thumping against my chest, I pray she's not here to embarrass me in front of my colleagues because of something that's not happening. I am not sleeping with her husband, I don't even have any desire to.

"Ok," I say, getting on my feet.

"Thank you, Zweli," she says to my boss and he nods and walks away, "Uhm, is there anywhere private where we can talk?" She asks nervously and that makes a part of me relax a little. Why would she be nervous if she was here to embarrass me? But maybe she is nervous because she's about to murder me.

"We can talk outside," I say and she nods.

I lead the way outside and she's following behind me; I have a million things running in my head right now. I kept wondering who would have sent a DM to her telling lies about me. We get outside, the same spot she wanted to whoop my ass last Friday.

"What can I do for you Mrs Mkhize?" I keep my face straight and my voice steady. I cannot show any weakness or guilt because I did nothing wrong with her husband. All I have taken from him is what he initially took from me.

"Londeka, sisi. I want to sincerely apologize for what happened. I acted irrationally and I'm ashamed of myself and my actions. I have never been one to tear down a sister, I should have had a conversation with my husband with regards to message I received from that stranger. I hope I didn't step on your toes so much that you'd want to stop learning from my husband. He values you as a young lady who wants to make it in life; please don't allow my mistake to ruin the mentoring you both have going on," I am confused out of my fuckin mind, "I brought these flowers to replace the ones Mkhize couldn't give you on Friday. Congratulations on your permanent contract, it's amazing when a fellow lady is winning in life. Hopefully he mentors you to be a successful businesswoman some day," oh my freaking God! Dedani lied to his wife, he told her he's mentoring me?

"Uhm, thank you," I take the flowers from her.

Poor woman, she has no idea of the kind of monster she married. She seems like a sweet person, she doesn't deserve the bastard she calls husband. I hope her eyes open soon to who and what her husband really is.

"I honestly want to do right by you and I feel the flowers aren't enough. Can you please join us for dinner sometime this week?" Oh hell no!

I'm not sitting around the table with them pretending that the sicko is my mentor.

"I don't think that's necessary," I say softly and she's shaking her head.

"Please, Londeka. It would mean a lot to my husband to see that I'm making amends. Please come,"

NDONDOLOZA DLADLA

I have been in a good mood this weekend because I thought Dedani's life was chaotic after I messaged his wife. But it looks like the stupid woman has listened to whatever lies he has fed her, I can't really blame her though. I know the kind of smooth operator that son of a bitch is, Dedani has the ability to make anyone listen to him and believe everything he has to say.

Now my happiness has vanished because she put up her Instagram after it was down the whole weekend. She posted a picture of her and Dedani with a caption that talks about enemies who always try to destroy great things. She threw in a Bible verse then proceeded to send a message to my fake profile. She told me to find healing and focus on myself, she said I shouldn't allow the devil to use me. I couldn't even respond because she blocked me; I wanted to tell her the kind of fool she is. Earlier on I wanted to send her pictures of Dedani and I, all the screenshots where he told me he loved me and he was just using her. I wanted to bring her down from the high horse she is on but I have to be careful. Dedani would hurt me if I try something like that, he hasn't acted because the message I sent Hlubi was sent from a fake account.

"This bullshit has to stop Ndondo. Aren't you tired of the pity party you keep throwing yourself? You were okay this weekend, how the hell did we end up here again?" My mother just burst into my room shouting. I honestly don't need this, I deserve to take my time in healing and getting over the man I thought I'll be with for the rest of my life.

"Mama, you don't understand," she pulls the covers and I heave a defeated sigh.

"I'm tired of this nonsense, you cannot continue crying over that son of a bitch. He has insulted you and told you in many different ways that he no longer wants you. How long will you be crying for him? Ndondoloza you aren't the first woman to be heartbroken and you are definitely not the last. Get over this and do as I've told you, I saw Sgora's car. Go see him and try to lure him into your den," I shake my head and she angrily claps her hands.

"Wake up little girl! Time is no longer on your side, do you want to waste away in this village? Do you think I'm going to take care of you forever?" She says vehemently and I'm blinking rapidly.

"I had to do what needed to be done in life, Ndondo. Do the same or you'll be crying over that piece of shit for years to come," she's starring me down. I slowly climb off the bed to go take my shower.

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I am in my car driving to Sgora's house, I'm a little nervous because I don't know what to expect. I have never really had a conversation with the guy, I've always seen him as someone beneath me. But as it turns out he's a son of a tycoon and being his woman would set me up for life. I'm not ready to be in a relationship but mother is right, I cannot cry over Dedani for the rest of my life. The guy moved on with his life while I was still in the picture; I need to remind myself of all the bad he has ever done to me so that my heart can stop feeling anything for him.

Sgora's X6 is parked outside, who would have thought he would be here in life? Driving such a beast and being able to afford all that his heart desires. I park and climb out the car after taking a deep breath. I look beautiful, hopefully this has him dropping his guard down a

little. I get to the door and knock, footsteps approach and a few seconds later the door opens and he's in front of me in Nike shorts, slides and bare chest. He snaps an eyebrow when he sees it's me, I understand I'm the last person he expected to see at his door step.

"And then wena?" He says, looking disgusted.

"Hey, Sgora," he scoffs then tilts his head to the side.

"Yes, hello. Can I help you?" I smile and tuck a strand of hair behind my ear.

"I didn't come here to fight with you," I try to be calm so he can also take it down a notch.

"Then why are you here? We aren't friends so excuse my surprise," I nod slowly.

A man like Sgora likes a cool woman.

"I came to apologize for everything that happened in the past, I didn't always treat you right. I recently started therapy and my doctor told me to make amends with people I have hurt in my life so I can be able to move forward," I say and he chuckles.

"Have you apologized to Mawande? That's the one person you and your family have hurt so bad in this life," he says and I gulp down my saliva. I shouldn't have used that line, he obviously was going to ask about that girl.

"You're right. I plan on apologizing to her but she's the last on my list because I need to show her with action that I'm sorry," he nods his understanding with a smile.

"Great. You make amends with her first then come to me," I knew this wasn't going to be easy but I didn't anticipate this whole thing turning out to be about Mawande.

"Baby," Nhlelozenkosi says from inside.

"Coming, love," he shouts back, "I need to go. Come back for my forgiveness once you have Mawande's. She is the only reason why I'd consider your apology," he shuts the door in my face and I close my eyes. Getting this guy to fall for me isn't going to be a walk in the park.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 63

SPONSORED BY ANONYMOUS

DEDANI MKHIZE

"Babe, can you please help me push my mother to her bedroom," can't a man catch a break in this marriage? This is exactly why I wanted her mother to go stay at a hospice, I didn't want to find myself playing porter or anything like that. Hlubi should have just listened to me from the start, this is the first and the last time I'm pushing her mother anywhere.

"Okay," I get off the bed and follow her downstairs where her sister Qaqamba and my mother are watching TV. I didn't include my mother-in-law because she's just sitting on that wheelchair. I wonder if she can understand anything that's going on around her. I push the wheelchair towards the bedroom downstairs, my wife is walking behind us. I stop near the bed and turn to leave the room.

"Dedani, please help me put her on the bed," she says with her eyes widened

I scoff, "I don't mean to sound insensitive Nomahlubi but I didn't sign up for this. You said you will be able to take care of your mother when I suggested hospice care, so please don't turn me into a nurse. I have long days at work, I cannot come home and push your mother

around," as hush as I might sound, this is the truth. I'm not saying this to hurt her.

"I'm not asking you to take care of her, I'm just asking that you push her and help put her on the bed," I shake my head.

"You were able to do it with Qaqamba yesterday. Why didn't you join forces again?" She takes a deep breath before answering my question.

"I don't want to overwhelm Qaqamba, babe," she must be joking.

"Oh, so you must overwhelm me? She's both your mother so it's only fair that the both of you carry this burden together," tears are glistening in her eyes, "Listen, Hlubi. I'm not trying to be an asshole but you knew very well from the beginning that I didn't want your mom here. And it was not from a malicious place; I knew it would be hard for you to take care of your mother 24/7. You might be trained as a nurse but you were definitely not trained for this job. It's only the second day and you're already experiencing a tough time. Taking your mother to specialized care doesn't make you a bad daughter," she wipes her tears.

"I didn't mean to inconvenience you," she honestly doesn't get it.

I pick up my mother in law from the wheelchair and put her on the bed gently.

I bump into my mother in the corridor, she's taking her plate to the kitchen. She grabs my arm and pulls me with her to the kitchen where she leaves the dirty plate on the island and leads me outside the door. I hope this is not another conversation about my marriage, she shouldn't push so much. My issues with Hlubi won't just go away in one day, ma needs to accept this and allow us some time.

She lets go of my arm and places both hands on her waist.

"I am still sensing some tension between you and Hlubi. Didn't I tell you to make an effort to fix things?" I want to roll my eyes but I know MaMkhize would smack the shit out of me.

"Mama, please. I appreciate that you want us to be happy again but our issues are too much. Things won't magically go back to normal, we need to have conversations and compromise," she smacks her lips.

"Have you compromised by letting that municipality girl go? She is in your head so much that you don't care if things don't get fixed in your marriage," I swallow hard because she's right. I have come to want Londeka so bad that I don't care about what happens to Hlubi and I. It's not even sexual like initially, I want to explore her, all of her.

"Londeka has nothing to do with the situation of my marriage. Nomahlubi's stubbornness has led us here, her not acknowledging me as her husband drove us to this coldness we find ourselves," she nods in agreement and that leaves me surprised, she has been team Hlubi these days.

"I understand that but you cannot put all the blame on her. It's takes two, son. This is marriage," I can't deal with this.

I had a long ass day at work and I was relaxing watching highlights in the bedroom.

"Ma, we will talk. I am tired," I pivot and head back inside.

I head up the stairs with the packet of peanuts I got in the pantry. I'll take a bottle of water in the bar fridge in our bedroom. I walk inside and find Hlubi changing into pyjamas, I thought she'll be in her mom's room till late just like last night. I don't say anything to her, I remove my slides and throw myself on the bed.

There's so much happening in the premier league this season, just like my marriage. Liverpool and Hlubi are both stressing the hell out of me.

"I went to apologize to Londeka two days ago," she says and I quickly look at her. She say what? "She accepted my apology and assured me that she won't terminate your mentorship because of my mistake," I am tongue tied, I honestly wasn't expecting any of this.

Why didn't Londeka call to tell me? Oh wait, she never tells me anything. I know that her family moved in because she was able to meet up with the agent in Petermaritzburg this past Saturday.

"That was mature of you," what can I honestly say to that? I just wonder how Mageba really took it. Hopefully it was in a positive light and she sees that I did everything to shield her from my wife's wrath.

"I was the one at fault so I had to make things right. I don't want to be the reason why a young girl loses a great mentor," I should try and call Londeka tomorrow, I'll cross fingers that she answers, "I wanted to prove to her that I completely support you both and I trust that nothing inappropriate is going on between you. That's why I invited her for dinner this Friday," shock me again Nomahlubi!

"And what did she say?" She chuckles a little.

"She wanted to refuse but I didn't take no for an answer, I threatened to wait outside the municipal office to pick her up," dinner with my wife and a woman who sets me on fire, it's going to be interesting.

NTUTHUKO GALLOWAY

Nhlelozenkosi and I just made love and right now she's in my arms, listening to my heartbeat. God, I love this woman and it kills me that

I will not be seeing her everyday like I used to. I have to move to Durban to be closer to the pulp and paper mill, that's the family business I found interesting and would like to be hands on with until I find a business I am interested in starting. I am leaving on Sunday because I am starting my training on Monday, I asked my father to tell the manager to start me from the ground up. I want to know each and every process, to understand how every department links together.

"MaHlomuka,"

"Mmhhh," she's drawing circles on my bare chest. I think I love cuddles more than her, I can stay like this for hours.

"I don't want me finding my family to come in between us, I don't want to loose what we have," It comes out in a whisper and she sits up straight, looking down at me.

"Nothing will come between us baby," she caresses my face and I close my eyes.

"I'm so used to seeing you and our little boy everyday. I don't want you or Singabakhe to feel like I'm neglecting you just because I'm a Galloway now," I open my eyes and find her smiling sweetly at me.

"It's going to be hard not seeing you everyday, I agree. But I totally understand that you also have to get into the life you were robbed for years. I have explained to Singa that daddy has to go work so he can be able to to buy him everything he wants and I think he understands. We will see you on the weekends until we move to Durban too," she says and I'm a little relieved to know that she is in full support of the changes in my life.

"You are moving in January right?" I ask and she nods.

"Yes, I have already started looking for apartments and schools we can enroll him. I know it won't be hard to find a job, a few companies

approached me a while back. I just need to choose the best one for me," I am lost there by apartments, I'm not sure what she means.

"Why are you looking at apartments, MaHlomuka?" I ask and she frowns like she's not understanding my question.

"Where will we live?"

"A house, I'm buying you your dream home. I am getting you pregnant next year, Singabakhe and his little sister can't be raised in apartments. They deserve a big house with their own rooms and a swimming pool," her smile reaches the eyes.

"MaMokwena would kill me for falling pregnant out of wedlock again," that's very true.

"Good thing I don't plan on doing vat and set with you. I'll do right by you before you move to Durban. MaHlomuka the only reason you will leave your father's house to live in mine will be because you're Mrs. Galloway," she leans in and we share a passionate kiss.

"Nhlelozenkosi Ngidi-Galloway, I like the sound of that," I chuckle.

"So you're taking your father's surname to my house?" I say playfully and she nods vigorously.

"And my kids will call that too," my smile fades immediately.

"Ah we ma! I would do anything to make you happy baby but forget that one. The Megalo's will only call Megalo, period!" She bursts out laughing.

"So that's your clan name, Megalo?" I nod.

"What can I say? I might be white but I have a lot of Zulu in me," she rolls her eyes before laying down and pulling the covers.

"I hear you Jan Van Reberk's nephew," oh no she didn't. I bite her and she yelps, I'm about to get on top of her when our door opens.

"Mommy," Singabakhe walks in rubbing his eyes. We forgot to lock the door, shit he could have walked in and found me on top of his mother.

"Why are you up baby? It's late, you have school tomorrow," they have been sleeping here since Sunday.

"I want to sleep with you and daddy," he says and trust me, I love my boy but it sucks being cock blocked by your own child. How does he expect us to practice giving him a sibling if he's sleeping between us.

"Uhm, go to the bathroom and pee first," Nhlelo says and Singa runs there.

His mother and I quickly get up and find something to wear. We can't have a child under the covers with our equipments out like that.

"We will go for round two in the lounge when he sleeps," my girlfriend says and I like how she thinks.

"I'm going to make it worth your while," I say and she bites her lower lip.

"I didn't have any pee mommy," Singa says, walking back in.

"It's okay boy, jump in," he climbs on the bed and sleeps in the middle. This is not our first rodeo. Nhlelozenkosi and I get in and face each other with our person in between us.

"Daddy, do you know that Miss Adams at school..." Nhlelo rolls her eyes inwardly and I want to laugh. Once Singa starts with the stories he won't stop and mommy wants some action in the lounge. He needs to go to sleep.

"Singa, you will tell your daddy about Miss Adams tomorrow on your way to school. It's late now and you have to sleep,"

NDONDOLOZA DLADLA

"Do you trust me?" My mother asks, placing her hands on my shoulders.

"With my life mama," that's true.

She would never do anything to hurt me.

"I'm glad to hear that baby. I just want what is best for you, Ndongoloza. It's sad that Qophelo didn't see that," I won't say this to my mom because she is still mad at my twin brother for what he did but I miss him so much. Yes, we had our differences but that's my other half, I shared a womb with him. The love between us was always greater; I wish he could just call and tell me he is okay.

"I know ma," she kisses my forehead.

"I don't think it's going to be easy getting Sgora to fall for you without any help," she says and I narrow my eyes.

"What do you mean?" I ask and she heaves a sigh.

"MaMokwena's daughter has her claws in him. She's probably using muti to make him blind to other women. To win him you'll have to fight fire with fire," she explains and my throat goes dry. I know nothing about traditional healers and muti.

"That's how women get and keep a man these days. I don't want you to loose out on a stable man because we gave up on him rather than finding help," I don't know how I feel about that though. People always say that the love you get by using potions always comes crumbling down and it's never pretty.

I cross my legs, trying to relieve myself of the discomfort I'm feeling, "what do you advise I do mama?" I ask and she smiles.

"I know someone who can help us get Sgora looking at you only, Nhlelo will be a thing of the past," I nod but my question is, why does my mother know traditional healers?

"Please wait a little, I need to use the bathroom," I get off the highchair and run to the bathroom.

I have pressure in my abdomen, it's like something wants to come out. I get in the bathroom and close the door behind me before pulling down pants and panties and sitting on the toilet seat to relieve myself. I try to urinate but it's hard that I have to push like I'm doing number two. I can feel whatever coming down but It needs a couple of more pushes. Something heavy drops from my vagina, it felt like I just dropped faeces through my vagina. I quickly stand up to have a look and what I see next shocks me out of my mind that I scream at the top of my lungs. I am horrified to say the least, I was never expecting to see that many maggots. Why would those things come out of my vagina? Tears are streaming down my face, I have never been this scared in my life.

"What's wrong?" Ma asks, she's panicking from hearing me scream like that.

I cannot answer her, tears are just streaming down my face as I stare at the horror moving inside the toilet.

"Did you shit blood?" She comes closer and as soon as she sees what I'm looking at her scream wins over mine.

"What is that?" She asks, with her hands covering her mouth.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 64

NDONDOLOZA DLADLA

My mother is driving like a mad woman, I hope we make it to wherever she is taking me alive. We are both so scared because of

what we saw in that toilet; I cannot believe live maggots came out of my vagina. Am I rotting on the inside? Is that why I have been smelling so awfully? What could have caused all of this? I don't think I have ever been so numb in my entire life, nothing is making sense to me.

"Ndongoloza, we are here," my mother says, bringing me back to the now.

"Where are we?" I didn't bother asking when she dragged me out of the house to my car.

"Mbumbulu," why would she bring us back here? She made us promise never to set foot here because this place holds a lot of bad memories for us.

"Why mama?" She heaves a sigh and shifts on the driver's seat to look at me.

"Because this is the only place I think you will find the help you need. Right now I need you to forget about everything that happened here and focus on what's wrong with you," she says, wiping my tears, "okay?" I nod vigorously then we both climb out of the car.

This house is big, I can't really tell who it belongs to. It has been over a decade since we left Mbumbulu to go live in Mzumbe. I don't really remember who is who.

"Mama, who lives here?" I whisper as we walk through the yard.

"A very powerful sangoma who will help you," oh so this is where she knows traditional healers from. We appear from the corner and there are two rondavels, the other one has a skull at the door and that sends chills down my spine immediately.

"To what do I owe the pleasure," my mother and I are both startled.

We pivot and find the dirtiest looking man with a tin of coffee that's not containing coffee smiling at us.

Oh Jesus, who sleeps next to that man every night?

"Madlabantu, this is an emergency. My daughter really needs your help," mama says panicking and this man laughs in our faces.

"You know which rondavel to go to. Explain the rules to your child," he says and walks back inside the main house. I don't think I'm comfortable being here.

"Ndongoloza!" Mama places both hands on my shoulders, "I need you to not scream when we walk inside that room. Whatever you see please don't look at it in the eyes and don't push it off when it comes to you. Am I making myself clear?" I shake my head.

"I hear you mama but I don't think I want to be here," there's obviously horror waiting for me in that room. I don't want to see things my naked eye wasn't supposed to see.

"Do you want maggots coming out of you again? Do you think Sgora will want you?" I cannot believe my mother.

"Mama, Sgora is the last person in my head right now. All I want is to get help, my vagina smells and now I have things coming out of it,"

She takes a deep breath, composing herself.

"Okay, let's put the Sgora plan on hold. But please trust that you will get help here," she says, caressing my face. "I will never mislead you, you know this my princess," she's right. I allow her to take my hand and lead me to the rondavel.

I am still scared but I refuse to allow fear to stop me from getting the help I need. I tried the western way and the doctors found absolutely nothing wrong with me so now it's time to give this route a chance.

We are hit by a pungent smell of muti as soon as my mother pushes the door open. I place a hand over my mouth and nose but mama quickly slaps it away.

I was right this is a room of horror, my whole body has gone cold. I manage not to cry or make a sound because I don't know what will happen if I do. I just hope and pray that I don't have to ever set my foot here again after today.

We took off our shoes before getting inside the room and there are no chairs in here so we sit down on the reed mat and wait for the man to come and talk to us.

He comes in about twenty minutes later, which felt like a lifetime to me because I'm so desperate to know what's going on with me.

"What can I do for you?" He asks after settling down in front of us.

"My daughter..."

He quickly interjects, "I wasn't asking you," mama nudges me with an elbow and I swallow past the lump clogged in my throat and start telling him about the situation; how it started up until today. When I'm done he is laughing like I just said a joke and that is really infuriating.

"You were bewitched. You've been sleeping with something that has finished you inside and the only thing left for you right now is death," he says and I gasp in shock.

"Madlabantu no! My daughter cannot die," my mother is brushing my back in circles as I cry.

"I know you can help her, please do something," mama begs the man.

"Of course I can help your child Nobantu. But it will depend on whether she wants my help or not," I just nod vigorously because I know the words won't come out of my mouth right now.

"See, she wants the help. Anything you want us to do we will definitely do. Just please ensure that my princess doesn't die," I am too young to die, I still have so much to live for.

"Your daughter has to stay here with me for treatment. It's going to be long and painful to reverse everything that's happening to her," I quickly shoot my mother a look with eyes filled with tears.

"He will help you Ndongoloza. I need you to trust him and all his processes. All this will be over soon, I promise," I just have to wear my big girl panties and go through with this whole thing. I mean it's a matter of life and death, I don't have a choice.

"Go knock on the main house door and tell the woman that opens for you to take you to the guestroom and give you a cloth to change into. I'll soon be there, your mother and I have something important to discuss," I just hope and pray that he tells my mother who did this to me and they send it back to the person in ten folds.

LONDEKA ZULU

Dedani's wife invited me for dinner today but I'm not going there. I have no business sitting around the table with him and his family when I know what he wants from me. Hlubi has been trying to call me since this morning but I didn't answer even one call, I hope she reads between the lines. I accepted her apology and the flowers she brought me, everything else is just unnecessary.

I just want to get to my flat and soak myself in the bathtub, I had a day from hell. I planned on going home to my family today but I'm just too tired so I'll leave tomorrow morning.

I switch off my computer screen and throw everything in my handbag before getting up and leaving the office.

I'm on my phone requesting an Uber when a car stops next to me, I look inside and it's Hlubi with the widest smile on her face. Jesus, this woman doesn't give up.

"I told you I'll come pick you up myself," she says and I heave a sigh. I honestly don't need this drama in my life.

"And I thought you were joking," I say and she shakes her head no.

"Nope, I wasn't. Hop in let's head to my house," she says and I bite my lower lip.

"Hlubi, I really cannot go to dinner at your house. I don't think it's appropriate, especially after what happened right here. I don't want to mix business with pleasure," she opens the door and climbs out.

"Listen, I just want to show you and my husband that I know there's nothing inappropriate happening between you two," she says and I nod.

"I appreciate that but your apology was enough for me, really," she closes her eyes and takes a deep breath.

"The stunt I pulled really caused a lot of tension in my marriage. This dinner was going to help me and my husband move forward. I know it doesn't make sense to you but..." She stops talking and wipes her tear. This is exactly why I can't go to her house. Her husband's lust for me is also the cause of what's happening to them. What kind of woman will I be walking in her home and eating her food while her husband has inappropriate thoughts of us running through his head?

"I'm sorry that your marriage is not doing well at the moment but I don't think me coming to dinner will fix it. Talk to your husband and fix things without a third party," she fans her face with both hands.

"I guess you're right. Can I at least drop you off at your place?" She asks and I nod then round the car and climb inside her Range Rover.

"Everyone is going to be disappointed but I'll make sure they understand," I smile at her before looking out the window.

It's a little awkward in here and I cannot wait till we get to my place. I direct her and that's the only time we are exchanging words.

She stops outside my apartment building, "Thank you so much for the ride and I will pray for your marriage to take the right direction again," I say and she smile sweetly at me.

"Thank you Londeka," I open the door and climb out without saying anything else to her.

I get in the apartment and the guy I'm sharing with is not home. This arrangement between us is not working out anymore. He brings his friends and they make noise without considering me. I need to move out of this place, I am permanently employed now and I can afford to live on my own. My little sisters will also be able to visit me when I cannot go home to see them.

I take off my clothes and wrap a towel around my body and slowly stride to the kitchen to get a bottle of wine and a glass before heading to the bathroom. I open the tap and fill my glass as I wait for the tub to also be filled with water.

My phone rings and it's a number I don't recognize. I hope it's not Dedani reaching me with another number because I blocked his.

"Hello," I answer meekly.

"Londeka, hey," I recognize this voice but I cannot point it out.

"Hey..." He chuckles.

"It's been so long that you can't even hear who you are talking to," I'm searching my head but I cannot come back with a face or name of who this voice belongs to, "It's me, Qophelo," that's it, God! How could I have forgotten my best friends brothers voice, oh ex-best friend I mean.

"Hey, Q. Jesus, it has been so long. Where are you hiding?" I ask, putting the phone on speaker and getting in the tub.

"Eswatini, I'm sure you heard of what happened between my mom and I," I heave a sigh.

"No, things haven't been the same between your sister and I. I know absolutely nothing," it still hurts that Ndondo ended our friendship because of a bastard like Dedani.

"I'm sorry to hear that. You and my twin sister had a genuine friendship," he says and tears burn my eyes. It's sad that she didn't see that.

"Thank you," I take a sip of my wine, "What are you doing in Swaziland?" I ask and he blows out a sigh.

"Trying to rebuild my life. I fucked up so much but I realized that I need to get my shit together before I was too far gone. I just miss home so much and I know my family wants nothing to do with me so I had to reach out to you," oh man, he sounds so sad.

"You can come visit me when you can,"

"Are you serious?" I nod as if he can see me.

"Yes, come through," Qophelo and Ndondoloza have always been spoiled, their mother would do anything for them. I wonder what happened between them that he had to move to another country.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 65

SPONSORED BY ANONYMOUS

MAWANDE DUMA

I was very surprised when Msebeyelanga called me this morning and asked that I accompany him somewhere. Things haven't been good between us this whole week, he has been acting very strange. Our phone conversations are short and somewhat cold and when we are in the same space it's very awkward; we haven't even had sex the whole week and that's unlike us.

I'm honestly scared that this is the end of our relationship. What if he realized that our relationship isn't what he wanted because I'm not his ideal woman? I mean I have nothing to my name and it's only next year that I will be working on myself and my future.

We are driving but I don't know where to, I'll just see when we get there. We haven't even exchanged a word, except for the greeting when he picked me up. I feel like crying because I never thought we'd hit rock bottom this quickly into the relationship. I love him so much and it hurts that I might have to go through life without him. Thinking about all of this makes me feel like someone is punching me hard in the gut.

We have driven out of the area I know and I'm tempted to ask where we are headed to but I cannot bring myself to look at him and say anything; I want him to be the one to say something first. I know that might be childish but I have never had to deal with such situations, Msebeyelanga is my first boyfriend.

I'm still trying to find my feet through this relationship, I'm not sure of how a lot of things work but what I am truly sure of is my love for him.

He takes a turn and we drive into a farm, I've never seen so many cows in my life before. Whoever owns this place must have a lot of money to his or her name. He keeps driving until a big house comes into full view, there are SUV's parked in the drive way and to my far left there are farming machinery. Msebe kills the engine and climbs out of the car without saying anything to me. I remain in the car and watch him approach the door, it opens before he can get to it and a black guy appears in khaki pants and shirt. They shake hands and laugh over something then look my way; a few seconds later Msebe walks towards his car and the guy goes back inside the house.

He opens my door and holds out his hand, I don't hesitate linking mine with his.

"You look beautiful, Wande," he says and tears burn my eyes. I haven't felt that warmth from him in a while.

"Thank you," I say softly and he brushes my knuckles with his thumb.

"Can we take a walk? There's something I want to show you," I nod my head and we start walking hand in hand. My heart is thumping right now because I don't know where we are in our relationship at this moment.

We get to the back of the house and there are other cows in the kraal. How many cows does one person need?

"He has so many cows, Jesus," I say out loud and he chuckles.

"Yes, he does. But these ones aren't his, my father left them for us. I pay him every month to take care of them on my family's behalf," he says and I nod my understanding.

"That's smart," he stops walking and takes my other hand; we are now eye to eye.

"I don't even know where to start Wande, but let me say I'm sorry first. I have been an asshole to you these past couple of days and that's because I have been so nervous about today," he says and I narrow my eyes.

"What's happening today," my voice comes out hoarsely.

Msebe runs a finger along my jawline and I gasp, I missed his touch so bad.

"Mawande, you have been the best thing to ever happen in my life. You have completed me in everyway possible; saying I love you is not enough in expressing my feelings for you," I am crying, I mean how can I not when he's saying all these perfect things to me at this moment, "Duma, Mthombeni. I brought you here to see my father's cows because I need you to know that they are ready to go fill up your father's kraal," I let go of his hands and place mine over my mouth. I'm shocked, I wasn't expecting this at all.

"Msebe, baby. Are you saying..." I can't even complete what I wanted to say.

"Yes, baby. I am asking you to be uMamuNgidi. I am asking you to make a man..." I don't wait for him to finish talking. I jump on him and luckily he catches me and kisses me as passionately as I'm kissing him.

God knows that I didn't see this coming, I thought he was going to break up with me and all along he was just nervous because he wanted to ask me to be his wife.

"Uthini Wande? Uyangi faka noma uyangi khipha?" He asks and I giggle, hiding on his chest.

"I'd love nothing more than to be your wife, sthandwa sami. I don't see myself with anyone but you," he kisses me again and we are disturbed by a car stopping behind us.

It's the guy he was talking to earlier on, he has the biggest smile on his face. Did he know about this?

"That kiss can only mean that she said yes," he says and Msebe laughs while nodding vigorously.

"Yes, this beautiful lady is going to be my wife," he places his hand on the small of my back and I'm left blushing.

"Congratulations to the both of you," he says, holding out a hand to Msebe first then me. "You can go to the next spot when you're ready," he hands Msebe a black cloth and I narrow my eyes. He has more surprises? My heart can't.

"Baby, I'm going to blindfold you just for a little drive okay?" He says and I nod.

My hands are shaking, I honestly cannot believe that he asked me to marry him. It feels so surreal, I mean it hasn't been long since we started dating but he has realized that I am the one for him. I wish my parents were alive to see me get married to the most amazing man, a man who is treating me the way my father treated my mom. Everything has been going so well in my life, God has definitely opened the doors for me. It's my season and nothing or no one can stop it.

The car stops again, it was really not a long drive. Msebe's door opens and he climbs out, a few seconds later mine opens as well and he helps me out before planting a kiss on my forehead. I came here feeling sad and now this day has become the best day of my life.

He closes the door and takes my hand guiding my steps. I cannot wait to take off this blind fold and see what he has planned for us. We stop after a few steps and a kiss lands on my lips, making me smile

like a Cheshire cat. I've known genuine happiness since I found Msebe, my heart wants no one else.

He removes the blind fold and I slowly open my eyes.

"Oh baby," I say, stepping back.

This is so beautiful, how long did it take them to do this for me?

We are still on the same property, I can see the house from here. This guy has a beautiful place. There's a romantic set-up facing the water and there's greenery at the back, it's breathtaking. The space is decorated minimally but it's everything.

"Who helped you baby?" I ask and he's smiling, proud of himself.

"The guy you just met and his wife. Do you like it?" He asks and I nod vigorously.

"I love it. This place is gorgeous, I've never seen anything like it before," he takes my hand and kisses my knuckles.

"I'm glad you do baby. I remembered this view from when I came years ago to check if the place is perfect for the cows. I thought a set-up here after showing you the cows would be nice, we didn't have to drive to another location after accepting my proposal," he explains and I'm glad he planned it this way. I love everything about today. He takes my hand and leads us to the set-up; there's another table to the side with platters of food.

"I thought you didn't want me anymore, this week has been hell," I say and his face falls.

"I'm sorry babe, I was honestly so nervous. I didn't know how to act around you without giving anything away. This had to be a surprise," I totally understand what he's saying right now.

"The perfect surprise," his smile comes back.

My handsome husband to be.

"There's only one thing left and it will be perfect," he says and I frown.

"I doubt it," Msebe looks at his wrist watch.

"It's almost time," he turns me so I can look towards the view then he snakes his arms around my waist.

"Time for what, Hlomuka?" I ask and his dick twitches on my ass. I cannot help but giggle.

"Definitely not the time for that," I hear a helicopter sound and look up to see which direction it's coming from, "Time for that," he says, pointing to the helicopter that has a banner written "Marry Me". My hands are covering my mouth, he pulled all the stops. I am so emotional right now.

Msebe is not holding me anymore so I turn and find him on his knee with a gorgeous ring in his hand.

"Please share my life with me babe. Grow old and grey with me," I bend down and kiss him.

"It's only you baby, it will only ever be you," I say and he takes my hand and slides the ring on my finger. It fits perfectly and looks good on my shaking hand.

"Hello fiance," he says, getting up and picking me up then spinning me around. I'm giggling like a school girl.

"That's definitely me," he puts me down, "I love you so much Msebe,"

"Uthandwa yimina babe," we share another kiss before he pops the champagne and pours into the flutes then hands one to me.

"To a beautiful future together as husband and wife," he says and I click my glass with his.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 66

SPONSORED BY AMELIA

MAWANDE DUMA

I have been up for a few minutes now and I'm staring at my gorgeous ring, Msebe has taste.

I cannot wait to go back home and share this moment with his family and Ntuthuko. I know they are all going to be happy for us, especially his mother. MaMokwena lives to see me and her son getting married and giving her many many grandchildren.

The only people I'm worried about is my aunt and her daughter, I know they are going to try and make this hard for Msebe and I. They will do everything in their power to sabotage my relationship, if everything went their way I'd live in that backroom until the day I die. I don't know why they think I'm not worthy of love and a good life. Good thing they aren't my God and they have absolutely no say over my life.

"Ngoduso yami," Msebe says with a groggy voice and I smile, turning to look at him.

"Morning bab'Ngidi," I peck his lips.

"I didn't do anything to you last night if you managed to wake up before me," he says and I'm left melting as I remember the delicious memories of last night. After the dreamy proposal we drove to Port Shepstone, he booked us at the lodge that belong to me but taken by aunt Nobantu.

"Baby, you did everything. I woke up because I still cannot believe that I'm engaged to you," I say and his eyes light up.

"Best believe that I'm making you my wife and moving to Johannesburg with you to start our new life," he says and the smile on my face widens. We didn't talk about the living arrangements yesterday, I'm happy he is relocating to Joburg with me. Kwazulu-natal will always be home -where we come from- but Gauteng is where we will build our own home and family.

"I'm happy that you'll be by my side. It would have killed me to be so far away from you," he pulls me towards him and we are glued to each other, my skin on his skin.

"Me too baby. We need to start looking at houses right away, something that's going to be our permanent residence. We can start looking at websites and find a couple of houses we like then fly to Johannesburg to view them," It makes me a little uncomfortable that he's going to do everything for us while I'm just a student, "Hey, what's wrong?" He asks, placing a hand on my cheek.

"I just feel bad that it's going to take me years before I can be able to bring in some money into our household," these are uncomfortable conversation we need to have before we can do anything.

"Baby, I proposed to you knowing this. Mawande, I will hold us down even when you're a big shot lawyer. I will be a provider and protector forever. Please don't stress," I believe he will but I really want to help, "Plus, you will be contributing in a way only you can my love," that's very true. No matter how successful I get, I will always take care of Msebe in a way only a wife can. I think I'll have a helper but I will be hands on with his things.

"We are going to make this work. Our life will be beautiful, not perfect but beautiful," he closes his eyes, drinking in my words.

"I want to send a letter to your family and pay lobola," he says and I swallow hard.

I'm happy that he wants to move forward quickly and not give me a ring that will be on my finger for the longest time, "I just don't want to

pay lobola to your aunt babe. You are a Duma and I want your cows going to the right people," this is going to be the hardest lobola process.

"I don't even know where my father's side of the family is. Aunt Nobantu made sure to drive them all away, she managed to do this because she was my guardian and had power over everything they left for me," he's nodding his understanding.

"You don't even know one person who would know where they are?"

"I know a couple who were close friends with my parents. I used to visit them frequently even after my parents died but at 16 they stopped coming around to see me or even call. I suspect aunt Nobantu has a hand in that," his eyes are widened, he's not believing his ears.

"That woman is the devil babe. Where does the couple live?" He asks.

"Here in Port Shepstone," that's if they didn't move, I mean it has been years.

"Can we please make a stop at their house today?" I nod vigorously.

Anything to help us find my father's side of the family. I want everything to be done right. My marriage to Msebe has to follow every traditional rule.

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I'm nervous and crossing my fingers that we find them and they can help me. I hope we do because I also want to know why they stopped coming to get me or call me on the phone; I believe life would have turned out differently for me if they were in my life. My fiance is driving with one hand on my thigh, he keeps looking at me

and blushing. Msebe is happy, just like me. It really feels good to love and be loved back with the same intensity.

I point him to the house and he parks at their gate and presses the intercom. He moves his hand from my thigh and takes my hand then gives it a reassuring squeeze. Imagine how great it will be going back to Mzumbe knowing that the right people will get the letter from the Ngidi's. I will be more excited about getting married knowing that those evil people will not try to sabotage things for me.

"Hello," a female voice answers.

"Hi, uhm is this the Majozi residence?" I ask nervously.

"Yes, who is this?" Msebe heaves a sigh of relief.

"Aunt Mbali, it's me Mawande. Nandi and Phila's daughter from Mzumbe," I say with a shaking voice, I cannot believe that we found them.

"Oh my God," the gate opens immediately and Msebeyelanga drives in and parks behind the BMW. The front door opens and she walks out, Jesus she hasn't changed one bit. I quickly climb out of the car and run to her open arms, I am in her warm embrace in seconds. We are both crying.

"Oh, Wande. Oh nontombi," I have always felt loved and protected when I was with her and her husband. I'm so glad that I found them and they will stand in for my parents when I get married.

She lets go of me and looks at me from head to toe before telling me I look as gorgeous as my late mother; that has me more emotional. I introduce her to Msebe and tell her that we got engaged yesterday. She congratulates us and asks us to come inside, we are offered

drinks and when she comes back from the kitchen I ask where her husband is and she tells me that he died in a car accident about 4 years ago. I offer my condolences and she settles next to me and ask me to tell her how life has been.

"I should have known that she was going to mistreat you. I wish we didn't allow her to threaten us like that," I narrow my eyes and look at Msebeyelanga.

"What do you mean aunt Mbali?" She takes a deep breath.

"Well she came here and told us never to come around to take you. She said she suspected that my husband was doing inappropriate things to you and if we continued to take you by force she will go to the authorities. My husband and I knew she wasn't joking because of the look in her eyes and I didn't want him to get into trouble so we decided to just step back," why am I even shocked?

"That woman is the devil aunt Mbali that's why I need to find my father's people so they can negotiate my lobola and take it," she's nodding vigorously, "Do you know where they are?" I ask and she bites her lower lip.

"I'm not sure where they are based but I can ask my elders and they will definitely know where to find a relative or two," that's a relief.

At least we have a lead.

"Thank you so much," she takes my hand.

"I cannot believe that I'm sitting next to you right now," we are smiling at each other.

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Msebe has been awfully quiet since we left aunt Mbali's house. His hand is not even on my thigh and I've come to realize that he only does that when there's something wrong. I don't understand why he is like this because we got what we wanted; a lead on my family to accept his letter and lobola. We should be over the moon right now. I won't keep quiet like I did yesterday when we were going to the farm. We are on our way to marriage and clear communication is key.

"Baby, what's wrong?" I ask and he takes a deep breath. He has been waiting for me to ask and I'm nervous because I don't remember doing anything to offend him.

He parks the car on the side of the road and looks at me.

"Wande, do you trust me?" I'm taken aback by his question.

"I agreed to spend the rest of my life with you. That means I don't only love you but I trust you with my life," I say my truth.

"Then why was I hearing some of the things your aunt did for the first time in that lounge?" He asks and I close my eyes.

I did tell him some of the things my aunt did to me but I didn't go in too deep.

"Msebe...uhm...I didn't tell you because I didn't want you to look at me with pity or stay in this relationship because you didn't want to hurt me too," he narrows his eyes.

"That's not enough reason for you to have kept those things from me," I'm not sure if he is angry or sad.

I didn't want him to know about my aunt making me sleep in the kraal and forcing me to bath with cold water in the winter. I couldn't tell him that she used to deprive me of sleep as punishment for not doing as her twins demanded. I don't know why I forgot he was in

the room when I was telling aunt Mbali everything that happened to me over the years.

"It is. It would have changed the way you look at me," he shakes his head.

"That's not true. Knowing your life story in full would have only made me appreciate you even more. It would have made me understand what you have been through and what I can do to make life more easier for you. Wande, you might not know this but you have life time scars from what your aunt put you through. What if I did something stupid that triggered you and you lost it in a way you cannot take back?" I swallow hard. I didn't tell him because I was avoiding these conversations, I don't want to remember those horrific things.

"I just want to forget, Msebe. Is that too much to ask?" I ask and he shakes his head.

"I don't want to take you back to those times but I need you to know that you can talk to me about everything and it won't change how I feel about you. Baby, we are getting married. We need to trust each other with our deepest things," I honestly hear him but I didn't want him to see my pain before he saw me as his woman.

"I'm sorry and I'll try to open up more about what I've been through," I see relief flashing across his eyes. This really hurt him and it sucks because I didn't want anything ruining our mood, we just got engaged.

"That's all I ask for,"

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 67

SPONSORED BY AMELIA

NARRATED

He never wanted this life, infact he hated it because it made people want nothing to do with his father and him. They were accused of all the atrocities that happened in Mbumbulu and that hurt him very much. What he didn't know back then was that every "rumour" was actually the truth; his father wasn't a good traditional healer and he only got to know it later in life.

He was forced to stop going to school because other parents weren't comfortable with him being in the same class as their children. They threatened to stone him to death if they saw him anywhere near the school, he didn't want to die so he stopped attending.

Even though the whole community hated them and didn't want to be associated with him, one person remained his friend without fear of persecution. It meant a lot to Mpiyakhe because their friendship gave him a sense of normalcy. Being around his father meant learning about different muti and it's purposes; it meant he had to go out to the veld to dig what his father wanted then come back to grind it.

Mpiyakhe was very close with Bonga and they did everything together. They were more brothers than friends and that's the reason why he took his betrayal hard and never forgave him.

They were together when the beautiful Nobantu passed them with a group of her friends. It was love at first sight for Mpiyakhe and he told Bonga about it immediately; from there they started following the girls so Mpiyakhe could see the beauty that caught his heart. His best friend advised him to tell Nobantu how he felt because it had been months and months since he saw her and freely fell for her.

Mpiyakhe was so nervous, he didn't know where he would start explaining what he was feeling. His best friend gave him tips on how

to court a girl and he listened because Bonga knew all about it, he had a woman he was set to marry. That meant his advise was certainly going to work in his favor.

He finally gathered the strength to tell Nobantu how he felt, but she was with her friends as always. He asked to talk in private but he was told he can say whatever in front of her girls. As nervous as he was he poured his heart out to the love of his heart but the response he got was laughter from Nobantu and her friends. As if that wasn't enough, Nobantu hailed insults at him. That broke his heart and crushed his self-esteem.

Bonga was there to cheer him up and he was grateful to have the support but his heart was still longing for Nobantu. Bonga understood that and he didn't judge him one bit; he knew that matters of the heart were too deep to fully understand.

One day Mpiyakhe went to Bonga's house to tell him of his plans; plans to leave Mbumbulu to start a new life away from his father. The reason Nobantu rejected him was because he was the son of a man people believed to be a witch. He thought disassociating himself from his father will make Nobantu rethink her decision. He was going to move to Durban and find a job; be a new man and come back later to find the love of his life and take her away to live their fairytale.

When he got to Bonga's house the door was locked but his bedroom window was open and there were sounds coming from there. He went to peep and what he saw next hurt him in a way he never thought possible. His best friend, who knew how much he loved Nobantu was on top of her balls deep. He watched until they were finished and then left with tears streaming down his face.

Weeks passed and the pain was still fresh, he could still hear her moans and see him sweating on top of her. He never confronted him and each time Bonga came to the house he would hide and ask his father to say he is not at home. His father finally sat him down and asked what had happened, he didn't want to say anything at first but his father was persistent. He opened up and his father saw the anger and pain in his son's eyes and asked what he wished to happen to both Nobantu and Bonga. Mpiyakhe just wanted them to suffer for the rest of their lives and that's when Mpiyakhe Mngomezulu died and Madlabantu was born.

His father told him that he could mess up their lives by just mixing muti in the rondavel. That was when he realized that the rumors about his father were true, but he didn't care, he wanted them to pay for pain he was feeling. For years his father trained him to be one of the darkest nyanga's to ever live and since then he has orchestrated everything that has happened to Nobantu and her children.

Qophelo killed his father so Madlabantu could be able to get Bonga's spirit and use it for his dark purposes.

The meeting of Ndongoloza and Dedani Mkhize was not a coincidence either. Dedani was his client who wanted to upgrade in ukuthwala so he advised him on what to do and then did what he does best. Madlabantu used his dark powers to make sure Ndongoloza literally fell on Dedani's lap and becomes the sacrifice to isilwane sakhe. What he didn't plan, however, was Nobantu bringing her daughter to him for help. The girl was supposed to die and leave Nobantu heartbroken just like he was. Ndongoloza will still die, that is inevitable but Madlabantu has mixed herbs and herbs to offer her temporary healing so he can use her to squash the evil heart in her

mother's chest. Madlabantu became this dark just to deal with Nobantu, to cause her pain at every turn. His hate for her and the determination to destroy her intensified when she came running to him for help like she didn't insult him for the very same thing she was asking of him.

Nandi and her husband were good people but Madlabantu still gave Nobantu poison to kill them because he needed the dark cloud to linger on Nobantu's head. The more forces against the woman who hurt him, the better.

A tap on Madlabantu's shoulder makes him snap out of his train of thoughts. It's MaShelembe, another beautiful woman he has used muti on to get in his bed. He has surely slept with almost all the woman in Mbumbulu, young or old; black or blue. Changing these woman to him is just a power move, he is doing this because of the rejection he suffered growing up. The woman hands him the phone and he spanks her ass before she walks back to the house to continue with whatever she was doing. Madlabantu looks at the screen and smiles, it's Nobantu on the line and the minutes are running.

"MaDladla, are you going to call me at every hour?" He asks then let's out a chuckle.

"My daughter is with you so yes, I'll be calling every hour," Nobantu says with an attitude on the other side of the call.

"What do you think I'll do to your daughter?" He teases her.

"You promised that you will not touch my child, don't go back on your word," he rolls his eyes.

Ndondoloza is filth, he doesn't even crave those exposed thighs in the rondavel.

"I am a man of my word," that's not true. Madlabantu is not trustworthy but she can trust that he won't do anything to her daughter. Ndongoloza will satisfy him in a non sexual way.

"Good. So, how is my princess?" she asks and he heaves a sigh.

"She's okay. She is in the rondavel sleeping. The muti I'm giving her is very strong,"

Nobantu takes a deep breath, "She will be fine though, right?" The desperation in her voice makes him smile.

"I am Madlabantu, I work wonders. You out of all people should know this. I helped you kill your sister and her husband. Helped you make sure that none of the Dumas come there to disturb you. Your toy boy is still living in the same house as you," he counts.

"I will call you again later," with that said the line goes dead. Oh, he cannot wait for Ndongoloza to be okay. It's going to be entertaining watching mother and daughter at each other's throats.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 68

NOMAHLUBI MKHIZE

"Qaqamba," I call out her name for the millionth time and she doesn't look at me. I don't know if she's ignoring me on purpose or she is just lost in her social media.

I look at my mother in law and she's giving me the eye, she wants to see how I'm going to handle the situation. My sister hasn't been the easiest person to deal with and she has only been here for a couple of days. She eats and throws her plate in the sink; getting her to help out with our mother is a challenge. I have to wait until she's done

watching reels on Instagram. I cannot ask my husband to help me with my mother, he made it clear where he stands in the situation.

I take a deep breath and stride to my sister on the couch, I take the phone from her and fold my arms.

"What the hell Hlubi?" She snaps and I hear my mother in law gasp in shock.

"Are you talking to me?" I ask and she blinks a few times. I won't have her disrespecting me in my own house like this.

"I'm sorry," she says then sits up straight.

"I brought you here to help me out with our mother. I try not to bother you a lot about her but you don't help me out with anything. I have a lot on my plate, I cannot deal with a selfish person," she raises an eyebrow, "All you do is look at your phone. I've been calling your name for a minute but you're lost in your own world," I am really not happy with her. She's acting like a brat, this is not how my mother raised us.

"What do you need?" she asks.

"MaMkhize was calling for you, asking for water to take her pills but you didn't hear her," that's why I had to step in and this isn't the first time my sister "ignored" my husband's mother.

"I'm sorry ma, I'll go get the water now," she attempts to get up but I hold out my hand.

"No need, I've already done that. You can help me with the dishes though," that's the least she can do because I cooked. I always cook and wash the dishes afterwards.

"I will do that, I promise. I just need to respond to a few messages," is she being serious right now?

"Damn it Qaqamba!" I scream and she shifts uncomfortably on the couch. I'm shaking with so much anger. My outburst wasn't

necessarily from her answer; I have been going through a lot of things and I don't have anyone to talk to. My marriage is not doing too good. My mother is a vegetable and I am solely responsible for her. It's just all too much for one person; I hate to admit it but Dedani was right. I should have taken my mother to a specialized care home but I felt like I would be throwing her away. She has always been supportive and there for me through everything, I just wanted to do the same for her.

"What's wrong?" My husband walks into the lounge and I close my eyes. I feel bad for snapping at Qaqamba like that, she didn't deserve it. I give her the phone back then pivot and walk past Dedani, I need to go cry alone. I have been keeping everything in because I wanted people to think I have everything under control.

I am about to take the stairs when I notice my handbag and car keys on the side table. I decide to grab them and go out for a drive, maybe that will help clear my head.

"Hlubi, where are you going?" My husband asks as soon as I touch the door knob.

"I just need some air, I'll be back. Please don't wait up," I walk out and I'm glad he doesn't follow me. I won't be able to look at him knowing that he was right all along about my mother's situation. I mean our marriage is facing a tough time because I didn't want to listen to his reasoning.

I have been driving around for over an hour and tears are just streaming down my face. I have to apologize to Qaqamba but also make her aware of how inconsiderate she has been. Its time I also sat down with my husband and sincerely ask for his forgiveness; Dedani has done nothing but love and support me through everything and the one time his opinion differed from mine I caused a rift between us. He honestly didn't deserve the bitch I have been towards him

these past couple of weeks and it's time I gave him his wife back. Tonight I am a little ashamed of going home, I want to get there when they are all asleep.

I stop the car outside Londeka's apartment building and take out my phone to call her.

"Hlubi," she answers in a questioning manner.

She must be wondering why I am calling her at this time.

"Hi, Londeka. Are you at your place?" I ask and she doesn't answer right away.

"Uhm, yeah I am. Why do you ask?" I heave a sigh.

"I am outside, please come out," I know she's not my friend but I don't know anyone in Durban. I am always closed in my house and when I want to go out I go with my husband or sister.

"Oh, okay. I'll be down in a few," that's a relief, I thought she was going to tell me to leave. I hang up the call and patiently wait for her with my eyes glued to the entrance. She appears after a few minutes, she's in her pyjamas. It's not too late it's a little after 8pm. I unlock the door and she climbs in the car with narrowed eyes. Her expression is understandable.

"I'm sorry for just showing up. I didn't have anywhere else to go," I say and her face softens.

"Hlubi, are you okay?" She asks and that sets me off immediately. She is literally the first person to ask me this. I place my forehead on the steering wheel and cry silently, she brushes my back and being comforted feels so good.

"Problems don't last, Hlubi. A year from now you won't even remember that you were once outside my place crying. Whatever it is, don't allow it to break your soul," she says and I raise my head and

look at her. She smiles while nodding, trying to make me believe her words. She would make an amazing friend.

"Thank you, Londeka," I wipe my tears, "I know you have work tomorrow but can we just drink a bottle of wine?" She bites her lower lip, contemplating, "I really need some girl time," emotional blackmail.

"Did you bring the wine? I drank the one I had on Friday," she says and I nod vigorously.

"I actually have a couple in the boot. I didn't offload the plastics," I went to the shops today to pick out a few things.

"Let's go inside then," my phone vibrates on my thigh and it's my husband. I heave a sigh before powering the screen off.

NOBANTU DLADLA

I open my eyes and stretch dramatically before turning to snuggle close to Sqalo but his side of the bed is empty. Where did he disappear to? I am normally the first one to wake up, it's worse now that Ndongoloza is at Madlabantu's house receiving treatment. I don't fully trust that man but he is the only one who can help my daughter. He told me that Ndongoloza was bewitched by one of the village women who is extremely jealous of me. I always knew that these witches don't want to see me and my children happy and winning in life. They are definitely the cause of my child losing her job and possibly breaking up with Mkhize; even though I'm happy it ended because he is a married man.

Our bedroom door opens and he walks in looking great, he is in a suit and all. Where is he going? I know they are okay with him working

from home and only going to the office when there's an important staff meeting or a meeting with a client. Sqalo is not the lawyer that goes to court, he is a wills and estates lawyer.

He didn't mention anything to me so I have a right to wonder where he is going looking breathtaking this early morning. I sit up straight and he comes to my side and kisses my cheek.

"Where are you off to?" I ask with furrowed eyebrows.

"Haibo! Bantu, I told you a week ago that we have a departmental meeting at work and I have to be present. I will also be staying in Durban this whole week, Vivian is going to Johannesburg for work. How did you forget all of this?" He asks, putting on his wrist watch.

I don't remember him telling me this, it would have gave me more sleepless nights because I don't want to be separated from him.

"Are you sure you told me?" I ask, getting off the bed.

"Of course I'm sure, I received an email from work and I told you immediately. Then the next day I showed you Vivian's text," a lot has been happening. I was stressing over Ndongoloza, everything Sqalo told me must have skipped my mind.

"Couldn't she get a nanny or something?" I ask and he snaps an eyebrow.

"Why would she do that? I have been wanting to spend time with my kids, Bantu," I don't trust that girl. She's probably not even going to Johannesburg like she told Sqalo. She just wants him to come so they can play happy family.

"Where will you be staying?" I am too jealous when it comes to my man.

"At the house of course," I gulp down my saliva and he heaves a sigh, "Nobantu, I'm just going for the kids. Vivian won't be there," he reassures me and I just nod.

Why am I even worried? I mean Madlabantu made sure that he will not leave me for any woman in this world.

"What's the time?" I ask.

"It's 6am, I need to leave now so I can get to Durban on time," he picks up his leather travel bag from the floor, "You'll be good for me right?" He asks with a raised eyebrow and I nod blushing.

"I'll always be good for you. Kiss the kids for me and don't do anything I wouldn't do in Durban," he chuckles and pecks my lips.

"Let me walk you out," I link our arms and we walk out of our bedroom.

Sqalo throws his bag in the back of the car before he pulls me to him and kisses me passionately. Why is he turning me on when he's about to leave for the whole week? God, I'm going to miss him so much. I make him promise to video call at least twice a day and he agrees. He gets in his car and drives off as I wave goodbye. I watch his car until it disappears; this house and our bed will be cold without him. I close the garage and when I pivot I see Mawande locking her door, I haven't seen her in a while.

"Mawande!" She turns and I signal for her to come here. I place both hands on my waist and watch her approach me; she puts her left hand in the pocket of her dress when she's almost near me.

"You called," haibo!

I fear Msebe's penis.

"You don't know how to greet anymore?" She is tempted to roll her eyes.

"Good morning. You called for me?" Claps once!

"Where are you going this early morning?" I ask and she shakes her head with a lopsided smile.

"I don't mean to sound disrespectful but that's not your business," haike, Nandi's child is disrespectful. Her phone rings and she looks at it. I gasp in shock to see the same phone Ndongoloza is using in Mawande's hand. That phone costs thousands of rands, who could hav...oh Msebeyelanga bloody Ngidi. I need to get my daughter a more advanced one, she can't use the same thing as Mawande.

"Baby," she answers, "Yes, I was just delayed for a sec," she giggles, "Tell Singa he won't be late for school," she hangs up with a smile.

"I have to go," she leaves me standing here, who is she swaying that flat ass for?

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 69

MAWANDE DUMA

It feels awkward to be driving with my finance and not have his hand on my thigh. He has stopped himself a couple of times because we don't want to come across as disrespectful to aunt Mbali who is sitting in the back. We picked her up after dropping Singabakhe at school; she is accompanying us to go see my father's cousin. I'm super grateful to her for moving quickly and getting us the address; Msebe doesn't want to waste any time in moving forward with getting married traditionally. He wants us to move to Johannesburg

as husband and wife and today is the first step in making sure that it happens.

The GPS shows that we have reached our destination. We park outside the yard and climb out before greeting the woman sweeping the yard nextdoor. She is looking at us intensely, definitely wondering who we are and what we came here to do. Township people are just like villagers, they are always minding other people's business. There's a sign at the gate that says there's a dog here so we don't enter; aunt Mbali shouts the Duma clan names and a few minutes later a woman appears from the corner and makes her way to us. She greets us and opens the gate.

"Can I help you?" She asks.

"Yes, my name is Mbali Majozi. This is Mawande and her finance Msebe. We are looking for Hamilton Duma," the woman narrows her eyes.

"That's my husband. He is still sleeping, he came from night shift but please do come in," she leads the way.

We are shown where to sit and she disappears to one bedroom for a few minutes. She has changed out of her gown and now wearing a floral dress. She tells us that my uncle will be out shortly and asks us if we would like coffee or juice. We all ask for coffee since it's still in the morning.

The bedroom door opens and my uncle walks out, he doesn't look like the last time I saw him. There's some gray on his facial hair.

"Sanibonani," he greets. We acknowledge him and he settles on the single couch. His wife comes back with a tray with cups and a sugar container, we all pour our own sugar. Uncle Hamilton's eyes are on me the entire time.

His wife takes the tray back to the kitchen and doesn't come back to join us.

"Mawande ka Phila," he says and I'm overjoyed that he still remembers me.

"Baba, it's me," he offers me a smile.

"It has been long. You have grown so much. How are you mntanami?" He asks and I heave a sigh.

"I'm great, I would be ungrateful if I complained about my life now," I steal a glance at Msebe next to me.

"Last night at work I was so tired. It felt like something was weighing me down and now that you're here I understand why. It's good to see you, I honestly never thought I'd lay my eyes on you again," he says and shifts uncomfortably on the couch.

"Me too but we are here now," he nods and stands up, opening his arms. I place my cup on the coffee table and get up to hug him.

"This is great, other family members will be happy to hear that you were here. We have been thinking about you all these years but we couldn't come near you because of your aunt. She is a difficult woman to deal with and the power your parents gave her made her even worse. She told us not to come anywhere near the house or you; please don't think that we forgot about you," Nobantu did all that she did and succeeded but I'm grown now and she cannot keep me away from those who genuinely care for me.

"I honestly understand. You don't have to feel bad about anything," we let go then go back to our seats.

"Baba, this is my parents closest friend. Aunt Mbali," I introduce them and he quickly remembers her and asks about her husband. She explains the tragedy that happened and my uncle offers his condolences like I did when I heard. He shares that he also lost his

first wife, the mother of his children. That explains why I couldn't recognize the woman that opened for us; she's the second wife.

"This is Msebeyelanga Ngidi. He is the reason why I had to put on my shoes and come looking for you," I say and he raises an eyebrow, curious.

"I don't understand, MaDuma," I take a deep breath.

"He asked me to be his wife and I said yes. Ngidi here wants to pay my lobola to the Duma's and not my aunt," I say and he gets up and starts dancing. Aunt Mbali is ululating and cheering him on.

"That's what a real man does son. Congratulations to you both," we say thank you and listen as he tells us that we have taken a good step and that it won't always be rosey.

"That's very true. They must always remember why they got married in the first place when things get tough because they definitely will," Aunt Mbali adds. They are scaring me now.

"We will surely remember what you have said," Msebe says then takes a sip of his coffee.

"Mawande, you have to come back this weekend. I am going to call every member of the Duma family and tell them that Philani's only child is home," he says and that gets me excited. It will be nice to see everyone after such a long time.

"I will definitely be here," I say and he holds out his hand to Msebe again.

"Promise to treat my daughter right and please have more than one child. My uncle only had Philani and he only had Mawande; I need you two to make a village," he says and I look away embarrassed.

"I hear you baba," that's Msebe chuckling.

"MaDuma, what's been happening in your life?" I'm not even going to talk about the hardships I've faced under my aunt. I am just going to

give him the good that has been happening in my life. Nobantu has hurt me and took away everything from me but I'm deciding to let go of it all and focus on the positive things in my life now.

"Well, I'm moving to Johannesburg next year because I'm starting university. I am going to study to become a lawyer," I say.

"Hurry and finish that qualification. It will be good to have a lawyer in the family. The police are always troubling me because I don't have a license to sell alcohol. I don't understand why I need one because this is not a tavern, I just buy a few cases of beer and sell to the men around here after a long day at work," he says and we all laugh.

It doesn't matter though, he cannot sell alcohol without a license but I won't tell him that. Let the man be excited to have a lawyer who will tell the police they are wrong for doing their jobs the right way.

"Once I am done they will not bother you again," his smile widens.

"I will start telling them that they have messed with the wrong one. Just because I am a security guard doesn't mean I don't have kids in high places," aow Jehovah.

I just pray he doesn't go around getting himself into trouble because he has a niece who will one day be a lawyer.

NOMAHLUBI MKHIZE

"I am sorry for snapping at you yesterday," I say to Qaqamba and she smiles.

"It's okay sis. I shouldn't have acted like a spoilt brat. I am sorry for not being any help to you, I realized that you've been carrying the burden alone while I just lived my life," she says and I'm glad she realized this all on her own.

"It's hard, sis. I think I have bitten more than I can chew," I say and she takes my hand. It hurts to admit this and think of the alternative.

"With the mom situation?" She asks and I nod and close my eyes.

"I thought I could take care of her since I'm a nurse but I can't, Qaqamba. The kind of care she needs is beyond me. I didn't want to send her away to be taken care of by strangers; it made me feel like I was throwing her to the wolves. I mean mama has been by our side without fail, she gave up so much so we can have everything," I allow my tears to fall.

"Sending her to a hospice is a good idea. I wanted to suggest it myself but after I saw how mad you were with your husband because of it so I decided to say nothing. They will give her the best care Hlubi and we will visit her as much as we can. Taking care of her 24/7 is taking time from your own life; I see how it has strained your marriage," that's the hardest one.

"I want to go back to how things were with my husband. We were so happy, in love and everything was total bliss. I miss the days where I called him home to just make love. I miss our conversations and how he treated me like his princess," she wipes my tears.

"You can't have that back if you are looking after mom all day every day," she's right.

"I know, that's why I have decided to take mama to a specialized care home. I made a few calls this morning and one is willing to take her this Friday," I feel very bad but this is what's best for everyone. It's best for my mom because she will be in good hands. For Qaqamba because she won't have to feel forced to do something she doesn't want to do. It will definitely be great for my marriage because Dedani will get his wife back and I'll feel like myself again.

"That's the best decision, Hlubi. It doesn't make you a bad daughter. Mama wouldn't want you to put your life on hold for her," I want to believe that but it's so hard.

"You can also go back to Eastern Cape," I say and she shakes her head.

"I am not going back there. I love Durban," she says and I know I should just clear it right away.

"You should start looking for jobs and apartments then," I love my sister but she can't stay with us now that mama is going to a home.

For Dedani and I to go back to who we were, we are going to need our space.

"I was going to ask my brother in law to hook me up with a job. I know he has connections," she says and I roll my eyes.

At least she's not asking me to talk to my husband on her behalf.

"You do that and please take me with when looking for an apartment. I need to make sure that it's in a safe area," she takes a sip of her cocktail. I don't want to touch alcohol today.

Londeka and I drank three bottles of wine last night and I'm hangover.

"Don't worry I will," her phone chimes and she takes it and reads the text then smiles.

"Uhm, Hlubi. I am going to have to love and leave you now," she says and I narrow my eyes.

"Where are you going?"

She just moved to Durban, she doesn't have any friends.

"Girl, you sleep next to your husband every night. I need to get some action before I grow cobwebs down there," I gasp in shock.

"Qaqamba, I'm still your elder sister," this child.

She rolls her eyes, "Hlubi, I'm 25 and you're 30. It's not that much of a difference," she takes her handbag and gets up from the chair.

"I'll see you tomorrow," my eyeballs threaten to fall off.

"You're sleeping over?" She pouts, "At least send the location so I know where to look first if you go missing," I mean this is South Africa.

"Promise you won't show up," as if I have the time of day.

"I won't," I say briskly.

"I'll send it to you and his picture when I get there," good.

My sister leaves and I continue eating my food, she barely touched hers. Qaqamba couldn't even wait to make it a take away, I fear the dick she's going to.

This spicy chicken is helping with my hangover. I wonder how Londeka is feeling at work right now. I should give her a ring and find out; I am the reason why she drank alcohol the night before. I put down the cutlery and gulp down my water before taking my phone and calling her.

"No, Hlubi. I'm not available to drink wine with you," she answers and I'm thrown into a fit of laughter.

"Hangover showing you flames?" I ask and she scoffs.

"I'm dying here. I will never drink with you again," I can't stop laughing.

"I'm sorry babe. What can I do to help?" I ask.

"Come stand in for me so I can go and sleep," she says and I would if I could.

"Unfortunately I know nothing about Supply Chain. I'm just a nurse turned housewife," I say and she smacks her lips, making me grin even wider.

"I can, however, take you to the spa on Saturday," Londeka is a great girl and I would love to be her friend. Our friendship won't make my husband raise his ears because he already knows and trusts her.

"I haven't been there in a while, I'd love to go," that's great. I need some girl time.

"Okay, I'll make the arrangements right away then communicate everything with you," I say.

"No problem," this is the start of an amazing friendship, I can just feel it.

"Go back to work. We will talk later,"

"Bye," she hangs up and I go back to eating.

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I never thought I'd see my mother like this. It hurts because she has always been the strongest and the most independent woman I know. I cannot begin to imagine what it's like for her you know, being trapped inside a body that cannot do anything. I wish there was something I could do to make her go back to the woman she was before the hijacking. Mom is such a great person, she doesn't deserve this.

I take her hand and kiss her knuckles, "I'm sorry for leaving you this afternoon. I just needed to talk to Qaqamba in a different environment," I say and wish she could just respond, even if she moved a finger.

"Mama, I hope you don't think that you're a burden to me or that I don't love you," I say with tears streaming down my face.

"I thought I could take care of you but it's so hard. Please don't hate me for taking you to a home. I honestly believe that they will take care of you better," the one that is going to take her this Friday is amazing, they have great reviews and their staff is qualified.

"Qaqamba agreed that it's the best decision. I should have taken you there from the beginning but I didn't want to drop you when you needed me the most," my heart is heavy as I say all of this.

"I'm going to send patrol money to the church so they can come and pray for you before you leave this Friday," mama is a firm believer of Christ. She wants everything in her life to include prayer.

"I'll make sure that they come at least once a month to bring prayer and read the word of God to you," I just want to make her comfortable.

"It's hard for me to send you there but I'm struggling and it's affecting my life. I know you don't like my husband mama but I love him and I need to start doing better. Please try and understand," I say and someone kisses the top of my head. It's Dedani, I can tell by his cologne.

"I know it's hard my love but this is the right decision. You can visit her everyday during the day so she knows that you didn't turn your back on her. We can also fetch her once in a while," he says with his hands on my shoulders.

"I haven't been the greatest husband either and I'm sorry babe. I promise to do better and to support you like I always have," I cry harder.

I needed to hear him say these words to me, it has been hell being at different ends with this man because I love him so much.

"I miss you so much," I say and he helps me get on my feet then hugs me tightly.

"I miss you more. I'm sorry mkami, I'm truly sorry," he kisses my shoulder.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 70

SPONSORED BY DITSHWANELO

SQALO SHOZI

I had no other choice but to lie to Nobantu, she is too jealous and wouldn't have understood why I had to stay the whole week in Durban. I came to celebrate my youngest child's birthday, Vivian called me a week ago and told me that our baby said he would love to spend his birthday with all of us. I was thrilled because I miss my kids so much; things haven't been the same since their mom and I separated. I want them to know that I will always love them, no matter the situation. I'm going to make it a point to call and come around more. Nobantu will have to understand that my kids come before anything and anyone.

"Mommy, can daddy sleep over and take us to school tomorrow?" My daughter asks and I tighten my grip on the steering wheel. I am pinching my ass for her to agree.

"Please mommy," the birthday boy adds and their mom heaves a sigh.

"Can you?" Vivian asks me and I nod vigorously.

I would have cancelled any plans if I had any, spending more time with them is more important.

"I'd love to," I try not to sound too excited.

"Okay then, daddy will be sleeping over," the kids cheer loudly.

"Thank you Viv," I say and she just nods.

I am happy to be ending the day with them. We had the most amazing time as a family over dinner at the birthday boys favorite restaurant. My son is obsessed with Spur, not for their food but for the play area.

"Did you have a good birthday baby?" My wife asks our son.

"The best mommy, I love my presents," he says and that's all that matters really. I am fortunate to be doing this with Vivian, she doesn't allow our issues to affect our kids.

We get to the house and Viv opens the garage door using the remote control connected to her house keys. We all climb out and take out his presents from the boot and the left over food. Our daughter says something that has me and my wife looking at each other before bursting with laughter. This feels like the good old days, when we were a real family. How did I fuck this up? I had the most amazing woman and she gave me an amazing family but I just had to be greedy. There are a lot of things I would do differently but it's unfortunate that I cannot go back in time.

"Kids, go brush your teeth and change into your pyjamas," mom says and they run to the bathroom.

"This room is the same but so different," I say, looking around, "What did you add or remove?" I ask and she heaves a sigh.

"I removed our wedding picture from the wall," she says and I quickly move my eyes to where a big picture of us happy was hanging. It's replaced with an abstract. I understand why she wouldn't want it

hanging on the wall and seeing it every day but that doesn't make my heart bleed any less.

"What did you do with it?" I ask and she shrugs her shoulders.

"My mother said I cannot burn a picture so I kept it in the garage with other things I don't use," damn! We are gathering dust in the garage.

"Viv, I'm really sorry for how everything played out," I say and she folds her arms.

"I just want to know one thing," she says and I nod for her to go on, "Why was I never enough for you Sqalo?" Her question hurts my heart.

I clear my throat, "My cheating had nothing to do with you. You were enough, you gave me everything and even more than I deserved. If anything I was the one who wasn't enough, that's why I always cheated. I wanted to feel complete but it never helped," She bites her lower lip and I realize the damage I did to this woman. I hurt Vivian so much and the only thing she ever did was love and support me.

"I know it's not my business but are you happy with Nobantu? Is it serious that I have to accept her being my childrens stepmother?" She asks and I blink a couple of times.

"To tell you the truth, I don't know why I'm staying with her. Viv, there's nothing there but I still can't pack my shit and come back home to be near you and the kids," she nods her understanding.

"I don't like the woman but it's not fair on her. If you are going to leave, do it now. We have a daughter, Sqalo. How would you feel if she met a man like you?" she says and my heart shrinks.

I wouldn't wish a man like myself for my daughter.

"I'm going to do better, I promise you," she shakes her head.

"You don't have to do anything for me, Sqalo. You failed at that when you were my husband. Just do better for yourself and the kids," my

phone rings in my pocket, I take it out and it's a video call from Nobantu.

"I will go tuck the kids in," she says and turns to walk away.

Nobantu doesn't have timing, my wife and I were having a heart to heart. We never got the chance to talk about all that happened and tonight was the perfect opportunity to do so. I settle down on the couch and take a deep breath before answering. She appears and her cleavage is in my face, I'm not in the mood for phone sex.

"Baba," she says in a low sexy voice.

If I'm being honest, the only reason I'm with this woman is because of the sex. Nobantu allows me do anything and everything to her in the bedroom; it's hard to find a young woman who will fully give you control over her body. I know that if I let her go I will have no one to satisfy my need to have the kind of sex we have.

"Bantu, this is not a good time. I have to go give the kids their bath and tuck them in," I say and her smile disappears.

"Oh," I close my eyes. She is going to sulk, sometimes Nobantu can be annoying and childish.

"I will call you before I go to bed," I say.

"I'll be sleeping then," I'm not going to beg her to stay awake for me.

"Oh okay. Goodnight," she gasp in shock.

"Kodwa Sqalo," haibo!

"Daddy," my daughter bellows.

"That's my daughter, she needs me," I get up from the couch, "We will talk tomorrow," I hang up and head to my children.

Vivian walks out of our daughter's room when I walk in, she's in bed already. I sit down on the edge of the bed and take her hand then kiss it. I tell her how much I love her and that she's a special little girl who deserves everything beautiful life has to offer. We close our eyes and she says her night prayer; when she's done I get up from the bed and kiss her goodnight before switching off her light and walking out of the bedroom.

I get to my first born's room and he's still busy on his computer, I clear my throat and he quickly switches it off with a mischievous smile on his face. He is ten years old and doesn't really appreciate being treated like a "baby", though he understands that there are rules he has to follow. I fist bump him and point to the bed. He groans and climbs on the bed and pulls the covers.

"When are you coming home for good daddy?" he asks and I heave a heavy sigh.

"Daddy cannot come home for good like before boy. Things are different now, mommy and I aren't together but I need you to know that we love you and your siblings very much," I say and the sadness in his eyes hurt me.

I caused this, I am the reason why our family is broken. I will never forgive myself for doing this to my wife and kids.

"Mommy already told us but I was hoping that you guys will fix things. I miss staying with both my parents," he lets a tear fall and I quickly take him into my arms.

"I miss staying with you too buddy. Daddy made a lot of mistakes that led us here and I'm so sorry for hurting you kids like this. I need you guys to always listen to mommy and not stress her. I'm going to

do better too in helping her with you kids and giving her the time she needs alone,"

"Can you at least stay longer," he asks.

"I will be in Durban until Sunday but I'm not sure about sleeping here. I'll ask mom if it's okay," he lets go of me and nods.

"I'll see you in the morning. Sleep tight," I say.

"Goodnight, I love you," I ruffle his hair.

"I love you too, buddy,"

I find the birthday boy snoring in his bed. I'm not surprised though, he played the entire time we were at the restaurant. I just kiss his forehead and walk out of his bedroom.

Vivian is on the couch in her pyjamas with a glass of wine in her hand. I remove my shoes and settle down next to her with some space between us. She's watching some soap opera.

"Wine on a work night?" I ask and she laughs.

"This is how I end my days. Drink wine while catching up on my favorite show," she says and I cross my legs.

"You deserve the time to yourself after work and being a mom," Viv owns the Rehabilitation and wellness center Nobantu and I took Sqalo to. MaDladla doesn't know that my wife owns the place, she thinks Viv is a mere employee of the center. I couldn't tell her the truth because she would have lost her mind. Anything that has to do with Vivian makes her mad.

"You can sleep here for the whole week. The kids miss you and I can't put my feelings before them," she says and tears immediately burn my eyes. She's an amazing woman.

"You heard us talking?" I ask.

"I wasn't eavesdropping but I heard," I smile and wipe my tears.

She frowns, "Why are you crying?"

"Tonight has been amazing. I realized that I messed up and not only did my mistakes hurt you, they are affecting our children. Worse part is that I haven't even been around; I'm in Mzumbe with a woman who means nothing to me," she takes a sip of her wine.

"Sit down with yourself and have a conversation," she says and gets up from the couch, "Let me get you a glass of wine," she says and I know she's terminating the conversation.

"Thank you,"

NTUTHUKO GALLOWAY

"Here you go," she hands me the glass of juice and sits down across from me under the tree.

"Thank you," I take a sip and place the glass on the empty space next to me on the bench.

"You look good. Durban is treating you well," I narrow my eyes.

"How do you know that I live in Durban now?" I ask and she looks away.

"Uhm, your father mentioned it. We speak on the phone now and again," Baba didn't mention this to me. Are they trying to rekindle something?

"Oh okay," for some reason she is embarrassed, "I'm happy in Durban. My father and I are getting to know each other better and I enjoy working at the paper mill. I just wish Nhlelo and Singabakhe were with me," I say and she smiles.

"She's such a lovely girl. You are lucky," that's very true.
Nhlelozenkosi is my wildest dreams come true.

"I'm blessed ma," I take my glass again and drink the juice.

"I came here to discuss something very important with you," she sits up straight with her eyes widened.

It's hard for me to do this but it has to be done. I am in the best place in my life right now and I don't want the past to be lingering over my head.

"I'm listening," her voice is shaking, she's nervous.

"I know you were aware of what your husband was doing to me growing up, Nomafu," I say and tears stream down her face, "I didn't understand why you stayed with a man that abused your child in every way possible. I mean we had many opportunities to run away but you never did. I hated you for the longest time because of it all, but finding my father has made me understand a lot of things. I understand you and your decisions better now but it still hurts, I won't even lie," she kneels down in front of me.

"Ntuthuko, I am very sorry son. I know its a lot to ask but please find it in your heart to forgive me," she says and I sniff back my tears.

"I have already forgiven you. I couldn't hold on to the pain and hate, I chose happiness and peace," she lays her head on my lap and cries.

"Somehow you were forced into this life and I want to know if you want another shot in life or you want to stay here with that monster," she quickly raises her head.

"I stayed here with him because Chadwick's family told me to stay far away from Tongaat. They didn't want me and their brother to meet and to make sure that happens they threatened my life and yours," I know all this. That's why I want to help her get her life back.

"So, are you leaving this man and going back to Tongaat to start your own life?" She swallows hard.

"What will I do with him?" She points to the house.

"There are a lot of places that can take him around Port Shepstone. I am willing to pay for his stay so you can have your life back," she nods vigorously.

"If that's the case then I fully agree," that's a relief. Her being away from this man is the only way she and I can try and have a relationship.

"Thank you so much, Ntuthuko. I will not forget this act of kindness, I don't deserve it but thank you," I hold her hand and squeeze.

"I will make the necessary arrangements and get back to you, but so long pack his things and wait for my call with the details," she wipes her tears.

"I will get to it immediately,"

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My meeting with Nomafu was fruitful, I feel lighter now that we had a conversation. All I need to do now is get that man a place to stay so my mother can be free of him. She asked me to find her a place next to her family in Tongaat, my aunt lives in Hambanathi so I'll get Nomafu a place in Belvedere. They will only be 20 minutes max away from each other. I hope this chapter heals her and offers her the chance at happiness she was robbed of by my father's family.

I get to Mawande's house, I texted her and she said she was busy cooking. I hope she's almost done because I miss her food; I remember how great of a cook she is from our days back at the

supermarket. She used to bring a lunchbox enough for the both of us and force me to eat. Wande used to complain that amaheh and chewing gum is not food. I haven't had that combo in the longest time.

The door is open and she's standing over the stove, "Mrs Ngidi," she blushes and I walk inside laughing.

"That's me," she says with open arms and we share a hug.

"You look great sis wami. Msebe is treating you well I see," she nods vigorously, grabbing a chair and handing it to me.

"He's amazing. I honestly cannot believe that we are at this point in our relationship," I am happy for her. No one deserves this kind of happiness like Mawande. Life has been serving her blows and for once everything is working in her favor.

"So when is he sending the letter?" she chuckles.

"He went to see some Ngidi elder around here yesterday and they wrote the letter. He went to Port Shepstone to have it delivered today," he is not wasting any time with his woman.

I want to move this quick when it's my turn to marry his sister.

"He wants you home ASAP," I say and she nods.

"I cannot wait to be home with him too," if I didn't have MaHlomuka I would be jealous of their relationship. What they have is beautiful and I know it's not always going to be rosey because we are human but I pray they stick it out through everything.

"I wish you guys the best and let me know when the families will sit to discuss your lobola," she takes out a plate and starts dishing up for me.

"Thank you and I definitely will tell you the date they agree on," the food smells great.

She cooked rice and beef stew.

"Did I tell you that your cousin came to my house some time ago to ask for forgiveness?" I ask chuckling.

"Who?" She hands me the plate of food.

"Ndondoloza. She told me that she's attending therapy and her doctor told her to make amends with everyone she has hurt," Mawande claps once.

"I guess she doesn't think she hurt me because I haven't gotten any apology from her," I click my tongue.

"I told her to apologize to you before she can come to me and she agreed. But something tells me she was lying. I suspect she is up to something, I just don't know what," she's nodding in agreement.

"Maybe she heard you're now a financially well off somebody and she wanted to shoot her shot," Wande says and I make a disgusted face.

"Even if she was the last woman on the planet," I say as Mawande sits down on the bed.

"So, you're missing work and you only just started," I swallow before answering her.

"I had to get some of my things at my house and I stopped by my mother's place to talk,"

"I hope that went well," my phone chimes.

I put the plate on the table and take it out of my pocket, it's my woman.

She is asking me to come get her because she misses me, I know what that means. She wants some adult bedroom fun. I text her back and tell her I'll be there in 15 minutes. I couldn't leave Mzumbe without seeing my sister first.

"Madam is asking for me," she smiles.

"Go see her. She's having a hard time with you being far from them," I am struggling too but it's almost December, we will spend the holidays together and right after it's January and they will be with me in Ballito for good.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 71

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NDONDOLOZA DLADLA

My whole body is sore, I am exhausted. The only thing I do here is drink muti, vomit or go to the toilet because of a running stomach then sleep deeply afterwards. What he gave me earlier today was very different though, it made my whole skin itch and I felt like my womb was on fire. I screamed at the top of my lungs when I went to the bathroom to pee, it burnt so bad. I don't think I have ever felt that much pain and discomfort in my entire life; Madlabantu told me that it has to hurt because it's working against the charm that was used on me. He basically said my body is a battlefield and have to take everything as it comes. I had to force myself to sleep because I didn't want to feel what I was feeling and luckily I was better when I woke up.

I pray that whoever did this to me experiences something far worse than what she did to me. I honestly don't understand why someone would bewitch another person when they could have bewitched themselves to win the lottery and live their best life.

I cannot wait for this treatment to be done so I can go home to my mother. She calls all day everyday to check up on me and the first thing she always asks is if I'm okay and Madlabantu is not trying anything funny with me. My answer is always the same, the man only talks to me when he gives me instructions on how to use his bitter muti. He acts like I don't exist most of the time and I'm good with all of that because he just has this dark energy surrounding him all the time. I would have fled if my mother didn't insist on him being the only person that can help me. I don't even understand how I manage to sleep sound at night when I know what he is keeping in that rondavel.

A knock comes through the door of the bedroom I'm using, I quickly get up from the bed and wrap the cloth properly around my body. He told me to only wear this cloth and nothing else the whole time I am here, I was even told not to wash it. I'm not sure how long I'll be here but I know it will be smelling by the time I leave this place. I open the door and he's standing in front of me with his hands placed behind him. Every time my eyes find his, a cold shiver travels down my spine. This man is the darkest I've ever come across.

"You are going to have to cook supper tonight," he says and I frown.

Where are all the women I've seen ever since I came here? They have been doing all the cooking and cleaning.

"I want to eat steak with uphuthu and tomato gravy," I didn't come here to be his maid. My mother pays him to accommodate and treat me. My meals should be his problem.

He snaps his long slender fingers in my face.

"Are you listening to me?" She asks and I nod vigorously.

"Yes, I'll be out just now," I say and he walks away after clicking his tongue. I leave the door open and go put on my shoes before leaving my bedroom with my phone in hand.

This man has a beautiful house with expensive furniture. I think he makes a lot of money working as a traditional healer. Maybe that's the reason why all these beautiful women I've seen here have something with him. I mean some women can sleep with a dog because of their love for money.

I once woke up in the middle of the night and heard one of them screaming his name and I got disgusted on her behalf. No amount of money would make me sleep with a man that reeks of muti and has teeth as yellow as Khanyi Mbau's Porsche. I'm sure he doesn't remember the last time he took a bath.

I start with the pots and when I'm done I go and look for him outside. I hope he is not in that rondavel of horror. I find him standing in the middle of the kraal with the cows settled around him. He looks up at me and shrugs his shoulders, I tell him that I'm done cooking and I've dished his food. He nods and walks out of the kraal, following behind me to the house.

I take my plate of food as he washes his hands at the sink.

"Sit down, Ndongoloza. I don't bite," he says and I narrow my eyes.

I never eat with him, he usual sits with one of his many women while I'm in the lounge.

I place the plate back down on the table and pull out a chair. This really feels awkward.

I pull my plate towards me and start eating.

"I didn't think you could cook. You seem like the type that gets everything handed to them, a spoilt brat is what I mean," he says and I'm shocked by his statement. He doesn't know me to have such an opinion about me.

"Well I can cook," I snap and he chuckles.

"I didn't mean to offend you," he eats with his hand? Oh my freaking God!

"What did you tell your boyfriend?" That's a random question.

"I don't have a boyfriend so I didn't tell him anything. Whatever it is you're referring to,"

He laughs with his mouth full, "A beautiful girl like you? It's hard to believe that no man has fallen head over heels in love with you," this conversation is making me uncomfortable, "But don't worry, one will surely be taken by you when he lays his eyes on you the time you go back home," he says and my mind quickly runs to Sgora. Did my mother talk to him about this? Mama can be so inconsiderate, how could she think of getting me a man at a time like this? I am mad at her for real.

"Did you have this conversation with my mother?" I ask.

"It was similar and it was about her toy boy," he says then bites his steak, "Can you believe that your mother has a boyfriend and you don't?" I place the spoon down.

"There's nothing wrong with that," something about this conversation rubs me off the wrong way.

"I understand why you didn't want one though," he says, looking at his food. He's almost done because he eats like a pig.

"What do you mean?"

He chokes on his food and coughs violently with his mouth open. I have to dodge the phuthu bullets coming from his mouth.

"I mean men want sex when they are in a relationship and you knew he would have ran for the hills if he smelled the dump that was between your legs before you came to me. But like I said, one will fall at your feet because Madlabantu will make you brand new," he says casually and tears are burning my eyes.

How dare he?

"I lost my appetite," I push back the chair and leave the kitchen with a broken heart. He just insulted me and he doesn't seem to care. What kind of traditional healer throws back the problem of his patient in their face? I want to go home now.

LONDEKA ZULU

The bathroom door opens and Qophelo walks out. The first thing he asked for after he arrived was a shower, he said he missed South African water on his skin. I laughed because he was being extra like always, between him and Ndongoloza he was the biggest exaggerator. He arrived over an hour ago and I'm so excited to have him around, a part of me feels like I have my best friend, they are twins after all.

I think about Ndongolo every day and I miss her so much, I know she said some nasty things to me but it was all Dedani. I cannot hold it against her because there's a lot of good she did for me when she still considered me her best friend. I just hope and pray that she's doing good and she finds happiness.

"I'm sorry I couldn't cook, came back from work tired," I ordered pizza and bought him beer then got myself a bottle of wine. It's Friday so I don't have to worry about going to work with a hangover like I did on Monday because of Hlubi.

"Don't worry about it. I have home cooked meals everyday Eswatini," he says and I raise an eyebrow.

"You always find a girl who will play wifey," I say and he is thrown into a fit of laughter.

"This time it's not like that. I think she's the one," I don't believe it. Qophelo is a womanizer, he meets the one every five minutes.

"Yeah right," I say, pinning open a beer for him, "here you go," he takes a sip immediately.

"Seriously though, Londeka. I'm not the same person I was a couple of months ago," he says that with a serious face and I can hear the sincerity in his voice.

"What happened? Why are you living in another country?" I tried thinking about it but I couldn't find any reason that would make him leave the only home he has ever known. His mother and twin sister are here.

"How much time do you have?" He asks and shrug my shoulders.

"I have the whole night," he heaves a sigh then takes the box of pizza and heads to my barely standing couch. I need new furniture, scratch that. I need to find a new place then get new furniture for it.

"So, I had a drug problem and my mother and her boyfriend sent me to rehab after I stole from Ndongoloza. I didn't want to get clean because cocaine was helping me forget what I did when I was still a kid. I cannot really tell you what it is because it's heavy, I don't want to put it on your shoulders," he gets straight to it and my heart is already thumping, I can tell its only going to go deeper.

"I stayed in rehab because it was either I get clean or my mother was going to disown me. It was hard at first but as time went by I started opening up and it really helped a lot. I realized while I was still there that I had to change or I was going to die like a dog with nothing and no one. The Eswatini plan came to me while I was still receiving

treatment; I wanted a new life in a different place and a new identity. Being Qophelo Dladla was hard, I had to leave him behind if I wanted a real chance at a better life," tears are streaming down his face. I can see that he has been through so much in his life and no one was there for him.

"I got discharged and went back to Mzumbe. The night I arrived I brought dinner for them and the food was laced with sleeping pills and marijuana so I could be able to rob them while they slept. I took all their furniture, clothes, cars and withdrew the money in their personal accounts and fled," I gasp in shock. This is some movie script!

I would be worried if I had proper furniture in this house. Imagine waking up and boom! There's nothing.

"I had already made plans to sell everything and when all my money came through I paid for my Eswatini passport and Identity document then ran there," I take a deep breath and get up to get my bottle of wine and a glass. I actually need something stronger because my head is spinning right now.

"I feel bad for doing what I did but I turned out like this because of my mother. She was more focused on other things and not what really mattered. She thought giving us all materialistic things made her the best mother but it didn't Londeka," he wipes his tears with his T-shirt.

I brush his back in circles.

"Are you planning on staying there for the rest of your life? That's not your home," he takes a deep breath.

"I want to come back home so bad but I don't want to go to prison. I know my mom and her boyfriend opened a case with the police and if they know I'm back I'll be arrested," the front door opens and my roommate walks in, he greets us before disappearing to his bedroom.

I asked him not to bring his friends today because my brother is coming around and he will be sleeping in the lounge.

I got Qophelo an inflatable mattress because we can't share a bed, I sleep naked.

"What if you arrange a meeting with your mother and tell her how sorry you are and promise to repay everything when you start working. I mean you have a university qualification. Yes, jobs are hard to come by but you can use the money you have to bribe someone for a permanent position then give back the rest of the money to your mom and pay what's left in installments," he shakes his head.

"I could get my mom to agree but her boyfriend will never be a part of it. He would even talk my mother out of it. It's better I stay away, I'll just visit secretly like I'm doing now," that's no way to live life but I understand him.

"Let me get another beer," he gets up and makes his way to the kitchen and takes out a dumpie then pins it open with his teeth.

"Enough about my sob stories. How does it feel being employed at our great municipality?" He asks and I smile.

"So far so good. There's no toxicity, I wake up every morning happy to go to work. But even if there was drama, I was not going to be a part of it. I went there to work so I can be able to support my family," he nods vigorously.

"You have never been one to focus on negativity. That's why I always liked you, Ndondo had a great one in you," he says and I press my lips into a thin line. "Londeka, what happened between you two?" He asks and I gulp down my drink then fill my glass again. I think I'm going to need more alcohol.

"How much time do you have?" I ask the same question he asked me and he laughs.

"The whole night," he holds his bottle up and I click my glass with it. My phone vibrates in my pocket and I quickly take it out. It's Hlubi, she's telling me that she's going to pick me up at 11am tomorrow. We have a spa day and I'm so excited. I respond with a dancing emoji and tell her I cannot wait.

"Uhm, Qophelo. I hope you can be able to survive without me for a couple of hours tomorrow. I am going to the spa, my body needs some pampering," I say and he shakes his head.

"Don't worry about me. I have to meet up with Lwazi anyway,"

"Is that a good idea? Do you trust him not to tell people that you're in town? We don't want your mom and her boyfriend hearing that you are around and coming with the police," I say and he smiles.

"Don't worry, he understands the situation. He is the one who helped me sell everything I stole," oh okay.

"Now, back to you and Ndongoloza," I blow out a heavy sigh.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 72

QOPHELO DLADLA

I have a cap on and sun glasses because I don't want anyone recognizing me and running to call my mother and my twin sister. I know mama would inform her boyfriend and that bitch ass nigga would track me down with the police and have me arrested. I know it's a risk being in Durban but I just missed home, I needed to breath it's air and see a familiar face or two. I'm grateful that Londeka agreed to have me at her place for a few days and listened to me without interruptions or judgemental eyes last night when I told her my situation. I honestly needed to cough out to someone I know

personally; yes I spoke to the psychologist at the rehabilitation center but I held back my true emotions most of the time because I feared being judged.

I am a very troubled man, a change of name and place doesn't take that away; I'm proud of myself for dealing with my issues without using cocaine. I was a slave to that substance for a long time and it controlled my life, without it I felt like I was going crazy. It helped me forget that I killed my own father to protect my mom who didn't even try to talk to me about it afterwards. She pretended like it never happened and continued with her life while I dealt with the guilt.

It wasn't on purpose, I was just trying to protect my mother because he was hitting her again. I wouldn't have plunged a knife in his neck if my mother loved us and herself enough to leave that man. It's not like we didn't have anywhere to go, we had relatives around Mbumbulu and most importantly we had aunt Nandi. Mawande's mother tried everything she could to show my mother that our father will not change but she still stayed.

"Watch where you're going," a man says angrily and I mentally slap myself for being absent minded in a mall full of people.

"God, I'm so sorry," I say, picking up the plastic of toys and my cap and sunglasses from the floor. I stand up straight and my eyes land on the one person I hoped to not bump into.

Shit, I have to go back to Londeka's place and get my things then leave South Africa immediately.

"Qophelo," my eyes move from his murderous pair to the voice of a female next to him.

"Doctor Galloway," I say with narrowed eyes.

What's my mother's boyfriend doing with my psychologist?

"Where have you been? You were supposed to attend sessions after you were discharged. You were registered as an outpatient," she says and I heave a sigh.

"I know but a lot happened after that. I promise that I'm still clean though. I haven't used anything since I left your center," I say and she nods smiling.

"That's good but you should contact me because this is a journey. I would love for you to be a part of our support group too," I am a part of a group in Eswatini. I haven't shared my story but I go every week so I can remember that I'm not alone and some people actually understand what I'm going through.

"I will definitely contact you," I lie.

"Mom, can we go before it finishes?" The little girl says, pulling her mother's hand.

"Boy, please take your sister to the store. We are right behind you," she says to the older boy who nods and takes his sister's hand.

My psychologist looks at me and then my mother's boyfriend who looks like he is about to explode.

"There's no need for me to make introductions right? You both know each other, yes?" She asks and I nod.

"Yeah, but who is he to you?" I ask and she frowns. Her face says I should know this.

"My ex husband and my kids father," whoa!

No offense to my mother but he left all of this for an older woman?

There's a lot I don't know about this guy. The first time I met him was in a jail cell when they gave me an ultimatum, then the second time was when I got home from rehab and found out he was living with my mother.

"Does my mother know you have kids?" I had to ask because the Nobantu I know wouldn't approve of her boyfriend playing happy family with his ex wife at a mall. Ma is a very jealous woman.

Sqalo swallows hard, causing his adams apple to bob. I narrow my eyes, his nervousness means my mother doesn't have an idea of what's happening here.

"Of course she does," the doctor says and my eyes are still on her ex husband.

"Uhm, Qophelo. It was nice seeing you. Give me that call okay?" She says and I move my eyes from this man to her with a smile.

"I will doctor," she can definitely sense the tension between me and her ex.

"Sqalo, you'll find us in the store," she says then walks away with the youngest boy.

It's just the two of us now, "Where's my car you son of a bitch?" He asks and I heave a sigh.

"I don't think my mother would appreciate you calling her a bitch," he clenches his jaw.

"The police have been looking for you. I am going to call them now and you'll tell them where everything is," I nod my head.

"It's okay, let me call my mother first," he blinks rapidly.

"Call her for what? What are you going to say to her?" He asks nervously and I realize in this moment that he doesn't want my mother to know that he's in Durban with his family. What lie did he feed her to be here without her? I can use this to my advantage.

"I will explain that I bumped into you and your wife with the kids and that the wife is my doctor, so we stopped to chat. I will then ask her to come to the police station the police will take me to and apologize

sincerely before giving back the money I made from selling everything," he's shaking his head.

"Nobantu wants nothing to do with you. Qophelo, you are dead to her after what you did," that might be true but I know he's just saying this so I don't tell my mom he is with the mother of his children. Sqalo knows that my mother is a grenade and once you hurt her she goes off.

"I accept that because I fucked up, but I think the reason you don't want me to call my mother is because you don't want her knowing that you're with her and the kids," I point to the direction his family disappeared to.

He grabs my arm, "You will not say a word to Nobantu about this. You didn't see Viv and I together," I laugh.

"I can keep that to myself but what do I get out of it?" I ask and he chuckles.

"You think you're smart huh?" I offer him a lopsided smile.

"I'm sure you know my mother by now man. She would burn the house down with herself inside just to hurt the person who hurt her. That woman is vengeful, do you know that she's mistreating Mawande because of a grudge she has against aunt Nandi?" my words hit home because his expression goes from angry to scared.

"What do you want in exchange for your silence you piece of shit?"

"I want you to convince my mother to forgive me and welcome me home. Drop the charges against me, I don't know how but make it happen," he hits his fists together.

"You're a junkie, you'll still find yourself doing something you shouldn't and end up inside," he says then attempts to walk away.

"What's it going to be?"

"You won this round boy," he says and I exhale sharply. I was holding my breath the entire time, I didn't think coming to the mall would give me back my freedom. Whatever my mother knows about this man is big. He knows that his ex wife is a hard subject for my mom and if she found out he was with her all hell would break loose. She will destroy him with what she knows. Or maybe he is genuinely in love with my mother that he would do anything not to lose her. Whatever reason, I am just happy that it got him to accept my terms.

MSEBEYELANGA NGIDI

I am in my rondavel laying on the bed with no top on. The fan is on and I'm having a cold beer, the sun is just too brutal today. I am watching soccer, Soweto derby. It's the biggest in South Africa, it doesn't matter which part of the country you're from this game gets you excited. Even maMokwena watches football when these two giants play and my mother is not a soccer fan. Twitter is also buzzing with predictions, by the end of the ninety minutes fans of one club will be burning their jerseys out of frustration and disowning the team because of a broken heart.

The game is great but I'm a little bored because Mawande isn't here to ask me silly questions every two minutes. It's funny that I'm feeling this way because she annoys me and I wish I could gag her until the game is over when she does that. I guess we don't realize that the silly little things that seem to annoy us are actually the things we adore about our significant others. I miss her so much, we have been joint at the hip ever since we got engaged. When I'm not working I make sure to fetch her so we can spend time together, and when she's not with me she's creating her Pinterest board for wedding

inspirations. I love that she's excited to be my wife just like I am to be her husband.

When this year started I had zero plans of getting married. I didn't even know that my soul mate was here in Mzumbe waiting for me.

I was busy making future plans with a woman who was just meant to teach me a life lesson and pass. Wande and I are meant to be, I mean what are the chances of me deciding to come back home after working abroad only to find a girl and fall head over heels. I had to come back in order to find my happiness and all that I lost along the way and caused me pain don't matter anymore. A future with MaMthombeni is the only thing that matters, everything else was just preparing me for her.

"Day dreaming?" I look at the door and it's my cousin Mafube. What? I didn't know he was coming. I quickly get off the bed laughing and go hug him.

"Bro, when did you get here?" I ask.

"A few minutes ago, I was still talking to my aunt inside," man, I wasn't expecting him.

We haven't been talking much since he left the last time.

"It's good to see you, but why didn't you tell me you were coming? I would have prepared better," I say and he shakes his head.

"I wanted to surprise the husband to be," he says and I'm blushing like a fool. It hits differently when people say it, "You're really tying yourself down to one woman Msebe?" He asks and I nod confidently.

"Wande is the one, Mafube. I would be a fool to let her slip through my fingers. That woman is the love of my life," he snaps an eyebrow.

"Damn! You're gone for real," there's not turning back. I'm choosing her until the day I die.

"I'm telling you gaz'lam," he holds out a finger to pause me then runs out of the rondavel. I use the time to remove the laptop and other things from the couch so we can sit down.

Mafube comes back with a bottle of Hennessy, ice and box of cranberry juice.

"We are celebrating you, Mfanaka," that's more like it. I take two glasses from on top of the fridge and go rinse them in the bathroom.

He is on the couch opening the bottle when I come back with the glasses.

"So, how did you pop the question?" I still cannot believe that I came up with that proposal alone. I start narrating everything and when I'm done he is whistling.

"That's so cheesy," he says and we both laugh out loud.

"It's allowed man. I mean I only get to propose once so it had to be memorable," he nods.

"Where's Wande? I want to congratulate her and welcome her into the family officially,"

"She's with her father's side of the family. We recently just found them because I want to pay lobola to the right people. They decided to host a family gathering to welcome her home," she wanted me to go with her but I told her that she needed this time alone with her family. They have to reconnect because it has been a decade.

"Hao, what's wrong with her aunt accepting the lobola?" the mention of that evil woman makes my blood boil. She did the cruelest things to my finance when she promised to take care of her. I mean who does that to a child, a child whose parents trusted you with. She has

taken enough things from Mawande, her lobola won't be another thing.

"That woman hates my fiance. She would do everything in her power to sabotage everything," I say and he narrows his eyes.

"Bathong! What are you saying now?" That's the sad truth.

"I'm telling you bafo," he hands me a glass and we click them.

"So, when are we going there to pay her lobola?" I heave a sigh.

"We have already sent a letter to her family. We asked to come through next Saturday, we will hear their response on Monday because the uncle was only meeting with the rest of the family members today," his eyes widen.

"Msebe, that soon? What's the rush?" He asks horrified and I laugh.

"We are moving to Johannesburg in January. I want us to leave here husband and wife," he takes a sip of his drink.

"Damn, I thought you'll be paying lobola next year," I laugh.

"That would be disrespectful to Mawande. Giving her a ring and not paying lobola?" He shrugs his shoulders.

"I guess you are right,"

"Otherwise, how are things in Bloem?"

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 73

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NDONDOLOZA DLADLA

I really wanted to leave this place after what Madlabantu said to me, but he told me that the maggots will come back ten times worse if I don't finish the treatment so I ended up not calling my mother to come fetch me. I cannot wait to be done with this man, his comments hurt and make me feel bad about myself. I didn't ask to be bewitched by someone who has nothing better to do with their life; no one wants to find themselves in the situation I'm in and stuck with a dirty old traditional healer.

The timer goes off and I stand up from the bucket, I was steaming my vagina with some herbs and I will admit that my good girl feels soothed. He might be dirty and annoying but his muti seems to be working; the horrible smell from my vagina is slowly dying down and that's a huge relief.

I had to do this naked so I grab my cloth and wrap it around my body before walking out with the bucket to find Madlabantu. He told me to bring the bucket to him when I'm done and he will discard the water himself.

I get to the kitchen and one of his beautiful woman is around, she's busy peeling the vegetables. I greet her and she responds as I walk out the house. I look for Madlabantu around the yard but he's nowhere to be found, I even go to knock on the rondavel of horror but there's no response. I'm about to walk back to the main house to ask the lady if she knows where he is. A Jeep Grand Cherokee appears and parks opposite the second rondavel, Madlabantu climbs out of it. This is his car, the number plates are personalized, MADLABANTU NUL. To say I am shocked would be an understatement, how much does a traditional healer really make? He must perform miracles because what is this?

"Close your mouth before a fly enters and choke you to death," he says and I quickly pick up my jaw from the ground.

I was still wrapping my head around him owning this big beautiful house that's filled with quality furniture; and now I'm shocked by the kind of car he drives. Some degree holders who work nine to five can only dream of living in such a place and driving this kind of car. Why are we told to waste time in university if there's money communicating with the dead? How does one go about being a Madlabantu?

"Are you sure you sat for 30 minutes like I instructed?" He asks and I nod.

"I didn't get up a minute earlier," he smiles.

"Good, so how do you feel?"

"Great, it feels like it's breathing," he laughs, an evil laugh that sends chills down my spine.

"As it should. I am not called Madlabantu for nothing," he puts the car key in his pocket and holds out his hand for the bucket. I hand it to him.

"Tomorrow I need you to wake up at 3am, I have to cleanse you and give you something to drink so it can work throughout the morning," oh God, I thought we were done with those bitter concoctions.

"I'll set my alarm for 02:55," he nods and walks past me, heading to the rondavel of horror with the bucket.

I get inside the main house and there are pots on the stove, it smells really good. All his women have mad kitchen skills, I find myself licking my fingers when eating the food they prepared. She's not in the kitchen anymore; I open the fridge and pour myself a glass of coke. I was told to eat anything I like and boy there's everything here.

I was shocked that he eats junk like everyone else, I thought he was a cannibal like his name suggests. With the glass of coke and a pack of lays chips I make my way to my borrowed bedroom. I place my snack on the bedside table and go close the door then climb on the bed, taking my phone. There's a missed call from mama, I quickly call her back and she answers after the first ring.

"Ndondo," she sounds down.

"Mama, is everything okay?" She heaves a heavy sigh and I know something serious is going on with her. It takes a lot to get my mother in a foul mood.

"No baby. Sqalo was supposed to come back home today, but he called and told me that he will only make it back on Tuesday. Apparently Vivian, his ex wife had to extend her trip," I hear her but she's not making any sense.

"I'm not understanding, where is your person?" I take a sip of my coke.

"He went to Durban on Monday to be with his kids because their mom had to go to Johannesburg for work. I'm starting to feel like that bitch is lying, she's there for fun and wants my man to play nanny. She wants us apart with the hopes of Sqalo missing the life they had together as he spends time with the kids," haike! Mjolo has no age restriction, it's showing everyone flames.

"Don't let her get to you. You said you're sure that Sqalo loves you and doesn't want to go back to his wife. Trust in your love and wait for him to come back, don't make noise in his ear because he will run away from you," I say and she chuckles.

"Hear yourself sounding grown and giving your mother relationship advise," I put the phone on speaker and open my chips.

"I don't believe the wisdom came from me either," I murmur with a smile.

"Anyway, how are you? Is Madlabantu behaving?" I didn't tell her about the awkward conversation we had over dinner.

"I'm okay mama. I feel so much better, he is really helping. I doubted him at first, I won't even lie, but now I can safely say he knows what he's doing," she exhales sharply.

"I'm happy to hear this. I just want you home and better," that's what I want too, hopefully we are almost at the finish line. "Baby, I have an incoming call. Let me call you back," she says.

"Please send me data," I say before she can hang up.

"I will after this call I'm about to answer," the line goes dead. I'm so broke, I cannot even afford to buy data. I am so used to having money and doing things at the time I want. I know my situation will change once I get home, my mother will make sure that I'm good. I lived before Dedani's money and I will surely live after it.

I log on Instagram and there's a collab post I wasn't expecting to see in a million years. I rub my eyes, maybe they are deceiving me.

Oh my God, how could Londeka do this to me? I know we aren't on good terms but to befriend the woman that took my man? That's just cruel.

They were at some spa in Umhlanga, they got full body massages and did their nails. After that they went to have lunch and later went to have drinks at Luma sunsets. The video they took makes it look like they have been friends for the longest time. I wonder if Londeka told her BFF about me and her so called husband.

I won't even try to pretend like this isn't hurting me right now, this Hlubi girl has taken both my man and best friend. One would swear she's after my life.

DEDANI MKHIZE

"Drink this baby, you'll feel better," she groans and turns to face the ceiling. Hangover is showing her flames, I've been nursing her since morning but nothing is helping.

"Seriously Mkhize? Champagne is the reason why I can't get up from this bed to go take a shower," she says and I laugh.

"You have to fight the devil with evil babe. Sit up straight," she heaves a sigh and does as I say.

She drinks half the glass, "It tastes like shit today," I doubt that but okay.

"You and Londeka shouldn't drink like that again," she smiles.

"I don't promise anything. I had such an amazing time, for the first time since I moved to Durban I felt like I belong. I'm not saying you're not enough but..."

I quickly interject, "I understand baby. You didn't have any friends and now you do and you can start having fun and not be bored in this house alone when I'm busy," she pecks my lips.

"I'm glad you understand," I honestly don't know how I feel about this friendship because I still want Mageba to be my woman with all my heart. On the other hand I don't want to tell Nomahlubi not to be her friend because I want her to be happy and care free so it can be easy for me to try and impregnate her.

I don't want Madlabantu reminding me of what I have to do, I don't need him to scold me like a child.

"Baby," she says after taking a sip.

"Yes, Mrs Mkhize," she giggles and a part of me catches fire. I have missed this sweet Hlubi who is all about me; her mother leaving our house was the best thing for us. She can fully focus on our marriage and not constantly worry about her mother needing to be fed or changed. The money I'm going to pay the hospice each month is a lot, but I'd rather cough out paper than live with her under the same roof.

"You don't have a problem with Londeka and I being friends and spending time together right?" I shake my head.

"Absolutely not. She's a lovely young woman I trust to be around my wife with no sinister motives," I know she won't tell Hlubi the things that have happened between us. I have come to know Mageba and if she wanted to burn me she would have done that long ago. She likes my wife and she doesn't want to hurt her, I need to find a way to make this friendship benefit me.

"Thanks love, I honestly like her. I feel comfortable around her and I believe she's genuine you know," I nod vigorously.

Husband and wife liking the same girl in different ways, what a life.

"As genuine as you?" I ask, running my finger along her jawline. Hlubi blushes.

"Yes, that's why we vibe the way we do," I lean in and kiss her, she let's out a moan in my mouth and my erection presses against my jeans.

She pulls out panting, "Lord, it has been so long," that's very true. I have been in dry season.

"I miss you in lingerie and heels," she bites her lower lip.

"I guess it's a date for later on, babe," music to my ears. Hopefully I will be lucky and score a goal. At least this time is different, my wife won't know when she's loosing the babies because isilwane sami will take them before she realizes she's pregnant.

"I cannot wait to make love to you," her smile disappears and she holds my hand.

"I am sorry for how things have been. I should have made time to have intimate moments with my husband," I bring her hand to my lips and kiss her knuckles.

"We are at a better place now babe, that's all that matters," her eyes light up.

"I should get the bottle of champagne, looks like the glass helped," I say and she nods.

"Yeah, please bring it. I'll hop in the shower so long," I get up from the bed and head towards the door.

"Wait baby. Did your mom eat today?" She asks with widened eyes.

"Don't worry, mom left in the morning. She said her goats miss her," Hlubi laughs.

Everyone knows how precious those goats are to my mom. She doesn't care about the other animals she has in her yard.

I get to the kitchen and Qaqamba is making herself something to eat. She will also be out of here soon enough and I will be able to walk around my house naked again. She asked me to hook her up with a job and I made a few calls, my contacts are yet to get back to me.

I open the fridge and take out the open bottle of champagne, Londeka pops into my head. I wonder how she's feeling, I would call to check up on her but she blocked my number. An idea quickly hits me, I place the bottle on the kitchen island and clear my throat.

"Qaqamba," she looks at me.

"Yebo, bhut'Dedani?"

"Uhm...Can I please make a call with your phone. Mine doesn't have network, I don't know what the problem is," she nods.

"Here you go," she hands it to me.

"Thanks, I'll buy you airtime," she laughs as I make my way out of the kitchen door.

I take out my phone and check for Londeka's number, punch it in Qaqamba's phone and place the call. It's ringing, ringing, ringing.

"Yes," she answers with a groggy voice and I smile.

"Mageba," I say with a smile.

My eyes are fixed on the door, making sure Qaqamba doesn't walk out and hear me talking to another woman on her phone.

"Yoh! Dedani, what do you want?" She sounds defeated by me but I don't take that to heart. Her stubbornness gets me excited. Plus, I'm happy she recognized my voice.

"Nomahlubi is having a tough time fighting the hangover, I just wanted to find out how you are doing," she clicks her tongue.

"You woke me up to ask me this stupid question?" She asks and I roll my eyes.

"I'm sending someone to your place with spicy food and a couple of drinks. I'll text you from this number when he gets there," she also needs me to take care of her.

"I don't want anything from you Dedani. Stop calling me," she hangs up and my heart is still alright. I'm just happy that I spoke to her.

I delete her number from the call log and head back inside whistling a melody.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 74

MAWANDE DUMA

"Are you ready to go back?" I nod vigorously.

I cannot wait to get to Mzumbe and see my baby, "Look at your smile. Msebe makes you crazy," aunt Mbali says with a smile and I'm left blushing.

"I miss him so much," she claps once.

"One weekend and you're acting this way. What will happen if you had to separate for a week?" Her question reminds me of how lonely and sad I felt when he was in Italy, it felt like I was missing a huge part of me.

"I don't even want to think about that, aunty. That's why I am so happy that he will be moving to Johannesburg with me. I don't know how I would have survived being far from him," she nods her understanding and I bend down and take my bag then we make our way out to her car. She is driving me back to Mzumbe, I spent the weekend with my father's family and she was with me throughout. I wanted Msebe to come but he wanted me to give my family all my attention and not worry about him. He said we will attend all family gatherings soon because we will be husband and wife.

Speaking of which, my uncle wrote back and he has accepted to host the Ngidi's this weekend for the lobola negotiations. I am both nervous and excited, I cannot believe I'm about to be a whole wife to an amazing man that loves me and supports my dreams.

"Wande, do you have a dress for this weekend?" She asks and I nod my head.

"Yebo, aunty. Msebe bought me so many clothes when we went to Johannesburg. I have a couple of beautiful dresses I haven't worn, I'll choose from them," that's one less thing to worry about at least.

"I spoke to Hamilton's wife and we will cook up a storm for them. I will whatsapp her sometime this week so we can discuss the menu," I am grateful for aunt Mbali, her presence will make sure things go smoothly.

"I will send you the money in my account, I hope it will be enough for groceries," I say as she stops at the red light.

"Don't be silly Mawande. I will take care of the groceries. You make sure that you're beautiful on your big day baby," tears burn my eyes.

I haven't had this kind of support in a decade.

"Thank you so much, aunty. I appreciate all you're doing for me," we get to the garage to pour some patrol before heading to Mzumbe.

"It's a pleasure my baby. I just wish your parents were still alive to witness you taking this big step. They would have been proud of the woman you have become," I miss them so much and it hurts that they aren't here to witness all the big things happening in my life right now.

We get to the Ngidi homestead and there are three cars parked outside. The two belong to my fiance and Nhlelo but I don't recognize the third one. We climb out of the car and aunt Mbali is holding the envelope with the letter from my uncle. Msebe is going to be so thrilled, he is super excited for the journey we are about to embark on.

I knock on the kitchen door and a few seconds later maMokwena appears and she smiles when she sees it's me.

"Hao, Wande. Why are you knocking at your own home?" She asks and I just giggle.

I know they have made it clear that this is my home as I'm soon to be a makoti here but I cannot just barge in.

"I didn't want to startle anyone," I say and she nods, stepping to the side so we can pass through.

"How are you?" -MaMokwena.

"I'm well thanks mama. Unjani wena?" Aunt Mbali responds and mama shows us where to sit. She was busy peeling potatoes, I'm sure she was about to make chips. This woman is addicted shame.

"Mama, this is aunt Mbali. The one I was telling you about," I say, "Aunty, this is Mrs Ngidi. Msebe's mother," mama smacks her lips.

"Call me maMokwena dear, and Wande I'm no longer just Msebe's mother. I'm yours too," that means a lot. I know she long accepted me and she adores me but hearing those words warm my heart still.

"Yebo ma,"

"Now please make your aunt something to eat and drink," she says, pulling out a chair and settling down.

"Oh nothing to eat please. We ate before leaving Port Shepstone but I'd appreciate something to drink. Thank you," that's true, we had dogwoods before we left. I get up from the chair and go to the fridge to take out a bottle of coke.

"I came with Mawande because her uncle Hamilton asked me to drop this letter myself," aunt Mbali tells my soon to be mother-in-law.

"A response from the Duma's. My son is going to be very happy," maMokwena says, "Can you please go and get him from his rondavel Wande," she adds. The door opens and in walks in my tall, dark and handsome. I really hit jackpot here, our kids are going to be the cutest ever.

"KaDuma, sthandwa sami. When did you get here?" He asks with a wide smile that's making his eyes twinkle.

"A few minutes ago," the butterflies in my stomach are going crazy.

"And you didn't come to greet your finance? Do you know how much I've missed you?" Why is he making me blush in front of the elders like this.

He greets aunt Mbali as he stands in front of me and hug me. Kodwa Msebe, we aren't alone in this room.

"A letter from the Duma's is here," his mother tells him and he quickly let's go of me and rushes to the table to take it from maMokwena. We watch him tear the envelope and unfold the hand written letter and read.

"Sisi, you'll be my wife by the end of Saturday," he says with a wide smile and I raise an eyebrow.

"If you afford to pay the amount they want. I won't come cheap you know," I joke and I'm glad everyone can tell because they all burst out with laughter.

"You did see the cows right?" He asks and I gasp.

"Are you sending live cows?" Where will they go? I don't think my uncle has a place to keep livestock.

"Mama advised that I give two cows, a female and a bull then pay the rest in cash," that's a relief.

"Yes, that's how his father paid my lobola," ma adds, very proud.

"Mawande," I turn and it's Mafube. When did he get get here?

"Hey, how are you?" he envelopes me in an unexpected hug.

"I'm great. You look gorgeous girl and congratulations. I don't know how this clown managed to convince you to marry him," he says.

"Hai, leave my finance alone," Msebeyelanga pulls me away from the hug and I want to laugh. I know he doesn't want his cousin near me because he has made passes at me in the past. MaMokwena tells Mafube to greet aunt Nandi, he apologizes and greets her.

"Wow, you look really great," he has already told me that. I think it's enough compliments.

"Thank you. Your brother is treating me well," Msebe clears his throat, happy with my answer.

"You should get yourself a nice girl like Mawande and get married too," maMokwena says to her nephew and he shrugs his shoulders.

"I doubt there's someone like Mawande out there rakgadi. They don't make them like her anymore," he says looking at me intensely, it's uncomfortable.

"That's true. I'm blessed to be the one who gets to call her my wife. Mawande is my pride," I'm melting into hot liquid right now.

"I should make the necessary calls to the elders that will be representing you on Saturday," mama says.

"So, they agreed to you coming to pay lobola on Saturday?" Mafube asks and Msebe nods.

"Yeah, this beautiful lady right here will be stuck with me for life. These are my last days as a bachelor," aunt Mbali's phone rings and she picks up and talks to the person for a few seconds.

"Wande, I have to go baby. That was Thulani, he's at the house waiting for me," that's her son who lives in Durban.

"Thank you for driving me back and please greet him," she nods.

"I baked so please pack some cookies for her," maMokwena says and I quickly grab a Tupperware container and fill it.

"I will surely bring back your Tupperware. Thank you," They get up and we walk her out.

I take out my bag from the boot and hand it to Msebe so I can hug aunt Mbali.

She drives out and we are all waving her goodbye.

"Msebe, are we still watching the movie we were talking about earlier?" Mafube asks.

"Raincheck bro. I need to spend some time with my girl, we haven't seen each other in three days. That's very long for us," he is embarrassing me in front of his mother today, he could have stopped at raincheck. Now maMokwena knows that we are going to have sex.

"You can watch the movie with me after I make my chips. Nhlelozenkosi is working in her bedroom so we won't be disturbing her," mama says and her nephew just nods and walks to the main house. I think he's mad at Msebe for cancelling their plans.

"I will see you two later," she also goes to the house, leaving me with my finance.

"Hey baby," he says and pecks my lips.

"Hello love," his hand rests on the small of my back.

"I missed you so much," I take his hand and lead us to the rondavel. I want to show him just how much I missed him.

NOBANTU DLADLA

Sqalo got home from Durban a few minutes ago and he is in the shower refreshing. We haven't seen each other in a couple of days and I can't wait to have some intimate time with him later in the bedroom.

Right now I'm unpacking his bag and checking for lipstick marks and smelling everything. I know Madlabantu made sure that he doesn't

leave me for any other woman but I don't think the spell will stop him from cheating. I know he hasn't given me any reason to doubt him but it has been hard, especially when he didn't answer my video calls and at times blowing me off by saying he is with the kids. I mean those children aren't that little, they didn't need his eyes on them all the time.

His clothes don't smell of perfume and there are no lipstick stains, it's a huge relief. I put everything in the laundry basket in the bedroom, I will do the laundry first thing in the morning.

I head to the kitchen to start preparing dinner, Sqalo must be dying for some home cooked meal. I know he cannot cook to save his life, he and the kids were living on take aways the entire week. I'm going to cook up a storm and feed him then be his dessert later. I take out the meat from the freezer and defrost it in the microwave; I'm going to make three salads with rice and sweet corn.

My phone rings in the pocket of the trousers I'm wearing, I quickly wipe my hands with the dry dish cloth and take it out. It's a number I don't recognize, who could it be?

"Hello," I answer but the person doesn't say anything.

"Haibo! Hello?" I can hear whoever it is breathing.

"Did you call to stay silent? I don't have time for this stupidity," I say briskly.

"Hello ma. It's me, Qophelo," my heart almost stops. I haven't spoken or seen my son since he came here pretending to be a changed man only to rob me clean.

"What do you want Qophelo?" I ask with my lower lip quivering. This child has hurt me so much in this life.

"Ma, I am very sorry," he says in a low voice and I'm shaking my head with tears burning my eyes. He cannot just call me and say sorry thinking it will change everything.

"You have some nerve, Qophelo. After everything you did to me? You think your stupid apology will fix everything?" I'm shouting, anger is taking over me.

"No mama. My apology alone won't cut it, that's why I'm asking for a chance to right my wrongs," I huff out a humorless laugh.

He wants me to accept him back so he can take what I have now and run like he did. I am not going to allow this act to fool me.

"No Qophelo. You have hurt me, humiliated me and I'm done with you. I did everything to make sure that you and your sister are good and taken care of but what did you do? No, I'm done. Qophelo you are as good as dead to me," I say and he gasps in shock.

"Mama, you don't mean that," his voice is shaking. I roughly wipe my tears with the back of my hand.

"I mean it all. I want nothing to do with you. Stay where you are and find yourself a new family because you are not welcome here," it hurts my heart to say all these things but I'm truly done with Qophelo. I tried my best but he did me dirty so me and him are done.

"Mommy ple..." I hang up and put the phone on the island.

My head is bowed and both hands are balancing on the counter as I cry my eyeballs out.

He should stop calling because I'm not going to answer it. Qophelo has stressed me too much in life. He is my only son but I refuse to have him as my cause of death; my heart will literally stop if I allow him back.

Sqalo snakes his arms around me from the back and kisses the nape of my neck, this makes me more emotional. I am glad that Qophelo called me when my pillar of strength was home.

"What's wrong?" He asks after a few minutes of just holding me.

"Qophelo, he called me," I say and he turns me so we are face to face.

"What did he say?" He sounds panicked.

"Can you believe he called to give me a lousy apology? He wants me to allow him back in my life like he didn't do anything," he takes a deep breath and holds my hands.

"I understand that he has hurt you so much but sthandwa sami I can tell that you miss him. I think it's time we put the past behind us; I'm not saying we should blindly accept him back home but everyone deserves a second chance," I raise an eyebrow. I never thought I'd see the day.

"Why are you taking his side? Baba have you forgotten what Qophelo did to us?" He shakes his head.

"I will never forget but I also cannot sit back and watch you suffer like this. You miss and love your son, Bantu. Let's try to forgive him and move on with our lives. He needs us to help him be a better version of himself, it's not too late," he wipes my tears.

"What if he does far worse the next time?" He shakes his head.

"Then we leave him be. One more chance is all I ask for him, for your peace of mind," he kisses my forehead.

This man just knows how to love me right, I'm so blessed.

"I'll think about it," he nods.

"Come sit down,"

"Baby, I have to cook for you,"

"No, we will pop some pies in the oven. You're emotional right now and I have to cuddle you," I giggle looking down.

"If you insist baba,"

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 75

LONDEKA ZULU

My excitement to be employed has died down but I still do my job to the best of my ability. Waking up in the morning is now a problem, I snooze my alarm three times before I actually wake up to go take a shower. I get to the office at exactly the time I have to clock in and I used to be thirty minutes early and leave an hour after everyone else. I won't be killing myself by giving them extra hours they don't pay me for.

I look at my wrist watch and it's 30 minutes until knockoff time, I can't wait to get home and remove my shoes and bra.

It has been amazing having Qophelo around, I find the place clean and dinner ready for me. He has really grown, the Qophelo from back in the day wouldn't even pick up his underwear. He and Ndondoloza shared an apartment when we were still in school and they fought everyday because he wouldn't help with the chores.

My phone chimes, alerting me of a new message.

HLUBI: HEY BABE. HOPE YOU'RE GOOD.

SO, MY HUSBAND WILL BE OUT OF TOWN THIS WEEKEND.
CAN WE PLEASE HAVE SOME INDOOR GIRL TIME. IT WILL

BE ME, YOU AND MY SISTER. SHE CANNOT WAIT TO MEET THIS AMAZING NEW FRIEND OF MINE.

I like Hlubi too, she makes an amazing friend but I don't know how I feel about going to her house. I mean her husband doesn't want to leave me alone, I have never met a man more stubborn. Nothing is going to happen between us, I will not give in so he must just give up.

I should cut ties with Hlubi but something in me wants to stick around her. Maybe if Dedani realizes that the friendship between me and his wife is genuine he will back off and leave me be. I just feel bad that I have to pretend to this woman while I know she's married to an asshole who cannot keep it in his pants.

HLUBI: PRETTY PLEASE BABE.

This text is accompanied by a teary eyed emoji.

I take a deep breath and spin around with my chair. I should lie and say I'm going to Petermaritzburg to see my parents but she will find a way to talk me out of it, Nomahlubi is persistent. Remember the day she showed up here to pick me up for the dinner at her house? Yep, that girl doesn't mind putting on her shoes to get what she wants.

But if I'm telling the truth I want to spend time with her too; I just need to find a way to get Dedani to back off completely from trying to get into my pants.

ME: I'D LOVE TO FRIEND. SEND ME THE DETAILS AND I'LL SHOW UP.

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I get to the apartment building and pass these rowdy university first years. These kids are wild, all they do is drink alcohol and smoke. When do they study? I honestly need to find myself a new place, I've been singing this song but now it's time to actually do it. When I'm done taking a bath and eating I'm going online to check what's out there for a permanent employee like myself. I'm crossing fingers to find a great place at an affordable price, I still need to send money home monthly and do other things for myself.

I open the door and Qophelo is sitting on the couch, focusing on something that's on top of the table. I greet him but he says nothing, that's weird; I hope I didn't do anything to offend him. I head to the lounge area and gasp in shock when I see lines of cocaine on the table, there's also a bank card, a packet of coke and a R100 bank note rolled up. He cannot bring drugs and use them in my house, he promised that he's clean. He needs to go because I'm not going to stay here with a junkie, he might take the little I have and run.

"I didn't use, but I want to do it so bad," he says in a groggy voice. He has been crying.

I instantly feel bad for the thoughts I had a few seconds ago.

"What's going on? What triggered your craving?" I ask and he leans back on the couch.

I cannot sit here while there are drugs in front of us. I take out a pocket tissue from my bag and remove the drugs from the table, Qophelo doesn't stop me so I continue then move to the bathroom to flush everything down.

I get back to the lounge and he has his face buried in his hands, I settle down next to him and brush his back in circles.

"You can talk to me," he removes the hands.

"I called my mom yesterday evening and asked for forgiveness. A chance to right my wrongs but she told me I was dead to her, Londeka," I close my eyes. No one deserves to hear those words come out of their parents mouth.

I know Qophelo is not a saint but he was willing to fix all that he broke.

"It kept ringing in my head and I just didn't want to hear it any longer, so I went out to buy coke in the morning. I have been sitting here for more than 6 hours, battling with myself. It would make me forget and feel good but it's going to mess me up again. I worked so hard to get clean," he explains and I wish I knew how to help him out.

"I'm proud of you for not taking the cocaine. I know it's hard but next time call me so we can talk when there's a lot going on in your head," he looks at me with tears glistening in his eyes.

"Thank you so much, Londeka," he is having a hard time, I honestly feel for him.

His phone rings from inside his pocket, he takes it out and answers. I cannot tell who he's talking to because his responses are only mhhh, yeah, okay. I just hope it's not someone he shouldn't be talking to, a dealer.

He hangs up the phone and looks at me, there's some hope in his eyes.

"What happened?" I ask briskly.

"That was my mother's boyfriend. He says he spoke to her and she's asking for some time and that she'll reach out once she's ready. He

also called in a few favors to make my docket disappear," he says and I smile.

"That means you don't have to stay in Eswatini anymore. Qophelo, you can come home and work on rebuilding your life here," he nods vigorously.

"Yes I can," he attacks me with a hug.

"I know there's still a lot to work through but this is good news, a step in the right direction,"

"I should book my flight to Eswatini. I have to get my belongings and take care of things before coming back permanently," he says.

Life is giving Qophelo a second chance, not everyone gets it and I hope he realizes this and lives a good life from here onwards.

"I'd go with you but I just started working, I don't want to ask for leave days and all,"

He smiles, "I understand, I am just thankful to have someone in my corner."

NOBANTU DLADLA

I am hanging the laundry on the washing line outside, I was supposed to do it yesterday but Sqalo told me to take it easy. I was still emotional over Qophelo's call, I still am but I have decided to listen to my man. There's never been a day where he advised me wrongly; I just asked for some time because I'm not ready to face Qophelo. I don't want to be rushed in forgiving him and moving on from the pain he has caused me.

Two cars drive in my yard and I stop hanging the clothes and put both hands on my waist. Who the hell drives into someone's yard and makes this kind of noise with the hooter this early in the morning? Both cars have a Port Shepstone registration, I'm sure these people are lost because I don't associate with such behavior.

I notice Mawande walking out of her room, she must also be shocked by this noise. She makes her way towards me as the doors of the two cars open and people climb out and start ululating and singing a wedding song.

I'd be damned, these are Philani's relatives. What are they doing here? I told them not to set foot here.

Mawande passes me without greeting and goes to dance with those people, what's happening here? I am definitely missing out on something because that nosey body Mbali is also here. They won't disrespect me in my own yard like this, but I want to see where they end up with this drama. They stop singing and share hugs before coming to me, I have my nose on my forehead and arms folded across my chest. They must know that they aren't welcome here for any reason.

"Nobantu Dladla," the illiterate Hamilton says and I roll my eyes.

"You don't show up to a person's home so early and make noise. This is not a Zoo," he chuckles.

"You will never change sisi, but that's alright because we aren't here for you," I smack my lips "We are going to need the Duma homestead for the Duma's this weekend," over my dead body. I have authority over everything. They can't just come here and start demanding things.

"Need my home for what?" I ask with an attitude.

"Mawande's home, my uncle and his wife's home. You are here because Phila and Nandi somehow thought you'll take good care of their baby girl," he's just trying to piss me off by mentioning Nandi but not today Satan.

"Mawande, what are these people talking about?" she fixes her head wrap and my eyes land on the diamond ring on her finger.

"Msebe is paying my lobola this Saturday," say what! How did this happen under my nose? How dare she run to these people?

I quickly grab her hand and inspect the ring, she yanks her hand away and steps back.

My heart is drumming against my chest, this is not happening. My worst nightmare is coming true.

"We will all be sleeping here until Sunday," Hamilton says.

My blood pressure has sky rocketed, I am fanning myself.

I should have ended this relationship long ago but I thought Msebe was just playing with her.

I really took my eyes off the ball and now everything is in jeopardy.

I don't know what to say to them so I make my way to the house; I'm dizzy so I'm taking my time because I don't want to drop down in front of my enemies. This marriage cannot hold, Mawande will get everything that belongs to her. What will I have left? What will my daughter have to fall back on when I'm gone?

I head straight to the bedroom, Sqalo is still out of it. He wakes up pretty late, around 11 am. I shake him gently and he groans, asking for a few more minutes. I wish he knew that we don't have time to waste, we need to come up with a plan to make sure that this lobola doesn't happen.

"Wake up, trouble is at our door step," I say and his eyes open immediately.

"What? What's happening?" He sits up straight, rubbing sleep off his eyes.

"Baba, the Duma's are here. They are negotiating Mawande's lobola this weekend," I say and he furrows his forehead.

"That's not good because?" Is he kidding me?

"Sqalo! My damn sister and her husband wrote in their will that Mawande only gets her inheritance if she gets a qualification or gets married and has a child," his eyes widen.

How could he even forget something so important?

"Damn Bantu, this is serious," he is telling me?

Can't he see that I'm shaking in my boots already?

"We have to do something so that this marriage doesn't happen," I say and he shakes his head.

"That will make them look into us, babe. I'm sure by now she has told those people how you have been treating her. The marriage clause has a kid in it so we can work around that; allow this marriage to go through, support it so they can let their guard down," this is the first time I'm not on the same page with him. We can't take chances, we need to block everything that will take away this life from us.

"Listen, it's time you establish a relationship with Mawande. A good relationship at that.

Beg and cry for her to forgive you for all that happened in the past. Make her trust you with her life so we can know each time she's pregnant and take care of it," I shake my head because I'm not about to grovel to that girl.

"I hear you baba," I'm gonna let this lobola happen but I need to find a way to permanently deal with her womb. It cannot carry any bastards who will take what belongs to me.

"Good, now act as normal as possible and stay out of their way. I will go to Durban for the weekend to give them space," what?

He wants to go where Vivian is.

"Why Durban? You can stay at the lodge in Shelly beach," he takes a deep breath.

"Durban is good because I'll be able to see the kids, they miss me being around,"

I don't like this one bit and he knows it. Plus, he just spend the whole week with them. "Nobantu please. Your insecurities with Vivian really need to go because I'm starting to get annoyed by this," he says and I gasp, shocked.

"Why are you talking to me like that?" I ask and he shakes his head.

"Nothing is happening between my ex wife and I, please get over it," he climbs off the bed and grabs the clothes her wore yesterday and puts them on before opening the wardrobe and taking out clothes and his bag to pack.

I cannot believe this. I storm out of the bedroom to go hang the rest of the clothes outside.

They have invaded my house, they are unpacking groceries and making tea. The man are outside inspecting the yard and talking about clearing the weeds so the Ngidi's find a neat place on Saturday.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 76

NTUTHUKO GALLOWAY

"Oh my God, Ntuthuko. This house is beautiful," She says with tears streaming down her face.

"It's yours to live in. We just need to go furniture shopping," she shakes her head.

"No, please. You have already done so much for me. I can look for a job and buy my own furniture," I take a deep breath.

I cannot allow that to happen, she's old now and it will be hard getting a job. I mean graduates are struggling in this economy.

"You don't have to, ma. I took you out of Mzumbe, I will cater to your every need," she wipes her tears.

"It will be too much on you Ntuthuko. You have Nhlelozenkosi and Singa to provide for now. I'm just grateful that you got me a place and offered me a second chance at life," she's stubborn but not past me, I'm colored after all.

"We can argue about this till the next day," she laughs and that just took five years off her face. I don't remember the last time I saw my mother's eyes twinkle, for as long as I can remember they were gloomy.

"Chadwick gave you his persistence I see," yeah, I guess I took it from my old man.

"Thank you, I will accept the furniture," she adds and that wasn't so hard now was it.

"Great, we will go on Monday," she walks around the house again, touching the walls. This must be so surreal for her, she must have lost hope of a better life long ago.

"Please take a few things so we can go, we will be back next week to move you in officially," we took all her clothes today and left Mzumbe. That devil was taken by a home in Port Shepstone, I will be

the one paying every month until the day he dies. He was insulting me and my mother when they were taking him away. He called my mother an ungrateful slut who he did a favor for by marrying her with a bastard child. I just laughed because he never married Nomafu, there was no lobola paid. Theirs was a vat and set, simple.

My mother has to be grateful to the heavens for not having children with that man, I know how evil he is. He would have poisoned them against me and possibly Nomafu just so he can have total control over them.

"I should call my sister first and ask her for a place to sleep for a couple of days," she says and I nod.

Ma takes out her phone and a few seconds later my aunt had picked up. They talk for a little while then she hangs up.

"What's wrong?" I ask because of the look on her face.

"She's not around. She went to Eastern Cape for church,"

"That's not a problem. I had made arrangements for you at the house. There's plenty of room," she narrows her eyes.

She mentioned my aunt so I didn't say anything because I don't want her to be uncomfortable.

"Does your father know about this?" She asks.

"He won't mind," she's not convinced, "Trust me, ma. He will be happy to have you around. You two will keep each other company because I'm leaving tomorrow morning. Msebe, Nhlelozenkosi's brother is paying lobola for Mawade," she starts ululating.

"Hao! Kwa kuhle kwethu."

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Nomafu is enjoying the ice cream I bought her at the patrol station when I was pouring patrol. She looks like a little girl tasting it for the first time; when I was growing up we didn't get the chance to enjoy these types of treats. That man was stingy, he barely gave my mother money for groceries but he expected food on the table everyday.

I have agreed with my heart to give Nomafu another chance to be a mother to me, I want to give her all that is beautiful, all that was robbed from the both of us.

We get to the house and there's a car that I don't recognize in the driveway. I kill the engine and we both climb out of the car, I go take out her bag from the boot and lead the way inside. The house is quiet, my father normally makes noise when he has visitors. I notice that the sliding door is open, maybe they are chilling outside. I throw the bag on the couch and we make our way outside. My mother screams at the sight of my father thrusting in and out of a girl on top of the sun lounger. My goodness, I'm gonna go blind.

We quickly hurry back inside and my mother is horrified as I am. But there's also sadness in her eyes, I feel sorry for her. I would be heart broken seeing Nhlelozenkosi with another man, even if we were broken up.

I take her bag and lead her up the stairs. The helper prepared the room for her, the bedding is changed and the window is open.

I offer her a drink and she says she will come down in a few minutes. Is she going to cry?

I get downstairs and my father is pacing up and down, he looks nervous as hell. I'm just grateful that he has his clothes on now. I wish I can unsee what I saw, he has to pay for my therapy because he and that girl scarred me for life. I need to call Vivian, she has to know that

our dad is having spontaneous sex. Weren't they worried about the neighbors seeing them? I mean we can see the neighbors pool from the balcony.

"Edward you could have told me you're coming home with your mom," haibo! Kahle bo Megalo.

"I didn't know you'd be nasty outside. What happened to the bedroom mfethu?" He takes a deep breath then exhales.

"I'm sorry, Buhle just showed up unannounced because I've been ignoring her. She had on a sexy number and started seducing me, one thing..."

I quickly interject, "Whoa! I don't need to hear the details bafo," he wants to traumatize me even further?

"I'm sorry," he says, holding out both hands.

"The neighbors took a video, you'll be trending on these things Nhlelozenkosi likes," he clicks his tongue.

"Don't joke with me," he looks up the stairs.

"Where's your mom?" He asks nervously.

"She is horrified upstairs," he closes his eyes as if pained.

"I should go talk to her," I step to the side and he moves past me rubbing his hands together.

Let me call Maka'Singa and give her this hot gossip, tomorrow is too far. My chest cannot contain this drama at all.

NOBANTU DLADLA

It's a full house, the Duma's are at every corner like flies. I cannot wait for all of this to be over so they can leave my house, I miss my personal space. They are sitting on my couches and watching my television; Monday I'm going to hire one of these desperate village woman to spring clean this whole house. I want all the furniture disinfected, I should also call Madlabantu to give me something to cleanse the house. Who knows what the kind of muti they came here with, I can't take chances.

I wish my daughter was around to help me get through this weekend. I feel so alone and vulnerable, I cannot trust these people. I don't even eat the the food they prepare, they might poison me to get all that belongs to me. I'd rather be safe than sorry.

I take my phone from the bedside table and dial Ndongolozza's number. I haven't spoken to her today. I called in the morning but it rang until voicemail so I had to call Madlabantu. He told me that she was sleeping because he gave her muti to drink.

"Mama," she answers and I smile.

The apple of my eye. The reason why I know my womb wasn't rotten when I was pregnant with her and Qophelo.

"How are you, sthandwa sami?" I ask and she heaves a sigh.

"I'm exhausted. Whatever he gave me was stronger than anything I've taken since I got here," Madlabantu needs to conclude this treatment and give me back my child.

"But it's helping right? There's no smell and discomfort?" I ask, crossing fingers.

"I feel like I have a new vagina," she says and I'm thrown into a fit of laughter.

"I'm glad to hear that. Sgora won't know what hit him," I say with a smile but she doesn't respond, I look at the screen and the call is still connected.

"Ndondo, are you there?"

"I am focusing on myself right now ma. Can we not talk about me seducing Sgora," she says and I take a deep breath. This child must not joke with this, especially now that Mawande is getting married.

"Don't start please. Do you want to be a laughing stock of Mzumbe? You want Mawande to be above you with something? Ndongoloza I have worked hard to make sure that you are superior to that girl. I was always inferior to Nandi, I don't want you to experience what I experienced my baby," she will get with Sgora and live happily as a daughter-in-law to a rich man. I will do everything in my power to make sure that happens.

"Speaking of Mawande, how are the preparations going? Will you be a part of the negotiations? I mean you raised her so it's only fair that you take the lobola money," I smack my lips, shaking my head.

"You're right but these greedy illiterate men will pocket every cent and look the other way. They won't show any appreciate to me for raising their brat all these years," they will burn in hell for doing all of this behind my back and only showing up a few days to the event.

"Why are you calm about it? The Nobantu Dladla I know would be showing them who is boss," I want to do something but Sqalo asked me not to do anything so these people don't look into us for any reason. Non of us want to end up in prison for fraud.

"I have learned to pick my battles wisely, Ndongoloza," Madlabantu speaks in the background.

"Mama, I have to go. I'll call you a little later," she says and the line goes dead.

I've been closed in this bedroom for hours now, I need something to eat and some entertainment. We never replaced the television in the bedroom after Qophelo robbed us like a thief in the night. I should take the TV in lounge and bring it to my bedroom until these cockroaches leave my house on Sunday. I climb off the bed and put on my morning shoes before leaving my bedroom and locking it to find someone to help me carry the TV and decoder, at least Qophelo didn't steal the LNB cable.

I get the shock of my life when I step outside and there's a marquee tent being erected in my yard. These people told me that it's just lobola negotiations, why do they need a tent? I look to the side when I hear laughter erupting. It's a group of village woman peeling vegetables, that's more than enough food for a mere lobola negotiation.

Mawande appears from the corner with a huge smile on her face, she's wearing an african print dress with a matching head wrap. This stupid marriage won't even last, she will be back here in less than a year. She won't have a womb to make children and that will be reason enough for maMokwena to send her back. Msebe is the only Ngidi son, he is expected to have children so his father's name can live on.

"What's all of this Mawande?" I ask, pointing to the tent, she heaves a sigh and scratches her chin with her left hand. I roll my eyes, she obviously did that so I can see her stupid ring.

"Well, I only found out just now that Msebe and his family along with aunt Mbali hired decor people and invited our close friends and family to celebrate after the negotiations are concluded," she says and I raise an eyebrow.

"That's unnecessary if you ask me," she titters.

"It's good that they didn't ask you," she says with a smile, "Please excuse me, I need to go get my phone and call my fiancé." She's honestly not the first person to get paid for by a man. She shouldn't think she's better just because she's getting married. She walks away singing a wedding song.

These people are going to bring the village rats into my yard and house. The same low lives that went out of their way to bewitch my daughter. I am fuming because I can't put a stop to this whole thing, I need to speak to Sqalo. He has to calm me down because he left me at a time I needed him here; I'm still mad that he went to Durban instead of Shelly beach but I need him because he's honestly the only person who knows how to put me at ease. I go back inside, straight to my bedroom.

I grab the phone from on top of the bed and dial Sqalo while pacing up and down.

"Hallo," a little voice answers and I close my eyes. Why is Sqalo's child playing with the phone? He didn't even tell me that he will be picking them up today.

"Hello boy, where is daddy," I ask.

"He is in the bedroom with mommy," my heart drops into my stomach and I break a sweat immediately. For what purpose is he in the bedroom with his damn ex wife? This is exactly why I don't want him going to Durban when she's around and I'm not.

"Are you at the house or daddy's hotel?" My hands are shaking.

"Huh?" This stupid child. The question is very clear.

"Does daddy sleep at the house with you and mommy?" I know this is wrong but I cannot help it. This child is innocent and he will tell me the truth.

"Yes..."

"Who are you talking to?" Sqalo asks.

"I don't know daddy," I'm waiting for this one to get on the phone so that I can give him a piece of my mind. He hangs up the phone and I swear I'm about to lose my mind, Sqalo doesn't know who he is dealing with here.

I try to call him again but it rings until voicemail, haibo!

I dial again but this time it goes straight to voicemail, this man switched off his phone.

Lord help me, I'm spinning.

Why the hell is he treating me like this? Tears stream down my face, I am hurt to my soul.

I would be driving to Durban right now if I knew the house address, the only thing I know is that the house is in Hillcrest.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 77

NOT EDITED

MAWANDE DUMA

I am pacing up and down in the bedroom that used to be mine when I was still living in the main house. I am with my cousins from the Duma's side of the family, I'm glad Ndongoloza is not here to look down on them and make them feel some type of way. She hasn't

been around for a while now, I thought she moved back to Durban but I saw her things in boxes in Qophelo's bedroom. I know for fact that she's okay wherever she is because Nobantu is still functioning well. She would have lost her mind if something happened to her previous princess. Why the fuck am I thinking about these people on my special day? I should be happy out of my mind to be leaving them behind. I'll only deal with Nobantu and her brat when it's time to take back what is rightfully mine. She will not believe the Mawande I'll be when I return to this village.

The bedroom door opens and aunt Mbali tells us that it's time to come out with blankets over our heads so the Ngidi's can point to their bride. Three of my cousins and I follow aunt Mbali to the lounge, the things we do for marriage. Its 100 degree celsius outside and here we are with heavy blankets, Msebe better treat me like a Queen for the rest of my life because I'm at risk of heat stroke here. We kneel down and listen to the delegates of both families talking and laughing for a minute. Uncle Hamilton tells them that they will be forced to pay if they pick the wrong flower. I'm crossing fingers that they get me right, Msebe has already spent a lot of money for today and it was such short notice.

"Mawande," someone says and I almost fall for it. My uncle was going to kill me.

Laughter erupts from the men.

"You think you're smart, Ngidi. My daughter will not fall for your tricks," Uncle Hamilton says proud. If only he knew that I almost cost his team the win.

"Okay, let's be serious," a voice I don't recognize says and I know it's someone from the Ngidi's. "Point to your brother's wife," I blush under the heat of this blanket. I'm finally my baby's wife, a beautiful

chapter has just started in my life. God, I've been so nervous but it looks like everything went on smoothly.

"Mawande is the one in the middle," Mafube says and I close my eyes. Is he fuckin serious right now. He got it damn wrong.

I hear my cousin giggling and I know Mafube has lifted her blanket.

"I want this much for getting it wrong," why didn't he say the amount. He just had to hold out his fingers to them.

"You better get it right," someone warns Mafube.

My blanket is lifted and relief floods through me, I make sure to keep my eyes down, I was given strict instructions.

"Yes, this is your bride,"

"MaDuma, we are here to take you home mntanami. The Ngidi's are excited to welcome you home tomorrow," haibo! I'm not leaving with Msebe today? My bags are already packed so why should I wait?

"Thank you baba. I cannot wait to be home with my husband," they all laugh.

These old man like things man.

"That's what we love to hear,"

Uncle Hamilton clears his throat, "She will take care of her husband and mother in law. Mawande was raised very well,"

My cousins and I are excused because they want to conclude a few things before they can share a drink and eat before leaving to get Msebe and the rest of the Ngidi's. The lobola celebration will start at 12pm, it's chaotic outside because of the preparations.

The woman start ululating immediately when I walk into the kitchen, I get so overwhelmed that I cannot contain my tears. At the beginning of this year I didn't think my life would turn out this way, I

had no hope. I thought I'd be my aunt's slave till the day I die but God and my ancestors had other plans. My tears have been wiped and the only thing I feel right now is happiness. Things are looking up for me, I'm married to the most amazing man ever, I am starting varsity next year and the list of other possibilities is endless.

"You bagged yourself a fine gentleman, Mawande," maCele says.

"Thank you," I answer with a straight face.

"I haven't seen Nobantu, she must be burning with jealousy," I remember when she made a comment on the day of the twin's graduation party. She knew nothing about my life then but she still opened her mouth; she taught me that people rejoice with those they benefit from in that particular moment. She was celebrating with my aunt on that day and she didn't see me. Today is my day and she's not telling me that I must be full of regrets. Village wonders shall never end, thank God I'm leaving this place soon.

"Come here baby girl," aunt Mbali says, pulling me in for a hug.

"I missed out on so much but thank God I got to be a part of this. Your husband is a good man, I see how he looks at you and speaks of you, he will treat you right. I'm so proud of you Mawande," she kisses my forehead and my heart is alright. I wanted my parents to be here but having aunt Mbali here is fills that gap in a way she will never understand.

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I am starring at myself in the mirror, I can't believe this is me. This is my first face beat, I look so gorgeous. I want to cry but the make up artist threatened to squash me if I ruined her amazing work. She

arrived shortly after the Ngidi's left and told me that she was sent by my sister in-law to make me look like a princess. She started with my hair, she kept it natural and I know Msebe is going to drop on his knees. My husband has a thing for my hair, he even chooses the hairstyles I do.

"Sorry to disturb Wande but you need to get dressed, Msebe just called. They are about to leave his house," my heart starts racing.

I'm about to see him and it will be the first time as husband and wife, customarily.

"My dress is in there," I point to where I kept my dress dress.

"Here's your dress," she opens the wardrobe and takes out a suit cover and zips it down. I gasp in shock.

"What? When?" I ask with a shaking voice.

"Oh oh oh, no tears doll. At least not before your husband lays his eyes on you," we all laugh.

"Nhlelozenkosi delivered it last night. They got a tailor to work on it quickly, your husband wanted to make this day special for you because the wedding won't be any time soon," he is so thoughtful.

I asked that our wedding be later on and he agreed, little did I know that he's sneaking behind my back to make our lobola day beautiful.

"You knew all about this?" She nods vigorously with tears glistening in her eyes.

"Yes, I helped him sneak around," my union with Msebe was written in the book of life, such things convince me even more.

"Come get dressed, the guests are here. People came in numbers to support you," I chuckle.

People if Mzumbe came to eat and take notes so they can exchange tomorrow morning.

Aunt Mbali and everyone else is in their Zulu attire, they look absolutely amazing. They help me get into my nude dress and put on a brown isicholo and beads around my wrists and neck. My dress has a detachable brown cape that finishes the entire look, I cannot believe they got the right size and chose colors that look so good on me. My cousin hands aunt Mbali a pair of designer shoes, why did they have to go buy such expensive flats? Ophaca like these ones cost almost nothing compared to the price of this shoe, the difference is only the two letter G's in gold.

A knock comes through the door and aunt Mbali gives the person permission to walk in.

"Oh my God," I look up and it's Ntuthuko.

"You made it," I say but I can't run to him because they are helping me get ready.

"I wouldn't miss this day for anything. You look absolutely breathtaking Wande, Msebe is such a lucky man," he says and I feel a huge dry lump clogged in my throat because of the tears I refuse to shed.

"We are both blessed to have found each other," everyone agrees, including the MUA.

"These are for you sis wami," he says and I smile. Ntuthuko is my family, a brother God blessed me with.

"They are beautiful, thank you," it's red roses in a circular box with my name on it.

"One more thing," he takes out a jewelry box and opens it, it's a gold bracelet with heart and stars charms.

"I want you to always wear this and remember that you have a brother who loves you. We became each other's family and light in the darkest times. No matter where life takes the both of us I'll always be there for you because I know that you'll never forsake me," I attack him with a hug.

"I love you too, mfowethu," he made life bearable in the toughest of times, I will always hold him dear to my heart.

We hear cars hooting outside and we quickly let go of each other, my in-laws are here.

"Let's me powder you quickly. Hubby has to see you flawless."

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I'm in the front with my entourage following behind me and my uncle. They are singing at the top of their lungs as we approach the Ngidi's who are singing their own song. It's some sort of competition, but a good one because we are now one family because of Msebe and I. Speaking of my husband, he has the widest smile plastered across his face. I cannot wait to kiss those lips and whisper sweet something's into each other's ears. We are newly weds, it's allowed.

We finally get to my husband and he starts dancing for me, I'm blushing as the crowd makes noise for him. We both have numbers behind us, his family from Lesotho and former colleagues are also here and I have the crazy Dumas as well as the villagers. Ntuthuko's sister is here looking amazing, aunt Nobantu is going to faint when she finally comes out of her bedroom and realize that the mother of

his toy boy is here. I should ask aunt Mbali to get the ambulance on standby.

Msebe takes my hand and the entourage becomes one, we start one song and dance towards the tent while singing.

I thought today was going to be a simple thing but Msebe has turned it into a celebration that has me looking like a Queen. The decor in the tent is nothing I could have dreamt of all on my own, these people delivered. It's a mini Zulu kingdom fit for me and mine. I thought the tent was small yesterday but 70 percent of the people here will fit and some will sit on the extra chairs outside. Haibo! How did I miss the DJ? This is a serious party.

"This is my dream unexpected wedding or whatever it is," I whisper to Msebe as we settle down on the couch facing the guests. We are comfortable here and we will only move to the table when it's time to eat.

"I had to make sure that we have pictures for our home in Johannesburg," he says and I kiss him. I don't care if the elders realized that I'm the one who reached for it.

What is it that this man hasn't given me? I haven't worked a day in my life but I'm going to move into a big house in a suburb I didn't even know exists.

"I love you maDuma, mkami," Abba father!

"Baba, I love you with every fiber of my being," he leans in and our foreheads touch.

"Khuzekani! You're still in the midst of other people," the MC, who I don't know says.

Msebe and I almost forgot that we are in public, I was ready to get on top of him.

"Seeing my friend this happy makes me not to regret postponing a blind date that was supposed to happen tonight," the crowd laughs, "I'm meeting the lady next week and Msebe is paying the bill. I just hope that the lady is as beautiful as my friends wife," oh wow, he is such a charmer.

"Congratulations to Mr and Mrs Ngidi, we are all here to celebrate the both of you. May this day be a start of your happily ever after," Amen! Amen! Amen!

"Did I tell you how gorgeous you look?" He asks and I look down, melting into hot liquid.

"All because of you babe. Thank you so much for making this day possible, I feel like the luckiest girl in the world," I fix umqhele on his head. I like that he kept his look at a minimal.

He's wearing black jeans with a white shirt and imbatha on top.

"Wande, we are going to have such a beautiful life baby, I cannot wait," I believe that too.

Someone starts ululating, we all look to see who it is and I'm left shocked. Aunt Nobantu starts a wedding song as she enters the tent.

Oh no!

She's in Luis Vuitton from head to toe, the clothes look a little uncomfortable but the girl is very confident. She comes to me and Msebe and shakes our hands then kiss our cheeks, I'm saying a prayer. I'm asking God not to allow her to mess up my big day. Why would she come out of her bedroom after locking herself in there for hours? She wants to mess this up for me.

TO BE CONTINUED...

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 78

NOBANTU DLADLA

I was planning to lock myself in my bedroom until these people left my house but being alone made me think of my situation even more. I cannot believe Sqalo cheated on me with Vivian when he promised that he loves and would never hurt me in any way. He hasn't called to explain himself and worse, his phone is on voicemail still. That can only mean they are busy playing happy family and having sex like rabbits. I am so hurt; I've cried so much I don't think I have any more tears to cry. I don't know what's going to happen when he comes back home, that's if he even comes back.

I'm sitting in the tent and listening to the last speaker, it's Msebe. He is thanking everyone for coming to celebrate this big day with him and Mawande, who he referred to as his wife. I'm bored out of my mind, but I will keep my composure and go through this whole day, so the village witches and wizards don't label me the jealous aunt. He gives the mic back to the MC who announces that we can now go and dish up for ourselves as they prepared a buffet at the back of the house. Msebe couldn't afford to pay for waitresses? This goes to show how everything was rushed, if they included me in the planning of this ceremony then this whole thing would have been perfect. I'm not saying it's bad, but it could've been better with the help of someone as classy as me.

I continue sitting down, waiting on everyone else to get their food. I know it's going to be chaos, Mzumbe people love acting like they've

never seen food before. I wouldn't be surprised if they came with empty ice cream containers to take some for later on. They give all villagers a bad name and that makes me mad.

Mawande stands up to take pictures with the Ngidi's and I see her outfit fully. I won't even try to say anything bad; she looks very beautiful. Her in laws seem very happy, especially MaMokwena. I overheard Hamilton talking to another Duma family member about Mawande leaving tomorrow. What I wanted to hear was how much they asked for her, I only saw two cows in the kraal. They are lucky I didn't destroy that thing, it makes my yard look hideous.

People start coming back to the tent to eat so I get up to go dish up for myself, I don't even know if I'll be able to eat. I'm going through a lot right now and my appetite normally goes away until I feel a lot better.

The food station looks clean and well organized, there are minders making sure there's enough of each dish. Everything is mouthwatering so I take a bit of everything.

I'd be damned! What is this bitch doing in my yard? Where did she leave Sqalo? Did she come here to mock me? I make my way to her to confront her about what she did with my partner. She's talking on the phone, her back towards me. She's not aware that I'm about to be in her face in a few seconds. I tap her shoulder and she turns and raises an eyebrow when she sees its me.

"Uhm, I need to go. Please don't give them junk," she says, and I know for a fact that she's talking to Sqalo right now. How is it that she can reach him, and I can't?

"Okay, I'll see you guys tomorrow then," she says.

"I love you too, guys," my heart shrinks.

Is Sqalo included in that?

"Nobantu, what can I do for you?" she asks, putting her cellphone in her handbag.

"You don't have any shame. Why are you here?" she laughs, looking at me from head to toe. Yes, honey! Please take your time, my outfit is Luis Vuitton. She can never catch me off guard being basic. I took few items from the new clothes Ndongoloza bought when she was in Sandton the last time.

"I'm here to support Mawande and Msebe. They are both like family to me now, so I had to show up" she says, and I smack my lips. "You look, uhm...Uncomfortable," this girl is disrespectful.

"Sleeping with Sqalo wasn't enough, you just had to show up here and ruin the day for me. What kind of woman sleeps with a man that's in a relationship with another?" I ask furiously and she is thrown into a fit of laughter.

"Haibo! Gogo, are you serious? Do you need a mirror so you can see the kind of woman you're talking about?" she takes a step forward, "You slept with Sqalo when he was my husband" I swallow hard.

"Oh, cat caught your tongue now?" I flip my weave back.

"So, you're not denying sleeping with my man yesterday," she chuckles.

"Why would I? When he gave me orgasm after orgasm while telling me how much he loves me. While begging for me to take him back,"

she brags and I drop the plate of food, tears burning my eyes. I feel like someone has sucker-punched me in the stomach.

"You desperate bitch," It comes out in a whisper.

"You won't see him again; he is back home with his family. We might be expecting another member soon, he arrived right when I was ovulating and we didn't use protection" my world comes crumbling down and I'm immediately light-headed, I swear I'm spinning. I try to balance myself by placing a hand on her shoulder, but she slaps it away. I clutch at my chest hoping that the ache I'm feeling will stop.

" Viv, what's happening?" Sgora asks, standing next to his sister and that's the last thing I see before falling unconscious.

LONDEKA ZULU

I had the most amazing weekend ever; I wish it didn't come to an end. I'm not looking forward to going back to work tomorrow but adulting has me by the nipples. At least I'm getting paid next week, and I'll be able to pay rent and deposit for my new apartment. I'm so excited, Hlubi will be helping me pick furniture. She's such an amazing friend, I'm happy that I didn't allow Dedani's shenanigans to rob me off the opportunity of having such a genuine friend in my life.

I close the shower taps and step out to dry my body and apply moisturizer. I feel better now that I've showered, I was tired but at least not hangover because we had a few glasses of gin in the morning after a greasy breakfast.

I don't want to leave to go be alone in the apartment, Qophelo left for Eswatini to take care of a few things before coming back to South

Africa permanently. I offered him to stay with me, but he said he doesn't want us to ruin our friendship. He said he knows he will be bringing different girls around and hosting friends and that will definitely cause friction.

I walk out of the bathroom with my toiletry bag and bump into Dedani, what is he doing here? Hlubi said he is only coming back this evening, I wanted to be gone because I didn't want this happening. I greet him and he greets me back, I try to pass through, but he blocks my way. I try the other side and he blocks me there too, then he cages me between his arms with my back on the wall.

"You smell great, maZulu," he buries his nose in my shoulder and I snap and push him away, but Dedani is strong.

"Stop fighting me, babe. I missed seeing your beautiful face so much I just had to come back earlier to catch you before you left," Dedani is the devil.

"I will scream this house down, Dedani" I threaten him, and he quickly steps back, holding out his hands in surrender.

"I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. I just can't help myself, Mageba. You drive me absolutely insane" I click my tongue and hurry to the bedroom I was sleeping in.

I put my dress on and pack the rest of my things in the weekender bag before tidying around. I take my things and leave the bedroom, I'm ready to get out of here. I don't want to be in the same space as Dedani Mkhize, he makes me sick to my stomach. I find him pinning Hlubi to the wall and kissing her hungrily, I clear my throat and they break the kiss. Nomahlubi is giggling like a school girl, she's really in love with this piece of shit. God, she deserves so much better.

"Londeka, hey!" oh he's gonna pretend like he didn't see me in the hallway?

"How are you?" I'm not interested at all, but I have to keep up with this psycho.

"I'm great."

"Hlubi tells me that you girls had an amazing time" I nod vigorously.

"The best time ever, it's sad that it has come to an end" Hlubi heaves a sigh.

"We can do it again next weekend," I laugh shaking my head.

"You should. I'll be away on business again" it's an every weekend thing now, he must have found a replacement for Ndondoloza.

"I can't, I'm heading home,"

"That's okay, you'll do it next time" he kisses Hlubi's forehead.

"I'm gonna head out now, we will talk on the phone friend" Hlubi narrows her eyes.

"I'm taking you home," I smile sweetly at him.

"No, please. I'll request a cab, your husband just got home. Spend some time with him"

"Are you sure?" she asks.

"100 percent. Let's just pray before I leave" there it is again. I asked to pray when I got here on Friday, out of nowhere I just felt like praying. Thank God Hlubi and Qaqamba didn't find me weird because of that.

"Please, babe. You know your prayer moved me on Friday. After that I felt so light," maybe God wanted me to pray so Hlubi could feel that way.

"Let's close our eyes,"

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 79

MAWANDE DUMA

I have never felt so happy and alive in my whole entire life. This past weekend was amazing, I got to celebrate my union with people who are genuinely happy for Msebe and I. I am excited for the future, it can only get better from here. This was never the life I envisioned for myself because of the circumstances I was in, but I'm glad God planned everything this way. His timing is definitely the best because things happen effortlessly.

I just finished packing a couple of my clothes and shoes in Msebe's wardrobe, I had to pack some of his things in suitcases to make space for mine. Its good that most things are already packed because we are moving to Johannesburg in January, that's in a little over a month.

We haven't decided on our permanent residency, but we do have three houses to choose from. Msebe made an appointment with the real estate agent for next week; I cannot wait to see everything physically and choose a house that will be our home forever. Where we will raise our children and love one another like life depends on it.

"knock knock," I sit up straight and give the person permission to enter.

"Mrs Ngidi," it's Mafube.

I don't know but I've been getting weird vibes from him, he was also so withdrawn at the lobola celebration. Everyone was having fun but each time my eyes landed on him he looked bored out of his mind.

I don't know if he's stressing over personal matters or he was just not happy for us.

"Hey, what's up?" I ask as he settles down on the couch.

"Nothing much, I just wanted to check in. How are you feeling?" I lean back and cross my legs.

"Happy would be an understatement," he nods his head.

"So you have zero regrets? Like non whatsoever?" I narrow my eyes at him. What is that supposed to mean?

"Msebe is the best thing to ever happen to me. My husband is everything I need and deserve and it's pretty amazing that he feels the same way about me," I say with a serious face.

He clears his throat, "I didn't mean to offend you, Mawande. I just wanted to make sure that you are 100% certain about this, marriage is not child's play,"

"I don't expect things to always be rosey between us. He's the only man I'd rather experience all seasons with,"

"I'm happy for the both of you and I wish you nothing but the best," he says but I doubt it. His energy is giving something totally different from his words.

"When are you going back to Bloem?" I don't care if I sound rude right now, I want him gone. Mafube makes me feel uncomfortable.

"I'll be around for a while. I quit my job so there's really nothing important to go back to," No he didn't just say that.

"Your kids? Aren't they important?"

He scratches his chin, "Of course my children are important. I just meant in the work department," if he says so.

"Why did you quit your job?"

"It wasn't challenging anymore. I need something new and exciting," must be nice being him.

"Sthandwa sami, I'm home," Msebe walks in with flowers and a restaurant paperbag. I get on my feet and rush to my husband. I missed him so much, he left for Port Edward early in the morning.

"Hey babe," I peck his lips.

"These are for you," he hands me the gorgeous flowers and bury my nose in them.

"I love them, thank you," I have a vase I bought for the flowers he got me when he proposed.

"Bro, what's good?" they shake hands.

"Everything is okay. I'm always happy when I'm here, it's so serene,"

"Yeah, I'm gonna miss this place once my wife and I are in Johannesburg. That city is just chaotic,"

"Don't worry babe, we will come down here frequently. I don't want my mother in law feeling like we have abandoned her," he nods in agreement.

"Okay, love birds. Let me give you your space," Mafube says, getting on his feet.

"Sure bro," Msebe walks him out and closes the door.

"How was your meeting?" I ask.

He snakes his arms around my waist from behind and kisses the nape of my neck.

"It went well, they loved my design," That's good news. His solo career is picking up nicely, I'm proud of him.

"When do you start working?" I ask, cutting the stems of the flowers.

"Next week after our short Johannesburg trip," I'm gonna miss seeing him every hour of the day, "I was thinking, MaDuma," I place the cutter down and turn to face him.

"I'm listening," he takes my hand and leads us to the couch.

"It's going to be the two of us for a while. I was thinking that we rent an apartment for the time being and buy land. I can design our home and build it from scratch. Whatever we have both wanted our family home to be like, I can incorporate our ideas and bring it to life. It's very hard and expensive to remodel," that sounds good.

I don't want him spending more than he should. I already feel like I'm on a free ride, I'm contributing absolutely nothing financially to this relationship.

"I'm all for it," he runs a finger along my jawline.

"Are you sure?" he asks and I smile.

"I am sure babe. Call the estate agent and ask her to find us apartments and land," he kisses me tenderly.

"I'm going to build your dream home and make you very happy in it," I believe that with all my heart.

"I love you so much, Hlomuka,"

"I love you, Wande."

SQALO SHOZI

"Good luck," Vivian says with a smirk on her face. She told me what happened at Mzumbe on Saturday and my head has been spinning since. I know Nobantu is waiting to unleash her wrath on me.

"I honestly don't want to go back there," I say and she takes a sip of her wine. "I want to start life afresh here in Durban. There's a lot I've done wrong, I want to fix my life. Build a great friendship with you for the sake of our kids and be a present father," I add then drop my weekender bag on the floor before sitting next to her.

"Then why are you going back? I mean no one is holding a gun to your head," I honestly don't know, a part of me wants to find an apartment here and go back to the office full time. I want to cut ties with Nobantu and just focus on being the best version of myself for the sake of my children. Something is pushing me back to Mzumbe, I'm not sure what it is but it's a force so strong.

"I just want to end things well with Nobantu, I don't want to leave anything hanging. I want to come back on a clean slate," I know Vivian and I will never get back together. Please don't get me wrong, I want my wife back but she made it clear that she's done. The only reason she is being friendly with me is the kids.

"You better get going then, get the police on standby," I chuckle, getting on my feet. She is joking but I might need law enforcement to intervene when I get to that house.

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I am fuckin nervous for obvious reasons, Nobantu is going to loose it on me the minute I walk through that door.

I ended her call on Friday when she called and my youngest son answered, then I switched off my phone to completely avoid her. Viv made matters worse by telling Nobantu that we slept together and it was good; I don't blame her because Nobantu went up to her and she had to clap back somehow. Vivian doesn't like confrontations and Nobantu doesn't shy away from being in another person's face. This is all my fault and I'm ready to face the music.

The gate is locked, her car is not parked outside. All the windows are shut. It would be good if she went out, that will give me time to prep something romantic to soften her up. I take my keys and climb out of the car to unlock the gate and drive in, I leave my car under the tree and make my way inside. My heart is thumping against my chest, I'm scared it might jump right out.

The house is silent, it's so clean you'd swear there wasn't a big celebration happening over the weekend.

I open the bedroom door and freeze on the spot. Nobantu is sitting on the bed in her pyjamas, her eyes are puffy and blood shot red. I swear she has been crying the whole weekend, it's going to be hard getting through to her.

I notice a torn dress on the floor, it has dust so I assume it's the one she was wearing when she fainted on Saturday.

I take a deep breath and walk further in, she's starring at me the whole time. Right now I feel like a vulnerable prey to an apex predator.

"My love," she doesn't answer but her eyes are still on me, "These are for you," I hand her the chocolates but she doesn't take them from

me. I place them on the side table and look down, I cannot keep eye contact.

"I know you're mad at me and I understand Bantu. I also need you to understand that I didn't want to fight with you. You know how you get when you think of Vivian and I being in the same space," she chuckles.

"You piece of shit! You have the nerve," she says vehemently and I take a deep breath then settle down on the edge of the bed.

"Vivian told me what happened on Saturday. I swear I didn't sleep with her, she just said that to make you mad," I don't know when she took the box of chocolates and hit me with it.

I quickly get up and move away from her, I don't want things to get physical. I might lose my cool and hit her back.

"Do you think I'm stupid, Squalo?" she's screaming.

"Please calm down," I wish I didn't say that because I just made her lose her mind. She's throwing anything she can get her hands on at me.

"Your son told me you were in the bedroom with mommy. Little children don't lie, you were having sex while they were in the house. That's why you ended the call and switched off your damn phone," I did all that because of her insecurities. I honestly didn't have sex with Viv, I was changing the light bulb in her room.

"I didn't sleep with Vivian, I swear. Your insecurities are what made me lie, what made me switch off my phone," I pause and shake my head, "I cannot live like this, I have to have a relationship with Vivian because she's the mother of my children. We should end this relationship right now because I cannot deal with hiding things you should understand and support me with," she walks towards me calmly. I have never seen anyone switch so quickly.

"I dare you to try and leave me Sqalo. I know things about you, things that will land you in jail," I swallow hard, she's threatening me?

"Right back at you," she smiles wickedly.

"I'm a good actress my love, try me." what the fuck? Who is this psycho bitch?

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 80

NOBANTU DLADLA

Sqalo and I are at odds, we aren't speaking to each other and he is now sleeping in Qophelo's bedroom. I never thought we'd find ourselves in this situation, I mean I genuinely love him and I thought we were going to be happy until the end. He no longer wants to be in this relationship but I will not let him go. He cannot play with me, waste my time and expect me to just allow him to go back to his children and Vivian. He hurt me and I'm going to hurt him back by making him stay with me, his misery will be my pay back. I threatened to report him for fraud if he dared to leave me and that shook him.

He made it clear that he will only stay because he doesn't want go to jail, and he made sure that I understood that there's nothing between us anymore. He told me he will never touch me again, that he will travel to Durban to see his kids and Vivian as much as he likes. His words and attitude hurt me really bad, I couldn't believe he would break me like this after promising me heaven on earth. I did everything for Sqalo, things his precious Vuvian failed in doing to make him happy and this is how he repays me.

I get to the kitchen and find him making a sandwich for himself. He no longer eats the food I prepare, I don't know why I bothered cooking for him after everything he said to me that evening. I take out a glass from the cupboard and rinse it before pouring myself some wine. It helps me calm down and sleep at night, I'm scared I'm going to be a functional alcoholic all because I gave my heart to an ass hole.

I hear a car park outside and I hurry to peep through the window to see who it is, it's a Grand Jeep Cherokee. That's Madlabantu car, what is he doing here? We spoke this morning and he didn't make mention of coming here. I hope everything is okay with my daughter. The front doors open and my heart skips a beat when I lay my eyes on my princess. Oh thank God, such perfect timing for her return. She will help me get Sqalo out of my system and make his life a living hell, he will regret ever playing Nobantu Dladla for a fool.

I run out of the house screaming in excitement, my daughter is laughing with her arms open for me. God, I have missed her so much. We hold on to each other, I know she's as happy and relieved as me. I let go of her and notice how clear and glowing her skin is. My beautiful angel, Madlabantu really restored my child to who she was before all of it. Those witches had darkened her with all their spells but she got help and they are about to go crazy.

"You look gorgeous," I caress her face.

"Thank you ma. I feel gorgeous too," that's all I want to hear.

"Why are your eyes like this?" I've been crying each and everyday. My heart is really broken, future hopes and dreams shattered.

"An allergic reaction," I lie to her.

I don't want to ruin her mood, she just got home. I'll tell her what Sqalo did to me some other time.

"What did you eat?" she asks and I shrug my shoulders.

"I'm not sure, I ate different dishes yesterday," Madlabantu clears his throat.

My daughter and I let go of each other and look at him.

"You're leaving me out of this reunion, that's not fair," he says and I roll my eyes.

"You've been seeing my daughter everyday for the past couple of weeks. I want her all to myself now," he huffs out a laugh.

"Right," he buries his hands deep in his pockets, "I just came to drop off your daughter. Her treatment is done, she can go on and live her life," he says and Ndondo and I share an excited smile.

"I would have come to pick her up but thank you," he nods.

"Ndondo, remember to use everything I gave you accordingly," she nods vigorously.

"I have your instructions voice recorded," my daughter says, holding up her phone.

"Good. I have to go now, it's a long drive back," he rounds the car and opens the drivers door. I have to talk to him about Sqalo, he has to explain why his supposedly good muti didn't work. I hope this dirty thing didn't lie to me just to sleep with me.

"Drive safely," Ndondoloza waves him goodbye. He drives away and my daughter heaves a deep sigh of relief.

"I'm grateful that he helped me out, but God I'm so happy to be home. Living with that man is not easy at all," she says and I brush her back.

"Tell you what, go take a shower and look cute. I am taking you out to eat somewhere nice," she starts dancing.

"Yes, please. I need to be out and about," we walk inside the house holding hands.

Sqalo is sitting on the high chair drinking coke, he has finished eating the sandwich he was making.

"Hello," my daughter greets him and his jaw is on the floor. What's his problem?

"Wow, Ndondo," I narrow my eyes.

"Yes, it's me,"

Sqalo clears his throat, "You look...

absolutely beautiful, like an angel. Where you bathing with milk where you're coming from?" haibo!

Why does he seem smitten? This is my child, he better not try anything with her or I swear I'll kill him with my own bare hands.

"Uhm... Thank you," he nods and picks up his glass and gulps down the drink.

"Let's go get ready, baby girl," I lead us to the bathroom.

"I am going to pick something out from the new clothes. I hate Dedani but those clothes ma, I can't just forget about them," she says and I swallow hard.

How am I going to tell her that her dress is torn because I wore it without her permission? She's going to kill me.

NHLELOZENKOSI NGIDI

"You're very good at this Makoti," Ntuthuko's mother says, looking around the house. She asked me to help her choose furniture and decorate the house, she had a hard time doing it alone.

"I just love beautiful spaces. I had a great time doing this, thank you for inviting me to help," she smiles sweetly at me.

Mam'Nomafu is a very beautiful woman, I can see why Mr. Galloway was taken by her back in the day.

"Maybe you should do it on your free time, as a hobby that pays," I take a deep breath.

"I'd enjoy it very much, but my job is demanding. Plus, I'm moving to Durban next year. I have to take care of Ntuthuko and Singabakhe all on my own," she places a hand on my shoulder.

"You don't have to do anything on your own sisi. I can help you with Singabakhe whenever you need me to. I also don't mind coming in during the week to watch him until you guys get back from work. I can do the cleaning and cooking..."

I quickly interject, "I appreciate that ma, but that's a lot to put on you," she shakes her head.

"No, Nhlelo. It's the least I can do for you and my son. This is an opportunity to be a parent to Ntuthuko and now you and that amazing little boy," she says, looking outside where my favorite boys are playing soccer. They are my handbag and purse those two, they refused staying in Ballito while I came to Tongaat to help ma.

"I appreciate it. We will have a conversation, the three of us and work out the details," she hugs me.

"Thank you," I hug her back, "You're good for him, he is so happy and at peace. I honestly never thought I'd be in this great place with my

son," he is good for me too and I'm happy that they have another chance as mother and son.

My phone rings, disturbing our moment. I quickly go and take it out of my handbag on the kitchen counter, it's Daluxolo. These days his phone calls don't annoy me, we are doing really well. It sometimes feels weird that we don't fight and scream at each other; our situation was so hostile that I didn't believe we'd ever find a common ground and have a healthy co-parenting relationship.

"Hey," I answer.

"Maka mfana," that's how I'm called now.

"Everything good?" I look outside when Ntuthuko and Singabakhe burst out with laughter. Those two will make you green with jealousy, they have the most amazing son and bonus dad relationship.

"All good, your side?"

"Everything is okay. I called to ask if you guys are available first weekend of December. I am hosting a thanksgiving ceremony at my mother's house," oh that's nice.

"By 'you guys' you mean me, Ntuthuko and Singabakhe?" I ask and he chuckles.

"Yes, unless you broke up with Ntuthuko and didn't tell me about it," I roll my eyes.

"No, Galloway and I are still very much together. I don't see myself letting him go," that's the truth. I'm going all the way with that man.

"I'm happy to hear that. He is a great gent, to both you and Singa,"
People do change shame, a whole Daluxolo Botha complimenting my man.

"I'll talk to him about this and get back to you," I know Ntuthuko is going to agree because he wants Singa and Daluxolo to have a relationship. I just had to make sure that this one knows that I communicate with Ntuthuko first.

"Okay, I'll wait for your call,"

"Cool, enjoy the rest of your day," I hang up.

Ntuthuko walks in and comes straight to me, he pecks my lips and I smile.

"Singa and I are going to get something to eat, we will be back in a jiffy," thank God. I'm starving, I regret not eating breakfast in the morning and refusing the snack earlier on.

"Hurry babe, I'm famished," he smiles.

"Do you want anything in particular?" I shake my head. I just want food, I don't care what it is.

"Anything you find is okay, my love. Thank you," I fix the collar of his golf t-shirt, "Oh, Daluxolo just called," Singa runs in the house.

"Daddy, can we go," he is pulling Ntuthuko's hand.

"Can we talk about it when I get back?" he asks and I nod. They walk out and Ntuthuko's mother laughs.

"It must be hard sharing him with Singa," she says and I exhale sharply.

"You have no idea ma,"

"He needs a friend. You and Ntuthuko should give him someone to play with," she says and I laugh, "You know you already have a baby sitter."

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 81

NOBANTU DLADLA

Ndondoloza and I had an amazing time last night, we had dinner and went to some bar for drinks. I'm so happy she is back home because I'm already distracted from the whole situation with Sqalo. I'll be over him and his bull in no time.

My daughter noticed that something is wrong between us, and she asked about it; I lied and said it was a stupid lovers quarrel because I just wanted to have a great time with my child. I'll tell her everything once she has settled back into her life here, hopefully she will have the best ideas on how to get revenge on that piece of shit.

I get up from the bed and draw the curtains before laying the bed neatly. I walk out of my bedroom and the aroma hits my nostril, Ndondoloza must be making us some breakfast. This is a first, my daughter is not domesticated at all, Mawande did everything for them.

I walk into the bathroom and brush my teeth then wash my face, I'll take a shower after eating and making the day's plans with my daughter.

I get to the kitchen and find my daughter sitting on the high chair, Sqalo is wearing an apron standing over the stove. He makes a stupid joke and Ndondo is thrown into a fit of laughter. What the hell is going on here? They have suddenly become best friends; I don't like this one bit.

I clear my throat and they both turn; they have these wide annoying smiles on their faces.

"Morning, mommy," Ndongoloza greets me.

"Morning," I kiss her forehead and pull out a chair.

"Bhut'Sqalo is making us breakfast," she says excitedly, and I narrow my eyes.

What is this? She never liked him; she only tolerated him for my sake so why are they suddenly sharing jokes?

"It's actually for you, Ndondo. It's a little something to welcome you home" Wow, just wow, this man is using my daughter to rub me off the wrong way.

"Aww, thank you, I feel so special right now" I quickly turn to look at my daughter with a raised eyebrow.

"As you should, you're the princess of the house" I can't stand this bullshit.

"Let's go to Durban today," I suggest to Ndongoloza.

"The three of us?" the devil is testing me today because what the hell is happening before my eyes.

"No, girl time. Do you know how much I've missed you?" she takes my hand and kisses my knuckles.

"Oh, I'd love that very much," that's my girl.

"Here is your breakfast, Princess," Sqalo places a plate in front of Ndongoloza.

He has never cooked for me, not even eggs. The best he has ever done is plate up take aways and hand them to me.

I won't lie, this is hurtful. It shows that Sqalo never loved me, he just used me, and I was too blinded by my love for him to realize it.

"This looks amazing, thank you," she takes a fork and digs in.

"I'm going to eat in the lounge while watching soccer highlights," he walks away, and I'm left with Ndongoloza who is moaning as she eats.

"Eat with me," I shake my head.

"It's okay nana. I feel like having a smoothie," she swallows.

"Ma, you're missing out. Your boyfriend makes the best breakfast." I wouldn't know, he has never made breakfast for me.

Ndongoloza gets up after wiping her plate clean and goes to the sink to wash the dishes. Sqalo walks in holding his empty plate and tells Ndongoloza to go relax and he will take care of the mess. My daughter hugs him and says thank you to him. She asks me what time we are leaving for Durban? And I tell her to go take a shower and pack a few outfits because we will be staying in Durban for a few days. My finances haven't picked up, but I can spare a little something for my daughter and I. We both really deserve some time out to relax and just not exist in our reality.

"What are you trying to do Sqalo?" I ask and he chuckles, not bothering himself to turn around and look at me.

"What do you mean?" He is playing dumb; he knows exactly what I'm talking about.

"Why are you trying to play best friends with my daughter?" He grabs the dish washing liquid and pours some in the water.

"Best friend is stretching it" he is so frustrating, "I'm just trying to be nice," I click my tongue.

"Well, I don't like you being nice to her. Stop it," that makes him turn to face me.

"I don't care if you like it or not. If Ndongoloza is uncomfortable with me being nice then I'll stop," I clench my jaw.

"You are poking a snake and it will bite," for some reason my statement sends him into a fit of laughter.

"What a direct comparison, at least you know yourself very well," I look around to see what I can throw at him that will wound him.

"Weh mama ndini, you threatened me into staying with you. How I choose to make my stay here bearable shouldn't concern you at all," he is showing me his true colors.

"You know what, Sqalo, fuck you!" he smirks and grabs his manhood.

"I've always liked it when you talked dirty. I wish I could bend you over that island and fuck you like some two-dollar whore from a red-light district," I gasp in shock.

Sqalo just proved that there's a thin line between love and hurt. He has showed me how quickly things can turn.

NOMAHLUBI MKHIZE

"I was speaking to the pastor on the phone this morning and he promised that he will come down to see you this coming week," I say to my mother with tears welling up in my eyes. I miss ma so much, our conversations, prayer sessions and the bond we shared. I pray everyday for a miracle, for God to heal her and make her the strong woman she was before the hijacking.

I no longer feel guilty for bringing her to this care facility, she is more comfortable here and taken care of in a way I could never be able to care for her.

"Did I tell you that I have a new friend now? Her name is Londeka Zulu, I swear you would have clicked with her immediately. Mama, she has such a beautiful and gentle soul, the fact that she can pray and believes in Jesus makes her the perfect best friend for me. Ever since we became close, I feel so light; just like I used to each time you prayed over me. I will bring her with me one day so you can feel her energy," I say smiling. "Qaqamba also likes her, I'm afraid that she will pouch my friend; they are the same age group" Yes, I'm the jealous friend. I want Londeka all to myself and there's nothing wrong with that, for as long as it's healthy.

"We had a conversation a while back about me going back to work because I'm bored most of the time. I thought about it and decided to go back to work, but that didn't sit well with my husband," I heave a sigh.

"Dedani wants me to be a housewife and I thought that's what I wanted too. I only realized that I love being independent after the deep conversation Londeka and I had about women and what's expected from them by society," One thing I like about our friendship is that we can talk about everything and anything. I learn so much from her and also get up to stupid things, we have a balance and that's pretty great.

"I get that Dedani wants us to start a family ma, but women all over the world do it all. They have families and thriving careers, I just need to sit him down and promise him that we are still going to have kids and be happy in our relationship," having my own kids is something that's not going to change, though I'm scared to miscarry again.

"Mama, it was nice seeing you and spending some time. I will see you again soon," I get up and kiss her forehead, "I love you." I push her wheelchair and stop in front of the TV. They play series for her so she can be entertained.

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I got a text from Londeka asking me to come through to her place because she has something for me. I haven't seen her since I helped her move into her new place. It's a definite upgrade, it shows that she's a working lady now. I'm happy to be witnessing her growth and progress, I know for a fact that more is going to come her way. She's a hard working, focused young woman who loves God and her family. Her success is guaranteed, that's God's promise.

I get to the apartment building and text her to come open for me. I cannot just come and go as I please, the security is way better than the old apartment. She appears from the corner then presses the remote, the gate slides open and I drive in.

I park in the space allocated for her and climb out. There's an Indian guy sharing a smoke with his wife, I assume. I greet them and make my way to Londeka who is sitting on the concrete bench next to her apartment. I love that her place is on the ground floor, no need for stairs.

"Hey friend," she tries to hug me but I quickly step back.

"Babe, I'm sorry but I told you that your perfume makes me nauseous," She scoffs.

"That's exactly why I called you here. You're always complaining about this smell or that these days," I snap an eyebrow, what is she talking about now?

"No, I don't," she rolls her eyes and leads us inside the apartment. What crazy thing has she come up with now?

"Let's just be sure that it's not what I think it is," I'm honestly lost, I'm not sure what she's talking about here.

"Make sense please," I sit down on the couch. She wanted to buy a brown one but I told her the cream would be aesthetically pleasing.

"We've been drinking and smoking pipe a lot, those might be risky for you. That's why we have to be sure about where you are right now," I chuckle.

Londeka never has a problem expressing herself, she's shocking me today.

"I'm gonna need a drink if you continue mumbling," she clicks her tongue and takes the plastic from on top of the coffee table.

"Go take a test, I think you might be pregnant," she says, and I'm left dumbfounded "Hlubi," she snaps her fingers and I snap out of it.

"There's no way babe. I'm on the injection," I say briskly.

"It's not 100% effective," Londeka answers.

"I think you're reaching, friend," she shrugs her shoulders.

"Just take the test, Hlubi," I blow out a sigh and get up from the couch, taking the pregnancy test and making my way to the bathroom.

My heart is thudding in my chest, I want a child but I hope it comes back negative. I haven't prepared myself mentally for a baby, I don't

want to go through a pregnancy with the fear of having a miscarriage. I need to first deal with my fears so I can enjoy my experience.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 82

DEDANI MKHIZE

"We should really see a doctor babe," I say to Hlubi, brushing her back in circles.

"No, love! I'll be okay. Londeka and I need to stop trying these different restaurants," the mention of Mageba gets me excited every time. I am happy that their friendship is brewing nicely, I believe it won't be hard getting Hlubi to accept her as my second wife when the time comes.

She and I will never be able to have living children because I had to sacrifice them in her womb. She knows how badly I want to have kids so she will have no choice but to agree; Londeka will be an easier choice to accept because my wife really likes her, she cannot stop praising her. I don't mind at all because I get to hear how everything is going in the life of the woman who drives me absolutely insane.

"Are you sure? I mean you have been throwing up every morning for the past week now," she caresses my face.

"I know you worry but I promise I'm okay, Mkhize." That's honestly disappointing because I need her to get pregnant soon so that Madlabantu is not on my case about the whole sacrifice situation.

"Okay then," I peck her lips, "What do you have planned today?" she shrugs her shoulders.

"Nothing babe. I'm just going to lazy around," I narrow my eyes.

"You're not job hunting anymore?" she has been making noise about getting a job as a nurse. I don't understand why because I do everything for her, she lacks nothing.

"I had some time to think about it and I have decided to just be at home and take care of you. I'll revisit the whole thing in the next year," that's a relief.

I want her home so I can try knocking her up every other day until it actually happens.

"Okay babe,"

We exit the adjoining bathroom and make our way to the kitchen. She couldn't wake up earlier to make me breakfast, so I'll just have cereal and grab something solid after my first meeting. I settle down on the high chair and watch her take out the bowl and spoon then the cereal and milk from the fridge. She gives me the bowl and I start eating; I have a meeting with one of the companies I offer my security services. It was a last minute thing and I'm just hoping everything is okay because they never request meetings with me.

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This was just a stressful meeting; the company called me to their offices to tell me that they won't be renewing the contract next financial year. I am just shocked because I've been giving them the

best services and they agree but still want to part ways. This is really a big knock on my financial situation, they gave me really big business. I offered them something to buy cold drink, I've done it before. In fact, that's how it's always done, you have to bribe these selection committee members to get contracts. They refused and I told them I'd give them more than what the next person is offering but they insisted that there's no person. I just need to have a word with Madlabantu, he needs to burn some muti to make them change their minds.

That meeting has really set the tone of my entire day and God knows I don't want to be stressed out. I have many things to take care of and they need me to be level headed. There's only one person who can lift my mood with her smart mouth and stubbornness. I grabbed two breakfasts and I'm on my way to the municipal offices. I won't stay long; I have another meeting in an hour and a half in the CBD. At least I know what the agenda of that meeting is.

The driver of the people mover bus drives like he's the only one on the road, this idiot almost bumped into me from the back.

This day is going to test me throughout, I should just brace myself because there's no way to dodge a shitty day coming your way.

I get to the parking lot and kill the engine before climbing out with our food, I couldn't get flowers because I'm in such a hurry. I need to find a way to get Londeka's new address and start sending her gifts to soften her up.

"Come on in," Zweli shouts from inside. I turn the handle and push the door open.

"Aow! Cadre! what a surprise," he gets up, holding out his hand for a shake.

"I'm great comrade, what about you?" he shrugs his shoulders.

"We are just busy; the end of the year is always pressing. To what do I owe the visit?"

"I came to have breakfast with my girl. Do you think you can lend me your office for 30 minutes tops," I say, and he narrows his eyes in confusion.

"Haibo! Dedani, what happened to restaurants?" he asks, and I pull out a chair and lower myself on it.

"You wouldn't be happy with me for taking her out on your time," he offers me a lopsided smile.

"Kahle wena. You're sleeping with someone who works under me?" he asks.

"Not sleeping with her yet," he chuckles, then fist bumps me.

"It's Zanele with the killer curves, right?" he asks, licking his lower lip.

"No, Comrade. It's Londeka," he's shocked.

"You got to be kidding me. How did you get through to that fire cracker? A fellow comrade tried hitting on her and she set him straight very fast," I chuckle, feeling super proud. Now that's my girl, she's not the kind to mess around.

"She's giving me a hard time myself but that's only because she's feeling me back. She just doesn't want to give in easily,"

"You should give me feedback . I want to know what you rate her in the bedroom," he's crossing the line now.

"Don't ever think about that woman like that again, Zweli. She's not just a piece of meat, I'm planning on making her my second government," I say, wagging a finger at him.

he gasps in shock, "This is serious,"

"It is. Please call her to come in here and excuse us for a little while," he nods his head vigorously and picks up the receiver and dials.

I'm standing behind the door, waiting on Londeka to walk in. Right on time, a knock comes through the door, and I give permission to come on in. She walks in and pushes the door without looking back; her nice behind greets me in that tight black skirt with a slit in the back. I quickly snake my arms around her waist and tighten so she doesn't escape.

"Haibo!" she's trying to wiggle herself out of my hold.

"Calm down, Mageba. It's only me, sthandwa sami," I kiss the nape of her neck and she fights me more.

"Let go of me, Dedani. Leave me alone," she says in a deep stern voice that's supposed to intimidate me but instead I'm turned the fuck on.

"You fit perfectly in my arms, nana," I bury my nose in her shoulder, "I have never been so crazy about someone," she bends a little and bites my arm. I yelp and release her. Londeka quickly steps back, giving me a murderous look.

"Never come at me like that again, Dedani," she's so mad at me right now but my heart is just so happy that I held her.

"What does a man have to do, Mageba?" I ask with a smile.

"Don't ask me nonsense. Please, leave me alone. What is your problem?" she says the last part sounding defeated.

"My problem is that you are in my heart, nana. My problem is that you don't want to give me a chance because you think I'm an asshole who's going to hurt you. Kodwa nkosazana, I want to give you the

princess treatment and make you umakoti wakwa Mkhize. Forget about everything you think you know about me and give yourself the chance to get to know me as a man who is madly in love with you," she's looking at me like I'm crazy, but I know deep down there's something for me. "Londeka, please. I have done the unspeakable to get your attention. Doesn't that show you just how much you mean to me?" she shakes her head.

"Mkhize," she says meekly, and my heart is pumping custard at this point.

"Mageba,"

"Tell me, did your mother drop you when you were little? I mean that's the only reason; you must have hit your head really bad. You need to get checked out," she says, and I'm thrown into a fit of laughter.

"You and your mother-in-law love saying that. Difference is, she says my father is the one that might have dropped me," she claps once!

"I don't know which language to use so you can hear me. Isizulu and English haven't gotten through to you, you're not understanding me. Which language should I use so that you can understand that there can never be anything between us?" Londeka hasn't learned anything about me in the time we have been in each other's lives? I will go to any length to get her, giving up is not an option.

"The only language I want to speak with you is the language of love, nana," she buries her face in her hands and groans.

"Why are you robbing yourself off the chance at true love and happiness?"

"You have a wife, who happens to be my friend and for the millionth time, I don't want you!" she is clapping with every word uttered.

I look at my wrist watch, "I have to go, sthandwa sami. Take your food on the table. I wanted to eat with you, but time is no longer on my side. I'll make time to see you again," I say and button the blazer.

"And please, unblock me. We need to stop playing these games," I add then pivot to walk out of the office.

NOBANTU DLADLA

I couldn't wait to make it back home from the lodges. I don't trust Sqalo with my daughter, for the past week he has been acting like a love-struck puppy around Ndondo. He makes her food and watches her television shows with her. They joke around and laugh like they've been best friends for the longest time. In the many years I've known Sqalo, I have never seen this carefree side of him. I'm even wondering if I ever knew the real him, if what we had was ever genuine.

I confronted the bastard and he told me that I'm just an insecure old hag who has a low self esteem. He told me we are not together, and it shouldn't bother me who he is friends with going forward.

His words hurt me really bad and I've decided that it's time I told Ndondo what Sqalo did with his ex wife. I know my daughter will be disgusted by him and be on my side with making him miserable here.

I open the kitchen door and there are two boxes of pizza and an empty bottle of wine on the kitchen counter.

I take a deep breath and walk further in the house, they are on the same couch looking at Sqalo's laptop. There's a plate with a bitten

slice of pizza and two glasses of wine on the coffee table. This is inappropriate, what made the both of them think this is okay?

"Oh hey, ma," my daughter greets me and I offer her a ghost smile.

She refused going with me to the lodges to stay with Sqalo and drink alcohol.

"Hey, what's going on here?" I ask, placing my handbag on the couch.

"You won't believe what we came up with," she says excitedly, and I raise an eyebrow.

"I'm listening," she grabs a glass and takes a sip.

"We were just chilling this morning and talking about the future. I mentioned that I'm not really the type to work 9 to 5, that I'd rather be in business," Sqalo is smiling, busy on the laptop.

"SS asked me what I'm most passionate about..."

I cut in, "SS?" she scoffs.

"Oh my bad. It felt weird to the both of us calling him Bhut'Sqalo so we had to find something respectful but also chilled and so SS made sense. Sqalo Shozi," ah weh ma!

"Right," I'm speechless.

"As I was saying. I told him I'm passionate about beauty and clothing. He asked me about my social media following and he lost it when he saw that I had over a 100K followers on Instagram," they look at each other and laugh.

I'm left weak at the knees.

"You've been sitting on money, princess" Sqalo says and my heart sinks into my stomach.

"All that is about to change with my baddest lawyer by my side," they high five.

I feel like an intruder looking into a private moment.

"Uhm, you'll tell me all about it later. I have a headache, I need some pain block and a nap," I say, taking my bag.

"Okay cool," she leans back and looks at the computer screen.

She won't even try to help me out with pills and a glass of water?

I walk out of the lounge and laughter erupts as I'm about to walk into my bedroom. That's it! Sqalo needs to get the hell out of my house. To hell with revenge.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 83

MPIYAKHE "MADLABANTU" MNGOMEZULU

"Bantu's," this fool answers playfully. He really has no idea what he has invited into his life.

"I would be crying if I were you, Mkhize," I say dryly, shaking my head.

"What are you talking about?" he asks, and I settle down on the bench outside the rondavel.

"I told you to leave that girl alone, didn't I?" I am honestly mad at him for not listening, all the work we've done went up in smoke because he couldn't control his desires.

"Mageba? No! you said you cannot cast a spell on her, making her fall for me naturally wasn't a red light; you didn't warn me against that," I huff out a humorless laugh. Dedani thinks this is a joke?

"Hei wena! I told you that the girl's grandmother is a powerful ancestor. You have angered Londeka and that anger transferred to her grandmother, those two are like the same person," I explain and he heaves a sigh.

"I cannot see anything with your life anymore, everything is just so blank. That's alarming, Dedani," He gasps.

"How do we fix this? I can come to Mbumbulu immediately," he says hurriedly, and I shake my head as if he can see me.

"I don't know, this has never happened before. I need to consult with those that lead me, it's just chaos with you," I doubt I'll be able to help him out, he has entered a territory bigger than me.

"Madlabantu, I trust you. Please find a way to get in control of the situation again," he says desperately, and I shrug my shoulders. I told him very well that I choose my battles wisely, the spirit of Londeka's grandmother is powerful. Fighting her will only bring doom to me, I am not willing to risk myself for Dedani who didn't listen to my warnings.

"I'm not promising you anything. Things are looking bad," I have many clients, losing him won't make much of a difference in my life.

"I will get rid of Londeka, she won't even be friends with my wife. I love her, yes but I cannot afford to lose everything because of her," from where I'm standing it's a little too late for him. He forced himself into her life and now he has to deal with the consequences of that.

"I will call you once I have answers," I don't want to tell him that he's out in the cold now. What brought us together had ended because of his stupidity.

"I believe in you," he says with a shaking voice. He is right to be nervous. I will use him as an example to clients who are practicing ukuthwala. Because of him they will know how important it is for them to listen to me at every turn.

"Keep well, Mkhize," I hang the phone up and put it in the pocket of my shirt.

MaShelembe walks out of the main house and makes her way towards me. This woman is beautiful, everything about her drives me absolutely insane. I have slept with almost all the women in Mbumbulu but this one is everything and more. She understands and respects me and my work; She knows her place and that makes her more attractive. Maybe I should just stop changing woman and make her my wife officially. It's time I have a family to enjoy all my riches with, plus, I need a child to take over some day.

"Your food is ready," she says and I smile, getting on my feet.

"What did you cook for me, today?" there's nothing she cannot do. From the bedroom to the kitchen, she excels.

"I made creamy samp and oxtail," I am salivating already.

I take her hand and we walk to the house.

"It smells good in here, MaShelembe," she blushes, bringing me the basin to wash my hands, "I think it's time I brought you home permanently now," her eyes widen.

"I don't understand," she says, and I point to the chair across from me and she pulls it and settles down.

"You have been a great woman to me. I want to marry you," she gasps in shock.

"What about all the other women?" I smile.

They all know about each other; they just cannot fight me about it because the muti I used on them is very strong.

"They are all in the past, mama. I will not look at another woman if you agree to come here and make this house a home, fill it with children and always remember to serve me," she's fiddling with the dish cloth.

"There are things I'd like for you to change before I we can get married," I narrow my eyes.

"I'm listening,"

"I'm not trying to disrespect you or anything, but can you please take your personal hygiene seriously. I always have to force you to take baths, I want to have a clean husband," she says, and I'm thrown into a fit of laughter.

I'm not going to reverse the spell I cast on her, she might leave me for a clean man.

"I hear you, I'll do better with your help," they say a woman cleans up her husband.

"I have one more request," haike! "I am still young, Madlabantu. I would like to be allowed to live life from time to time," she says, and I narrow my eyes.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, I want to be allowed to go to the mall with friends and eat at restaurants. To attend gatherings and go on trips," I don't have a problem with that. It's not like she will cheat on me or listen to anyone who tries to poison her mind against me.

"I'm okay with that," I say and her eyes widen, she didn't think I'd agree that easily.

"Thank you," my phone rings, disturbing this important conversation. It better not be Dedani. I take it out of the pocket of my shirt and it's Nobantu, I smile and answer.

"MaDlala, how are you?"

"Not good, not good at all," I throw my head back and laugh silently. Things must be cooking in her household.

"Haibo! What's happening? Is Ndongoloza okay?" I fake concern.

"Oh, she's okay, more than okay. She's now best friends with Sqalo, they do everything together. It's like I don't exist anymore," this is the best news, my things are working very well. Nobantu is about to enter a fire.

"That's a problem? You should be happy that they are getting along, it makes your life easy," I say and she scoffs.

"Sqalo and I broke up, he cheated on me with his ex-wife. Your muti clearly didn't work," oh but it's working Bantu, not in the way you wanted it to.

"What do you need from me?" I ask.

"I hate this fake friendship between them, do something to make my daughter hate him. I want us to frustrate him," she says and I shake my head.

"I'll see what I can do," she heaves a sigh of relief.

"I knew I could count on you," stupid woman.

"Goodbye." I hang up.

This is only the beginning Nobantu, the worst is yet to come.

NOMAHLUBI MKHIZE

I've been with Londeka since morning, she called me and asked me to come to her place since she didn't go to work. I don't know what's going on, but she has been crying and praying non stop. I have never seen anything like this in my life. My mother has always been a prayer warrior but experiencing Londeka is intense. When she calls

upon God I feel vibrations, it's like she has direct communication with him and he answers her almost immediately.

We have been praying together every night over the phone since we found out I'm pregnant, and it has helped my anxiety a lot. I fear losing this baby like the first one, hence I don't want to tell people about it. Londeka understands and is happy and supportive of my decision to keep it a secret even from my husband. I just hope and pray Dedani understand why I kept it to myself the day I finally tell him.

Londeka gets up from the rug and wipes her tears; We haven't exchanged a word since I got here, and it has been hours.

She sits down next to me and takes my hands into hers; I see sadness in her eyes and I start to panic all over again. I caress her face and she forces herself to smile at me; Something serious is happening and I wish she could tell me what it is. She has been an amazing friend to me and I want to be same to her.

"I'm sorry, Hlubi. I hope you can forgive me for not telling you earlier," she says and I narrow my eyes.

"What is going on friend?" she closes her eyes as if pained.

"I don't deserve to be called your friend," a drop of sweat rolls down the valley of my breasts.

"You're scaring me," I say with tears burning my eyes.

"You have become more of a sister than a friend. You are a special human being and something deep inside of me always tell me to pray for you and yesterday it told me to come clean if I want our friendship to prosper," whatever it is hard on her.

"Tell me then, I want our friendship to prosper too. Londeka you mean so much to me," I say with my lower lip quivering.

"I had a friend named, Ndongoloza. She dated a man for five years and he went to marry someone he only knew for less than a year. She was heart broken but he manipulated her, and she stayed with him regardless of him being someone's husband. He bought her an apartment and found a job for her; He had complete control over her and because of that our friendship ended," That man is the devil!

Poor girl must have been devastated.

"The same guy started making a pass at me, I told him numerous times to leave me alone but he didn't. He went as far as burning my home to show me that he's willing to go to any length to get what he wants. I wasn't going to allow him to play with my life like that so I threatened to go tell his wife everything, from his affair with Ndongoloza to how he has been chasing me. He promised to back off; I demanded that he buys my family a house because he destroyed the one we had and I also told him to get me a job at the municipality," rha! He deserves to be burned down.

"He did all that but he just didn't want to leave me alone. In his head we are in love and things are going to work out fine. He lied to his wife about being my mentor after she caught him with me outside my place of work. The wife felt bad, she came to apologize to me and invited me to dinner. I couldn't go because I knew it was wrong but she didn't let it slide, she was persistent and we ended up being close friends," she says and my jaw is on the ground. The last part is exactly what happened with me, her and my husband.

What is Londeka trying to say?

"What are you saying to me? Is Dedani the man you're talking about?" she closes her eyes and nods.

"I'm sorry Hlubi. I shouldn't have agreed to being your friend, I'm so sorry," I let go of her hands with my heart drumming in my chest.

"No, Londeka. You're lying," my husband would never. Dedani loves me too much.

"I understand Hlubi but I have proof of everything I'm saying," she hands me a stack of papers. It's printouts of text messages, receipts and documents of the house that was bought cash in Pietermaritzburg. There are also pictures of my husband with some girl, these aren't from before we met because he's wearing a shirt I bought him. My whole world just came crumbling down.

"I'm sorry for lying by omission, I just didn't want to hurt you. Please forgive me," this is all too much. I get up and take the papers with me. I want to go through everything before I confront him.

"Nomahlubi, please say something," she begs me but right now I need to get out of here. I don't even know how I feel about this whole thing.

I walk out of her apartment and she's on my heels, asking me not to leave and talk to her. I unlock my car and climb in then start the engine.

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I managed to drive myself home safely. Dedani's car is in the driveway, he's home early. I was hoping to get here and look at what Londeka gave me then think about what to do. I take a deep breath and climb out of the car, headed inside the house.

He is sitting in the lounge, watching soccer highlights. I greet him and he asks me to come and sit down because he has something important to talk to me about.

I'm trying by all means not to lose my cool with him.

I settle down on the armchair, "Everything okay?" I ask and he shakes his head.

"No babe. Everything is not okay," he places both elbows on his knees.

"Hlubi, I need you to stop being friends with Londeka. She's not a good person," he says and I raise an eyebrow. Is this some kind of joke?

"What did she do?" Dedani rubs his hands together.

"That girl has been pretending to be an angel but she's not. She has been making passes at me, offering herself to me in exchange of a good life. I made a mistake allowing her in my home, she saw how I treat you as my wife and she wants that. Baby, she has become a danger. You honestly need to cut ties with her, don't even try and confront her about this," what the hell? Londeka just told me some damaging things about my husband and now here he is saying some things about Londeka too.

"Wow...uhm...I have heard you," he blows out a sigh of relief.

"Good baby, you'll find another friend, one who will not want your husband and life,"

Why is this happening to me?

His phone rings on the coffee table, he gets up and answers.

"Mamkhize," he listens for a few seconds and his eyes widened.

"What? Calm down, I'll be right there don't worry," he hangs up, looking shaken up.

"Baby, I need to go home right away. My mother says the house and all the cars are burning. I will call you once I get there okay," he kisses my forehead and runs out of the lounge.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 84

DEDANI MKHIZE

I am standing with my mom and brother, looking at everything that was destroyed by the fire. Nothing is left, not even a shoddy piece of dress. We don't understand how the fire started, mama says it started in her bedroom and quickly moved to other rooms. They say they've never seen such a fast-moving flame like the one they witnessed last night. I went cold as they narrated everything to me and my mind quickly ran to what Madlabantu said about Londeka and her grandmother being angry at me. I tried calling that dirty man but he didn't pick up my phone, he hasn't even had the decency to call me back and find out why I left him that many messages.

"I will build you another house mama and replace the cars, don't cry," I say, rubbing her back.

"It's not about that, Dedani. There were things in that house you can never be able to replace. The photo albums that held all the great memories of our lives, the jewelry my grandmother left for me to name a few," She's right, my money can only do so much.

"I know and I'm sorry ma," she clasps my hand.

"I just don't understand what caused the fire, Dedani. That wasn't normal at all," he says, shaking her head.

"We should consult with a traditional healer mama. It's clear that a dark force has a hand in all of this," my brother suggests, and I swallow hard. I can never set foot in another healer's rondavel, that's one of the rules Madlabantu gave me when I first started this journey with him.

"You're right. I know someone who can help us,"

I quickly interject, "Can we put that off right now. I have to take you to the nearest town to get you some clothes and toiletries," I'm buying myself some time to come up with a plan to talk them out of this.

"We can't! What if the enemy has more plans against us? Ma, we shouldn't take things lightly," I want to slap my brother right this minute. I am the breadwinner and the first son; my word is law in this household.

"Dedani, your brother is right. Clothes and toiletries aren't pressing matters at this point," Shit!

"I am not saying it is, ma. We can do that tomorrow morning," they share a look then shrug their shoulders.

I must leave the village before my mother drags me to another nyanga. I don't want to defy Madlabantu because the consequences of doing so are always heavy.

"We need to discuss where you are going to stay while I rebuild the house," I say and my mother heaves a sigh.

"Why rebuild? You should buy us a house in Durban, I'm tired of this village," My brother says.

"Haibo! Did you burn my house so you could demand that your brother buys us a house in the city?" mama asks him with a raised eyebrow.

"No! How could you even suggest that mama?" I agree, that's extreme.

"What would you like to happen, Mamkhize? Rebuild here or move you guys to Durban," she takes a deep breath.

"This is my home; I have nothing in Durban. Please rebuild this house for me, son," I nod vigorously and hug her.

"Consider it done, ma. I'll have it up as soon as possible, I just need to find a construction company and have them look at the situation," she tightens her arms around me.

"Please move me to Durban," my brother says and mama quickly let's go of me.

"You want to move to the city to make your brothers life chaotic. You are already getting up to no good in this very village, what mess would you create there? Dedani, don't listen to this one," mama says and I give my brother an apologetic look. Our mother has spoken.

"So where will you live in the meantime?"

"We could live with my sister," that's where we slept last night, my aunt lives in this very village with her disabled son.

"No, ma! The house is too small, I had to share a room with you. Can you at least get us into a guest house until the house is built," my mother claps once at her son's request.

"It's okay, mama. I'm good for it. We will find one in town," if looks could kill my brother would be dead by now.

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I bought them clothes and other necessities then we went on to view guest houses. We found the perfect one that offers food and is also self catering, my mother will be able to cook for herself. MaMkhize tends to complain about people's style of cooking and would rather do it herself; this setup will ensure that I don't get any calls from her complaining when I'm back in Durban.

I step out of the shower and dry my body with the fresh towel provided. I had to bath in a plastic basin this morning, I don't remember the last time I bathed in that small container with a droplet of water. I couldn't complain because my aunt was kind enough to allow us to sleep at her house. I need to deposit a little something in her account to show my appreciation for taking us in.

I step in the bedroom from the adjoining bathroom and my phone is ringing from on top of the bed. I'm hoping it's one of two people, my wife and Madlabantu. I haven't spoken to Nomahlubi today, her phone had been off. Madlabantu on the other hand avoided my calls when I needed to talk to him badly. I pick up and it's the latter, finally.

"I would have died if you were the only person who could offer me help," he smacks his lips.

"I was spending time with my soon to be wife, Dedani. She didn't want any disturbances," I laugh, who in their right minds would marry Madlabantu?

"Have you had the chance to consult with your spirits about my life?" I ask, sitting down on the edge of the bed.

"No, I was spending time with the woman of the house. I will get to it," he's not taking this seriously.

"Madlabantu, do your job,"

"Don't shit on me. We wouldn't be in this mess if you just listened to me and stayed the hell away from that girl," I close my eyes. My heart is aching, yesterday I had to let go of every hope of being with Mageba as my wife. The universe knows how hard I was in with that girl, but I can't lose everything for her. Maybe she and I will have something in our next life.

"I told you I'm done with her. I told Hlubi to stay away from her too and she agreed. I kept to my end of the deal, please do your best," I get on my feet, "My mothers house and cars burned down mysteriously last night. They say the fire was something they've never seen before, I'm scared Madlabantu," he whistles.

"Mkhize, that's not good. I am blocked out of seeing anything that's happening in your life and now the first person you spent money on when you made it lost everything. This doesn't need glasses, it's going to go down from here," he says and I'm blinking rapidly.

"Don't say that please. I can't lose my money and power, help me," I put the phone on speaker and throw it on the bed as I pace up and down.

"Mkhize, what's happening to you is not from my side. Londeka's grandmother is at work here, I don't know how to stop her without angering her and causing her to come after me," When did Madlabantu become a pussy?

"Please consult with your spirits, there has to be something we can do to get her off my back," he blows out a sigh.

"I will call you when I have something." He hangs up before I can say anything. I couldn't even ask about isilwanesam; I want to know if they'll be able to get the sacrifice when Hlubi gets pregnant even though he cannot see into my life at the moment. I don't want to have an angry grandmother and isilwane that's not fed gunning for me at the same time.

NOMAHLUBI MKHIZE

I didn't sleep a wink last night; I went through the evidence Londeka gave me more than a hundred times. I was desperate to find something that throws it out as fake or something like that. I didn't want to believe that my husband is who Londeka said he is but there's no denying it now. Dedani Mkhize is not who he sold himself out to be, he's a liar and a cheat and I was stupid not to see the fraud he is.

I went through the documents in the safe and I found papers that show he paid a year's rent for an apartment in Port Zimbali; His name appeared as the one responsible for the lease, but the occupants would be him and Ndongoloza Dladla. Dedani had another life from the one he was sharing with me. How did he manage to hide it so well? Or was I the one not looking hard enough to see the red flags, no matter what, those are always there and in one's face.

I went on Instagram and searched for a Ndongoloza Dladla, a profile popped up and it was the girl in the pictures, Londeka's friend. I went

through her grid and even though she didn't post his face, she posted his hands with watches I know. Feet with shoes that belong to him and even drove his cars. She has also been in this very house and slept in our matrimonial bed. I want to hate her so bad but how could I? I mean the girl was with him longer than me, she's the one who must hate me. I mean Dedani married me while in a five-year relationship with her.

I love Dedani with all my heart, but I cannot stay here and wait for him to come and lie to me. What hurts even more and drives me to leave this house is the fact that he looked me in the eye and lied about Londeka making a pass at him; He probably knew that Londeka was going to tell me the truth and so he decided to paint her in a bad light so I don't believe a word she says.

Right now, I don't know where my friendship with Londeka stands, I genuinely care for that girl but what she told me yesterday changes everything. I don't think I'll ever be able to look her in the eyes and see her as my best friend.

I packed a couple of my things and loaded them in the boot. I want to be alone for a couple of days and figure out where to from here. I took money from the safe because he would easily locate me if I used the credit card anywhere as it's in his name. I switched off my phone because I don't want Dedani to get in touch with me, but I need to power it and take my sister and the specialized homes number. I'll buy another sim card just to be available for my sister and my mother.

Notifications flood my phone as soon as my phone is on. It's missed calls, texts, emails, social media. I start by saving the two numbers on the phone as all my contacts are on the sim card, I should back them up on the cloud too. Phones get lost or stolen all the time and I'll have to start from scratch with people's phone numbers.

The next thing I do is check my email, I get one from where my mother is living and my heart stops. They are asking me to come to the home as soon as possible because something happened with my mom. They say they tried calling but it didn't go through.

Tears are streaming down my face as I run out of the house to the car. God, please don't let it be what I think it is. My life is already chaotic, I won't survive another blow.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 85

NOMAHLUBI MKHIZE

I drove to the home where my mother is living and found out that she was rushed to hospital because she was moving her fingers and trying to speak. I can understand the trying to speak part because the doctors did say there was no medical reason why she was mute. What's confusing is the moving her hands part, I mean the doctors diagnosed her with quadriplegia as a result of a spinal cord injury from the gun shots she sustained during the hijacking.

I have been at the hospital waiting to hear word from the doctors who are still busy with her and running tests. I am sending prayers to

the man above and hoping that the situation has changed for mama; she deserves a second chance. I am going to need her now more than ever with the baby coming and my marriage ending before it even went anywhere.

I called Qaqamba and asked her to come, I didn't tell her what's happening over the phone because I didn't want her to panic like I did when I read the email. I honestly thought they were informing me of my mother's passing, I cried all the way to the home. But getting there my heart was alright because the news was somehow comforting.

If I'm being honest, I wish Londeka was here with me praying. I know for a fact that I'd be feeling better than I am right now. I have been battling with myself, wondering if I should give her a call and ask her to come. But the situation between us is still fresh and my heart is obviously hurt that she kept the truth from me all this time.

"Hlubi," Qaqamana is running towards me.

I quickly get on my feet, opening my arms for a hug.

"Hey, it's okay," I say, brushing her back in circles as she cries in my arms. My sister has been trying to act like the whole mama situation is not bothering her but I know it does. She should have allowed herself to feel every emotion and go through it all to be able to deal with other blows as they come. Bottling in emotions is never a good thing.

"What's going on? Why is mama here again Hlubi?" I wipe her tears.

"They said she was trying to talk, and her fingers were moving so they had to rush her here for tests" I explain and both her hands cover her mouth.

"This is a good thing, right?" she asks hopeful.

"I don't know yet; I haven't spoken to the doctors. The nurses asked me to wait here and they'll come find me when there's an update," she heaves a sigh and settles down, I take the chair next to her and hold her hand. We are all we have right now, relatives haven't been around, and they call once in a blue moon. The church has been the only thing comforting my sister and I in this trying time.

"She's a strong woman, she will be alright," I say and she offers me a weak smile.

It's been an hour since Qaqamba arrived and we still haven't heard anything from the doctors. What's taking them so long if it's just standard tests? I'm anxious now, I am starting to think that something bad is happening with our mother. I'm trying not to panic because my blood pressure will spike and the baby will be in danger.

"Kholekile Sonjica" we jolt up, nodding.

"We are her children," I quickly say, pointing to myself and Qaqamba.

"I am doctor Khan. I'm sorry for taking so long, I had to go through your mother's file first," that's okay, he's here finally.

"What's happening with our mom?" my sister asks with a shaking voice.

"Your mother was brought in because she was trying to speak and also because she moved her hand after being diagnosed with a spinal cord injury that led to quadriplegia," we know that doctor, how about you give us something new. I snap at him in my head.

"We had to run more tests, she went for an MRI and CT scans because we wanted to understand what's happening inside that led to her being able to move her hand..." I am a surgical nurse by profession but now I am feeling stupid, it's like the doctor is speaking gibberish to us.

"That means your mother is not quadriplegic but paraplegic," I gasp, clutching at my chest.

"What does that mean now?" my sister asks with narrowed eyes.

"It means mama is only paralyzed waist down, waist up she's fine," I explain and my sister's eyes widen.

"Your sister is right," this is God's miracle. It can only be him doing this.

"Can she speak?" Qaqamba asks and I cross my fingers.

"Your mother's mutism had no medical reason. She can now talk but her voice is hoarse, and she cannot give a full sentence at one go. That's not alarming, she will be able to do so with time," he explains and relief floods through me.

"Can we please see her?" he nods vigorously. This is amazing news; I know mama will still be on a wheel chair but at least she can talk and use her hands.

MAWANDE DUMA

I am taking a stroll around my village; I want to take in the beauty of Mzumbe for the last time because soon we will be moving to Johannesburg with Msebe. I am super excited for our new life, but I realized that I'm going to miss my simple village life and our family. Especially his mom, maMokwena is the best mother-in-law. I am

truly blessed to have such a loving and supportive in-law; I will never fall down in her presence. Msebe sometimes complains that his mother wants to take his wife, he's just being silly.

We went to Johannesburg last week to view the apartment we are going to move into. I am in love with it, it's not too big nor is it small, it's perfect for my husband and I. The real estate agent is still trying to find us a good piece of land where we will build our dream home. Msebe and I have started exchanging ideas of what we want it to be like. He cannot design on paper as yet because we aren't sure of the land we are going to get.

A couple approaches me, they are holding hands and laughing freely. They make me miss my husband; He had to sleep in Port Edward because his team had to work late yesterday and early today to be on schedule. They were behind a little and it wasn't their fault, the hardware delivered material late and that messed up their time frame. My husband wants to be done with this project before Christmas.

Haibo! My eyes must be deceiving me. The couple I was admiring from afar is my cousin and her mother's toy boy, what the actual fuck? This man has no shame at all, how does he go from mother to daughter? Nobantu is going to lose her mind when she finds out that "Baba" is now holding hands and being lovey dovey with her daughter in public. It's only a matter of time till the news reach her ears, this village is small and the news travel faster than light.

"If it isn't the new Mrs in town," Ndondo says, not ashamed that I just caught her with her mother's man.

"Hey," I say, looking at their locked hands.

"How is married life treating you," I smile genuinely.

"Amazing, my life is great. Thank you for asking," She nods and the guy kisses her shoulder, making her giggle like a school girl.

"SS, wait," claps once!

Nobantu is going to catch a double murder case, I swear to God.

"Babe, ask her," he whispers in her ear but not low enough

"Uhm, Mawande... Where did you put the key that opens the door to the back room?" she asks and I raise an eyebrow.

They want to turn that room into their love pad? Wonders shall never end.

"it's in the second drawer, it has a red key holder," they exchange a naughty look, and my jaw is on the ground. What has this world become?

"Thank you, and congratulations on your marriage. It's a pity I couldn't attend," wherever she disappeared to was obviously nice, she has gained complexion and her skin is beautiful, in the olden days they would have said she was licked by a snake that's not seen by anyone.

"Thank you, Ndondo," I say and they walk away. I put both hands on my waist and watch this abomination in total shock.

I get to the house, still trying to wrap my head around what I encountered on the road. I know I should rejoice that my aunt is getting played after all she has ever done to me, but I actually feel bad for her. No woman deserves to be deceived and lied to like that, especially by those she trusts. But then again, she took that man from Ntuthuko's sister. I guess this is her karma. They did say it doesn't need a location pin to find you.

I get into the main house and the beef I took out of the freezer has defrosted in the sink. I take out a pot and throw in the meat. I'm not sure what starch I'm going to pair this beef with, but I'll think about it last. I'll peel the vegetables as the meat boils. I want to prepare a fist for my husband, he had takeaways last night.

Someone spans me from behind and I smile widely, when did he get home? I didn't even see his car outside; he must have parked in the garage. I pivot, ready to jump on him but I get the shock of my life. Why would Mafube touch me like that? I am huffing and puffing with anger, he crossed a damn line. I slap him across the face, and he is shocked out of his mind.

I storm out of the house, going to our rondavel. My husband needs to know about this, I take my phone to ask him what time he will be home, but it takes me straight to voicemail. I cannot believe Mafube thought it was alright to touch his brother's wife like that. I am so mad at him. He has to leave this house as soon as possible, I cannot be uncomfortable because of him.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 86

NDONDOLOZA DLADLA

I never thought I'd find love and be happy after my breakup with Dedani but here I am. I never planned for this to happen, we spent a lot of time together and before we knew it, we were head over heels in love with each other. I obviously feel bad for falling in love with my

mother's ex-boyfriend but the heart wants what it wants. I just hope and pray that she forgives us when we finally tell her about our relationship and gives us her blessings.

We need to tell her soon before she hears about it from the villagers. A few people, including Mawande have seen us together holding hands and it doesn't require a PhD for them to make sense of it all. The news has to come from us, it will be more hurtful if she heard it from other people. I won't lie and say that I'm not scared or worried about my relationship, there's a high possibility that my mother will hate my guts and throw me out after disowning me. I've told my boyfriend this and he understands my fears and has promised that he will take care of me and make sure that I'm happy. I believe him because he has been doing exactly that; I appreciate him so much.

"I never thought I'd say this," he breaks the comfortable silence.

"What babe," I ask, and he kisses my shoulder.

"Look at me please," we are in the back room Mawande was living in. It's now our private place to make love and spend time together as a couple. It's perfect because it's the last place my mother will think of checking.

"You look so beautiful, I am such a lucky man," I'm melting into hot liquid.

He knows how to make a girl feel loved.

"I love you," we share a passionate kiss, he moans in my mouth then breaks the kiss.

"God, you don't have to do much to get me here," he says, directing my hand to his erection. He is not bigger than Dedani but he surely is

better than him in bed; Sqalo knows that sex is not just the penis going inside the vagina.

"You have quite an appetite love," I say with a mischievous smile.

We have had three rounds of sex in the two hours we have been locked up in here.

"What can I say, my food is delicious," I giggle, hiding my face in his chest.

"You wanted to say something," his facial expression changes from playful to serious.

"I know that our relationship will not make sense to most people because I've been with your mother. They will judge us but that's okay because we have each other and what we share is real. Princess, I love you," we are looking into each other's eyes and the words he just uttered match his actions.

"I want to make you my wife and have kids with you. After my divorce I didn't want to think about marriage and my kids were enough for me but you babe... You make me want to have it all and give it all to you," we haven't been together for long, and he already knows in his heart that I'm the one.

"I know this is not how you thought you'd get proposed to, but I just wanted to give it to you real, in the moment I'm truly feeling it. The romance will come later," this is perfect. He didn't go on one knee with a diamond ring in his hand, but he gave me what's in his heart.

"What do you say princess? Are you ready to be my wife?" I attack him with a sloppy kiss. This is the happiest day of my life.

"Of course, baby. I want to be your wife, hell I'd marry you even tomorrow," he rolls me over and gets in between my legs.

"I'm going to do the right thing my love. You'll be my wife sooner than you know, Ndondo," Ndondoloza Shozi, it has a nice ring to it.

"I want to make love to my fiancé now," I open my legs wider and his eyes twinkle with naughtiness.

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I didn't want our moment to end, I just wanted to be with him in the back room all night but that would have made my mother's ears to raise. We decided to tell her about our relationship after we get an apartment in Durban. We are leaving Mzumbe, there's nothing here for a young couple like us. My man will go back to the office, and I'll run my beauty and clothing business. Sqalo has been helping me get it off the ground and everything is going very well. Soon my followers will have an amazing online store that will offer them exclusive items of high quality at an affordable price.

We walk inside the house and my mother is standing over the stove, cooking. She looks at the both of us then back to her pot. I greet her and she greets back in a cold tone; is she suspecting us or something? I am panicking but my fiancé looks unbothered, he is acting all normal. We shouldn't have walked in at the same time; Next time I will come in first and have him follow an hour later.

"Where have you two been?" she asks without looking at us and I swallow hard.

"Durban. Meeting a supplier for Ndongoloza's online store," he says without stuttering and I'm glad he's here to help me answer my mother. I would have panicked and sold us out.

"How did you get to Durban? Your cars were in the garage," oh my God. She has us, there's no way of getting out of this one.

"I called some meter taxi guy from Port Shepstone to drive us because we couldn't. We had to finish the proposal on our way there, it needed both our attention," he's literally saving our asses right now.

"I see," she says.

Sqalo takes out a bottle of beer from the fridge.

"Princess. I'll see you in the morning. It has been a long day," I nod, smiling at him.

He is the most handsome man I have ever laid my eyes on.

"Thank you so much for helping me out with this," he winks at me and walks out of the kitchen. Leaving me with my mother.

"You couldn't answer my calls or respond to my messages Ndongoloza?" she says, and I heave a sigh.

"I'm sorry mama. My phone is on silent, and I haven't even looked at it. The meeting was all I could think about," the lie rolls off easily from my tongue.

"I didn't even know about this meeting Ndongoloza, you're keeping me out of this venture of yours. You hardly spend time with me, everything is Sqalo these days. I miss my daughter," her words hurt my heart.

"I'm sorry mama. I promise I'll do better," she offers me a faint smile and guilt eats through me. I am a horrible daughter. She's going to hate me for being with Sqalo and even accepting his marriage proposal.

"We can watch a movie and share a glass of wine," she nods vigorously.

"I'd love that very much."

MAWANDE DUMA

I miss my husband so bad; he is still not back from Port Edward. He had to stay because a lot of unexpected things happened that delayed them even further. The guys couldn't just continue alone, he had to stay to make sure that everything is done properly. He feels bad for leaving me alone for so long and he has promised to make it up to me.

I haven't told him about the situation that happened with Mafube because I didn't want to stress him out, he already has a lot on his shoulders. I will tell him when he's home, I know this will change their relationship forever, but he needs to know. Mafube crossed a line with his own brother's wife, he has to face the consequences of his own actions.

"Wande," Nhlelo calls out for me.

"Come on in babe," the door opens, and she walks in looking beautiful as always.

"Hey. Mama and I are leaving," she says, and I get up from the couch after pausing my movie.

"Please make lots of videos for me and his uncle and greet my brother for me," they are attending Singabakhe's last recital at school. They are closing the school year today.

"I will my love. Mama asked to see you," she says, and we both walk out of our rondavel and head to the main house.

My mother-in-law looks amazing in her seshweshwe dress and it's head wrap. One thing about this woman, she is a proud Mosotho. She has been in the land of the Zulu's for so many years, but she still prides herself with who she is.

"You look amazing mama," I say and she twirls for me.

"I have to represent Singabakhe very well, they must know that his grandmother is a cotton eater," Nhlelo and I are thrown into a fit of laughter.

"Share the joke," the asshole says, walking in the kitchen. This guy makes me sick; I will never forgive him for inappropriately touching me.

"It won't be as funny coming from someone else," Nhlelozenkosi says and Mafube shrugs his shoulders.

"Mama, you asked for me," I say and she nods.

"Oh yes my baby. I cooked mala le mohodu, can you please take over it and make steamed bread," what a delicious menu. I haven't had tripe in a while.

"No problem, ma," She smiles.

"Oh Wande. I'm going to miss you when you leave for Johannesburg," I'm gonna miss her even more.

"You have spoiled this old woman Mawande," Mafube says, and I ignore his ass.

"She's my daughter in law, who must she spoil if not me? Don't be jealous," Nhlelo grabs her handbag after looking at her wrist watch.

"Mama, we should go. Ntuthuko is almost there," the award for best bonus dad goes to my brother. He has been nothing but amazing to

that little boy. Ntuthuko will put everything on hold for his girlfriend and their son.

"We will see you guys when we get back," I walk them out and wave goodbye as Nhlelozenkosi drives out.

I walk back inside the house and Mafube is in the kitchen, he better not try anything, or I'll break his nose. I ignore him completely and take out the ingredients for the steamed bread. Everything will be ready when they get home from Singabakhe's school.

Mafube tells me he is going out and a part of me relaxes, I won't worry about him being inappropriate with me. I don't want to live like this, I cannot be uncomfortable in my own home.

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I am in the main house lounge, watching the movie I paused in the rondavel. Netflix is the best at giving us these amazing new movies and series, I never get bored.

The steamed bread is on the stove, it will be ready in no time. The tripe is half way through cooking and I'll put in some onion and season it up. I enjoy cooking for my family, especially my husband

because he is obsessed with my food. I'm gonna try my best to cook every day when we get to Johannesburg, it won't be easy because of school but I want to remain the wife I am to Msebeyelanga.

Mafube walks in holding flowers and a gift bag, that better not be mine. He will not silence me with his gifts, I'm going to tell my husband what he did, and I won't even feel bad when Msebe gives it to him. I pause the movie once again and get up from the couch, he is blocking me from exiting the lounge. I want to punch him in between the eyes. He needs to go back to Bloemfontein or better, move to Lesotho permanently.

"Wande please," he says and I step back, folding my arm with my nose flared.

"I messed up Mawande. What I did is disgusting and unforgivable, I will not forgive myself for crossing that line but I beg you to please forgive me," he says and I chuckle.

"I'm going to tell Msebe about what you did, your gifts won't shut me up," he is nodding in agreement.

"You're right, he needs to know, and I'll stay to face the music for inappropriately touching his wife," he pauses and takes a deep breath, "This gift is not a bribe, I just want to say I'm sorry and ask that you allow me to tell Msebe and my aunt what I did to you a few days ago," he says and I raise an eyebrow. I wasn't expecting that at all.

"You tell them the very day my husband gets home, Mafube," I'm not even joking.

"Consider it done and please find it in your heart to forgive me," he says.

"I'll consider it because you're willing to come clean yourself and stand for whatever heat they bring your way," he smiles. "But don't you ever try anything like that again or I'll murder you with my bare hands," he hands me the flowers and the gift back.

I shake my head, "I'll take those after your talk with Msebe," he places them on the coffee table.

"Fair enough but can I please pour you a glass of juice and make a snack for you," I just nod.

"Watch your movie and I'll be back with your drink, Mrs Ngidi." he runs out of the lounge, and I go back to the couch.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 87

MSEBEYELANGA NGIDI

I cannot wait to get home to my wife, Lord knows that I miss her so much. This is the longest we have gone without seeing each other since we got married. I haven't been sleeping well because I'm now used to having her in my arms, making love to her before going to sleep and before I start the day. Yes, we are at it like rabbits. It's allowed because we are newly weds and my wife's cookie is the best I've ever had. The first thing I'm going to do when I get home is to take a shower and bury myself deep inside of her before I eat the food she prepared for me. I've been living like a king; Things are just going to get better once we get to Johannesburg.

I get home in Mzumbe and park my car next to Mafube's. I hope he has been taking care of all my girls. I climb out and open the backseat door and take out the flowers. I want to make her smile;

she's been sad because I haven't been home. I'm definitely going to make it up to her, I was thinking we can spend a week in Durban. I want to spoil her rotten; spa pamper day and some shopping and maybe take a ride on a boat in the ocean. The last time I was insanely romantic we were in Sandton, it's time I reminded her that her husband is madly in love with her and will always give her the princess treatment.

I go straight to the rondavel and push the door open, she's not on the couch or our bed. The TV is paused, I call out her name and get no response. She must be in the main house; she would have texted me if she was going out. That's another thing I admire about Wande, she keeps me posted with her movements and I didn't have to ask. It keeps me at ease as her husband because I worry about her when she's not with me.

I walk inside the main house and there are pots on the stove. I peep inside and smile widely, tripe and steamed bread, what a combination. I'm glad I managed to come home today, I'm over the takeaways I was eating in Port Edward.

The TV is playing so I go to the lounge to surprise her, she's going to jump on me and I'm gonna kiss the day lights out of her then take her straight to our bedroom.

I walk in the lounge and the smile on my face disappears, anger and hurt takes over every inch of my body. My wife is lying unconscious on the couch, her top is off and Mafube is struggling to take off her jeans. Why would he do this? Violate my wife this way, did he drug

her so he can be able to rape her? I knew Mafube had a crush on my wife, but I didn't think he'd take it this far.

I drop the flowers and the bastard turns and his eyes almost fall off when he sees me. I charge to him and trip him, he falls flat on his ass, begging me for forgiveness. I push him down and start punching on the face. He is tall but very slim, he cannot push me off him. I'm going to kill him with my own bare hands for trying to rape my wife, my innocent Wande. Does he have any idea what Mawande has been through in her life? Did he think of the trauma and lifetime scars she was going to be left with. I'm punching and he's busy shouting for mercy. Wande is not even moving through this chaos, this bastard definitely drugged her.

Someone pulls me from Mafube, I'm kicking and screaming because he's still breathing. The person is strong, he manages to push me back and stand in front of me. It's Ntuthuko, no wonder he overpowered me. Mafube better thank his lucky stars; The bastard stands up and goes to hide behind the couch.

"Msebe what's happening here?" she asks, panicking. I don't answer her, I just rush to my wife and try to wake her but nothing. She's alive but her pulse is weak, I look at Mafube.

"What did you give here?" I ask but he doesn't answer.

"Msebe I said what's happening here, why is Mawande naked and Msebe bleeding?" can't MaMokwena read between the lines?

"This son of a bitch was trying to rape my wife ma. If I had walked in thirty minutes late, he would have been on top of Mawande, violating her," they all gasp in shock.

"What? Hei wena nja! What were you trying to do to my sister?" Ntuthuko asks, running towards him. Thank God he's taking over, this dog needs to learn.

"Baby, please stop. You'll kill him," That's my sister, she's crying.

My mother is next to me, trying to wake Wande with me.

"Mafube what did you do? What evil is this?" she's now crying, disappointed in her nephew and scared for her daughter in-law.

"Daddy, what's happening," Singa's little voice comes through this chaos and everyone stops.

"Nothing baby, go to the car and play with your tablet," my sister says to her son, leading him out of the lounge.

"Wande, baby wake up please," I'm shit scared, but I have to be strong for her right now.

"Here, pour this water on her," Nhlelo walks back in, handing me a jug of water. I quickly take it and pour it on her face. She doesn't even flinch.

"Mama, I'm taking her to the hospital in Port Shepstone," I put her top back on and carry her.

"We are coming with you," my mother says, running after me.

Nhlelo opens the door to her car and I get in with my wife. My mother takes the front seat, placing Singa on her lap. I hope we don't run into traffic police. Nhlelo runs to lock the door and I watch Ntuthuko holding Mafube by the belt. He tells me we are taking him to the hospital with us so he can tell the doctors what he did to my wife. After that we are taking his ass to the police, there has to be something they can charge him with. Mafube cannot walk free after what he just did to my woman.

Trust me, my sister is driving as fast as she can but to me it's like she's driving like a tortoise. Wande is still breathing but I'm super worried, we don't know the kind of drug he gave her. It might be affecting her internally as we speak, I'm praying that I'm wrong and the drug is only affecting her consciousness and nothing else.

We finally get to the hospital and my sister runs to get help as I climb out with my wife. My mother is scared out of her mind, I know a part of her is blaming herself for what happened to my baby. She welcomed Mafube and told him to stay for as long as he wanted because he didn't have to be anywhere. This is no one's fault but Mafube's, he has been planning this for a long time. He always had an eye for Mawande but none of us gave it more than a thought, because we thought it was just a harmless crush.

I'm almost at the door when two nurses run out pushing a gurney, I place my wife on it, and they hurry inside with her. They are asking me what's happening, I still don't know because Mafube doesn't want to say. I'm about to turn when Ntuthuko walks in with him, holding him by the belt. He looks like shit; his face is swollen and bloody.

"What did you give to my wife, Mafube?" I ask, holding him by his shirt.

He's crying again, he's shitting me right now. Mawande is unconscious and he thinks his tears matter in this situation.

"Sir," one of the nurses says, she's impatient and I understand why. Wande doesn't look very good.

"I swear I'm gonna cut off your dick if you don't speak," Ntuthuko says, grabbing his junk. My poor nephew is watching in confusion and fear, I hate that he has to see all of this.

"I gave her this," he takes out a packet of pills from his pocket and I snatch them, showing them to the nurse.

"Oh I know it, it's an illegal anesthesia. This thing is not approved, it's too strong.

We have had a couple of rape cases of it here. How many pills did you give her?" the nurse asks and we all look at Mafube.

"Three pills," it comes out in a whisper.

They show me where to open a file for her and they rush off with Wande.

They wanted to deny my wife treatment because she has no medical aid, but I quickly gave them my card details and told them to withdraw their money from it. We take somethings lightly; I have to put her on my health insurance immediately.

I get back to my family and they are all sitting in silence, the mood is somber. Singabakhe has headsets plugged in, I'm glad they are distracting him. He shouldn't be witnessing any of this.

"The nurse came and said she called the police," my sister tells me.

"Why, Mafube? Why would you want to hurt Mawande like that?" I'm no longer angry, I'm hurt to my soul. He is like a brother to me and I trusted him with mine.

"I'm sorry, Msebe. I don't know what came over me," Nhlelozenkisi chuckles, shaking her head.

"Don't lie. You did this because you're jealous of Msebe," she says vehemently, and everyone looks at her. Does she know something that we don't.

"He once made comments that made me raise an eyebrow. I didn't think much of it but maybe I should have," she says with a shaking voice and look at Mafube again.

"What did I ever do to you? We have always treated you like one of us, even my late father. Why would you want to hurt me by raping my wife? Do you understand how much Wande means to me? What she has been through in her life? Mafube that woman thanks God every day for bringing us together, she believes that the universe is finally favoring her since we got together. You wanted her to see our life together the same way she sees her pastMy my mother is sobbing. I feel for her.

"I welcomed you into our home and treated you like a son, gave you everything you needed. I practically raised you and Msebe like twins. Ngidi loved you dearly, he didn't allow you to fall down. Why would you want to sleep with your own sister? You promised that you didn't see Mawande that way, you said you were only flirting so why?" The pain in my mother's voice breaks me.

"He won't be honest mama. I just want him to know that I'm done with him, he better stay clear of Wande and I. He's not my brother anymore, he's just a dog that will have its day for hurting the most innocent soul I know," he goes on his knees after I speak.

"Msebe please, I am so sorry," I want to kick him in the chest. He just took Sauda's first place of the person I despise the most.

"Mawande Duma?" a voice says, I turn and find a doctor with two police officers.

"My name is Msebe, I'm her husband," I say with widened eyes.

"Sir, we have managed to pump your wife's stomach. The toxins are all out, she will be back to her normal self in no time. However, we found something while we were busy with her, we'd like to discuss it with you both when she's awake," he says and I narrow my eyes.

"Is everything okay?" I ask, taking a step forward.

"She's okay, I just can't discuss it without her because she's the patient," right.

"When will she wake up?"

I hope it's tonight; I can't sleep without hearing her voice. I thought I lost her, she was just laying there, looking dead. I thought my biggest fear was a reality.

"She might be up now, the nurses were finishing up when I left the room," oh thank God.

"Can we please see her, we need to know if she's opening a case against the perpetrator or not," Can we not do this today, I need to talk to her first. She must be scared and confused, wondering how she ended up here. She is not in the right frame of mind to discuss what happened earlier, she just needs me to hold her and kiss her forehead.

"Can we please do that in the morning, my wife is scared where she is. Please detective," he heaves a sigh.

"You'll find her here in the morning. I'm not discharging her yet," the doctor adds.

"Okay, we will see her in the morning then," the cop says, and they walk away.

"Doctor, please take me to my wife," I ask and he nods.

"We will give you guys a few minutes before coming in to see her," that's MaMokwena.

"What are we going to do with that bastard? We can't let him go. He might run to Lesotho," Ntuthuko heaves a sigh.

"I know someone that can keep him until tomorrow when Wande has decided," he's a big help.

"Don't let him run. Thank you sbari,"

I walk behind the doctor he's taking me to my wife, my hands are sweating. I am still scared; I'll be better when she's out of here and completely in the clear.

The doctor stops outside the door and points me inside. I thank him and quickly walk inside; Wande is curled in bed sobbing painfully. My heart breaks even further, I will never forgive Mafube for this.

I close the door behind me and round the bed so she can see me.

"Sthandwa sami," she quickly looks at me and the fear in her eyes knocks me with guilt.

"I'm sorry I wasn't there, MaDuma. I am so sorry, baby. I failed you, I wasn't there to protect you," I say and take her hand, kissing her knuckles.

"Msebe," it comes out in a whisper and I know what she's asking me, I can see it in her eyes. I go round the bed again and climb on then hold her tight.

"I love you so much and I'm sorry babe," she quickly turns to face me and hides her face in my chest and let's out a heart wrenching cry.

"I got there before he could do anything love, but I'm still sorry I wasn't there to stop it from happening at all," she holds me tighter and I kiss her forehead, brushing her back in circles.

I promise God and her late parents that I will not allow anything like this to happen again. I will do my absolute best to make her happy for the rest of our lives, Mawande has been through so much. I know she's a strong, resilient woman but she can only take so much.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 88

NOMAHLUBI MKHIZE

My mother is getting much better, the three of us haven't stopped giving praise to the almighty God. She is still admitted at the hospital, there are a few things her doctors want to monitor but overall, they are happy with her progress. Her speech is much better, though her voice is still hoarse. Today she managed to feed herself, her hands are getting stronger.

The doctors said we will be able to take her home some time next week, I'm stressed out because I left my matrimonial home. I can't take my mother to the hotel I've been living at and Qaqamba's apartment is enough for only her. I should probably make arrangements to move back home, in Eastern Cape. It will be good for both of us; I mean that's her favorite place and for me it's far from Dedani and the bull shit he has been doing behind my back. I have given it a thought, I cannot live with a man that has cheated on me and continues to want to do so.

I haven't seen nor spoken to Londeka since the day I left her apartment. I don't know if she's tried to reach out to me because my cell is off. I won't lie, I miss her so much. Both as a friend and a prayer warrior. Talking to her and spending time would have definitely made me feel better amid the chaos that's happening in my life. I am caught between a rock and a hard place when it comes to our friendship.

"Nomahlubi, what's wrong baby?" I snap out of my thoughts when my mother reaches for my hand.

"Oh, nothing. I'm just tired," she offers me a sweet smile.

"I gave birth to you sisi. I know you like I know the back of my hand; something is bothering you. Please talk to your me," she says, in a way only a mother can and that sets me off. God, I have missed her so much. I didn't think we'd be able to sit like this and have a conversation again, I had accepted the situation, but God came through for us. Mama managed to give sketches of the man that highjacked and shot at her, hopefully they'll soon be apprehended and sent to prison.

"A lot has been going on, mama. I just can't believe that the life I had with my husband was all a lie," I say and she narrows her eyes.

"What do you mean sisi?"

I take a deep breath, "Every evening when I leave this place I go to a hotel because I left my house. I haven't spoken to Dedani since he left to attend his mother, their home and cars caught fire," she gasps in shock.

"Haibo! Hlubi that's bad. I know I don't like your husband, but you don't leave someone in a time they need you the most," she says, and I shake my head.

"You don't understand mama, you we right about Dedani not being a good guy all along..." I tell her everything that went down, all of it and she's shocked out of her mind.

"Nomahlubi! Are you serious?" I wake up every morning wishing that this was a long, bad dream and it has come to an end. But the pain in my heart reminds me that this is now my reality.

"I'm really sorry baby, oh Lord," she says and I bite my lower lip.

"And now I'm pregnant, in pain and full of fear," I say and mama places a hand over her mouth, tears glistening in her eyes.

"Everything is going to be alright. I cover the life growing inside of you with the blood of Jesus, nothing will happen to him. I know you're hurting right now but this is the best news, children are a gift

of God and I'm thankful that I get to hold my first grandchild before God remembers me home," I smile through my tears, brushing my growing belly.

"I am so happy you're better mama. Londeka has been a great support and now that we are over it was going to be hard without anyone by my side. I mean Qaqamba is there but she's so young, she has her own life to live. I couldn't expect her to put her life on hold for me and my endless troubles," she gives my hand a little squeeze.

"Every time you came to visit me at the home you talked about Londeka so much. I was at ease knowing that you have someone who knows God and has connect with him on your side. I prayed to be better everyday so I could meet her, she sounds like a remarkable young woman." She stops talking and clears her throat, I push back my chair and go get her some water. I help her drink up and settle back on the chair next to her wheelchair.

"I know she hurt you by keeping the truth from you and obviously allowing your friendship to be built on lies but I think that all came from a good place. She didn't want to lie to you but as time went by, she realized that it wasn't okay watching you live a lie. She told the truth and that's the most important thing, please don't lose this beautiful friendship," she adds, and I heave a heavy sigh.

"I don't know ma, I'll think about it,"

"And your marriage?" Did I ever get married though? I mean it was never genuine, it was all based on a lie. He hurt someone really bad in order to be with me, but still continued with that person and even wanted to add Londeka to the equation.

"There's no marriage mama. I will never be able to trust Dedani and my forgiveness will be like a pass for him to do worse. I don't think he's ready to be tied down to one woman, the divorce will give him his freedom to do whatever," I didn't get married only to divorce less than year in it.

"Are you going to tell him about the baby?" I nod vigorously.

"He has always wanted a baby; I don't doubt he will be a great dad. Me and him just have to figure out a way to exist in peace for our child," she has a proud look on her face.

"You're mature, girls your age would have used this innocent soul to settle the score," I'm not looking for revenge.

I just want to be happy with my baby and go back to my career. There is a valid reason in the heavens why things turned out this way and I have to accept it.

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I just picked up something to eat and I'm headed back to the hotel. That place is lonely as hell now that I've done all the thinking and made decisions on a way forward. The only thing that's heavy on my mind is my friendship with Londeka, my mother is right. She is a genuine person and the first friend that has ever brought true happiness into my life. She never made me feel like she was in it for what she could get from me. Her love and sisterhood for me is true and that's what I need to focus on.

I get to my room and it's clean, I left a mess in here this morning. Whoever did housekeep probably swore at me and called me a pig but it was a once off thing.

I woke up very late and did what I needed to do then headed to the hospital, I don't want mama to get bored. Qaqamba is at work all day during the week, my cheating, soon to be ex-husband hooked her up with a job and my sister likes it. She feels bad for not being able to be there for mom so I promised to spend time with her so she's not alone; That will make my sister feel less guilty.

I settle on the couch and take out my cellphone from the handbag, I switch it on, and it has a little battery. I'll be able to make this short call to Dedani then I'll charge. I need to get things out the way so I can start with my healing process, avoiding him won't do any good for me. A flood of messages comes through immediately, I'll check everything later.

"Oh thank goodness, Baby where are you?" he answers, panicking. I roll my eyes and take a deep breath.

"Hello Dedani,"

"Love, where are you? Hlubi I have been worried sick, I was even planning on going to the police station tomorrow morning," He's not that smart, he could have found my sister or went to the home my mother was staying. But I'm glad he didn't, meeting him when I wasn't ready was going to make me lose it on him.

"You didn't have to worry, I'm good," he scoffs.

"Are you listening to yourself? I haven't been able to get a hold of you since I left for home and when I got back you weren't here. For two days I've been losing my mind," huuu!

"My mother woke up and is talking so I had to take care of things," he gasps in shock.

"Y-Your mother can talk... Like us? How did... How did that happen? When?" he's stuttering.

"Long story. Can you meet me at Tigers milk in Sun Coast tomorrow morning? There's something important we need to discuss," he chuckles.

"What's going on? Why are we meeting in the streets Hlubi? We are married and we have a house, why can't we meet here right now?" I'm not setting foot in that house.

"Dedani can you meet me there or not?" I ask, annoyed.

"Fine, Hlubi. Please just know that I'm not happy with you," I don't give a single fuck.

"Good, 9 in the morning and please don't be late," I end the call and heave a heavy sigh.

MSEBEYELANGA NGIDI

Wande is back home but my wife is not okay at all, she is so jumpy, and the crying is on another level. I wish there was something I could do to erase what Mafube did to her, yes, he didn't rape her, but he still violated her. I had to listen to her tell the police what happened and I was holding my breath the entire time. If Mafube was in the same room as me that day, I would have killed him with my own bare hands and went to jail to serve my sentence proudly.

He tricked my wife, pretending to ask for forgiveness after he spanked her. Wande said she tried calling to tell me what happened immediately after it had happened, but my phone was on voicemail. The time I got back to her I was stressed out and she decided not to make me worse and wait till I got home to tell me. God I wish she

had just told me, I would have left everything and came home. Mafube would have left and none of this would have happened. I can't help but feel like a shitty husband.

So, Mafube got home with a gift and flowers to apologize. My wife told him she wasn't accepting anything and that she was going to tell me. He then asked her for an opportunity to tell me and my mother himself, seeing that as taking accountability, Wande agreed, and he offered to get her a drink. A thank you gesture that wasn't as extreme as the flowers and gift as they came across as him trying to buy her silence.

He came back with the drink and my wife drank it without suspecting a thing. It was the normal cranberry, and nothing was out of place. Twenty minutes after she drank the whole thing, she started feeling light-headed and seeing double, she felt like sleeping, a deep sleep. She explained that she asked Mafube what he had done to her and he laughed to her face.

Before she lost consciousness the bastard kept on saying she led him on like all the other bitches in the past. That she was taken by him and his career until I showed a little interest in her; According to him Wande would've been his woman if it wasn't for me. He said Mawande dropped him immediately after the "Ngidi golden boy" smiled at her. Apparently, the only reason why I got with Wande is because I want every good thing for myself just like when we were young.

Ntuthuko got busy with him at his friend's place and made him confess to why he wanted to rape my wife. It was to break me, to

take away the happening I have with my woman. The plan was to have his way with her, then leave himself and Wande naked to be discovered as passed out after "consensual sex" by either me, mama or Nhlelo. He was going to lie and say they both remembered the connection they had at first and one thing led to the other. But he stupidly gave Mawande an overdose and she wasn't going to wake up when whoever discovered them tried to shake her up. It would have been clear even then that his story is bullshit and that he drugged my wife and raped her.

Wande agreed to open a case and I was thrilled. He has to pay for what he did to her. Our family back in Lesotho is heart broken, no one can believe that he would do something so evil. We were very close growing up, they bought us one and the same thing so the other doesn't cry for the others thing. I honestly don't know where this hate for me comes from. Once my wife is in the right frame of mind, I'm going to go see him and ask him why.

"Make sure she eats this, Msebe," mama says, handing me two plates of food, "You know she didn't eat breakfast and she didn't have much of her lunch," I'm super worried about her, she must eat now.

"I will mama, thank you," I kiss her cheek and head to the open kitchen door.

It's already dark outside, I'm gonna feed her first then have my food after. We will go to bed after and cuddle, she has always loved cuddling but now it's worse. I think she just feels safe in my arms, that's a relief because I need her to believe that no harm will come to her when I'm with her.

I call out for her before I enter so she's not startled, she answers and I push the door open with my leg. She's sitting on the couch in her pyjamas, watching some movie on Netflix.

"Are you okay?" I ask, placing the plates down.

"I'm okay babe, just not hungry. Please put the plate in the fridge," she says and I heave a sigh.

"MaDuma, you have to eat sthandwa sami, it's not just you anymore," I say, placing a hand on her stomach, she shifts uncomfortably, and I heave a sigh.

The doctor told us we are pregnant, two months along. Fortunately, the illegal anesthesia didn't harm the baby but it could have if I didn't bring her in when I did. Now I'm grateful for getting here on time, not only did I save my wife from being raped, but I also saved our baby's life.

"Wande, you don't have to finish the plate. Half of it and I'll be relieved, please baby," we haven't spoken about the baby, I know I'm happy and I'm dying to express my feelings, but I'm scared. She doesn't seem very happy about the life we created and it's worrying me. I wish I knew what's happening in her head.

"Okay," she says, avoiding my eyes.

She tries reaching for the plate, "No, please let me feed you," she nods her head and I quickly grab the plate and start feeding her. She's chewing slowly, it's clear she doesn't want to eat but I'm happy she's not fighting me over it.

"Baby, I love you so much. Everything is going to be okay; I promise you," she looks at me and there's fear and uncertainty in her eyes.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 89

NOMAHLUBI MKHIZE

I'm at Tiger's milk, waiting for Dedani to arrive so we can have this conversation and get it over and done with. I know he's going to deny everything and put up a fight when I show him that I have evidence that implicated him. He is a stubborn man who will never go down without a fight, but I don't care about that because I'm not giving him another chance to hurt and humiliate me.

No matter what he says or does I'm not staying in this marriage, the only thing we will do together is co-parent the life growing inside of me. I'm gonna make it clear to him that if he tries to use this baby for his own selfish reasons then I'm cutting all ties and he will only be allowed back when he's ready to accept the new reality. The reality that he is no longer my husband, just the father of my baby.

My mother said she will call a meeting with his family once she's discharged. We have to announce our divorce to the elders, it's out of respect and tradition. I know maMkhize will be hurt and disappointed in her son, this marriage meant so much to her. It breaks my heart too that it had to get to this point, she treated me like a daughter since the day we met, and I'll miss her dearly. Yes, I won't be the divorced wife that attends the ex-husband's family functions. I'll send the baby to those things with a nanny I trust.

I look at my wrist watch and it's 8:55, he will be here soon. One thing about Dedani is that he's punctual, African time doesn't work with him. He is a politician and a businessman so time to him is money, he values it too much if you ask me.

"Hey love, I hope I didn't make you wait long," he says, pulling a chair.

"Oh, no. I arrived early," I say, picking up my cup of coffee. Damn! it's finished, and I can't have another one. I know I must stop drinking it completely since I'm pregnant but it's going to be so damn hard to do that. Caffeine is everything to me.

"Where have you been, Nomahlubi? What's going on?" he asks, and I take a deep breath.

"A lot has been going on, my mother woke and she's talking. She's not quadriplegic like the doctors had said, she can use her hands just not her legs. On the other hand, truths that I never imagined came to light and everything is just a mess but God will see me through," I say looking at him straight in the eyes. His can't stay on mine, he's too nervous.

"How did it happen? With your mom? The doctors said..."

I quickly interject, "God works in mysterious ways. That's honestly all that I can say," I answer, and he swallows hard.

"This is great news babe. I'm sure you're at ease now that your mother is well," I smile and nod my head.

"Why are we meeting here? We have a house Hlubi, we are married," He leans in and places both elbows on the table.

"I have two things I want to discuss with you. I need you to understand that nothing you say will change my mind," he narrows his eyes.

"Babe, if this is about your mother moving back in with us then I don't have a problem. At least now she won't be dependent on you for everything, you'll have less stress. Whenever you're both ready for

her to go back to Eastern Cape we can get her a live-in nurse, I'll take care of the expenses," he says and I chuckle.

"That's thoughtful of you but it won't be necessary," we are disturbed by a waitress asking for our orders. Dedani asks her to give us a couple more minutes to decide.

"Sthandwa sami, what's wrong?" he asks with a soft voice.

"I want a divorce Mkhize," he gasps in shock.

"What?! Why Hlubi? What have I done?" he wasn't expecting this, not in a million years.

"I don't want to be married to a liar and a cheat. I don't want to think of what you're up to every time I'm not with you," I explain, and he leans back, fanning his face and leaning in again.

"I'm in the dark here. I have never cheated on you," I roll my eyes.

I think I have the word "fool" written across my forehead.

"Stop it, Dedani. I know everything. Londeka came clean before you could sell me the bullshit story about her wanting my life," he's blinking rapidly, "I know about Ndongoloza, that you dated 5 years and you rented her an apartment while married to me. I know you burned down Londeka's family home and bought the one in Petermaritzburg," he's sweating, he can't even get a word out to defend himself.

"Baby, I know it looks bad but please let me explain. Hlubi, I have never loved anyone the way I love you. We can work through this, I can work on myself to be the man you deserve," tears are glistening in his eyes.

I honestly thought he was going to spin the whole story and make himself look like a victim of some sort.

"Why did you ask me to marry you if you knew you weren't done fucking around? Have you any idea what I sacrificed to be with you?"

my voice is shaking but I will not drop even one tear in front of this man.

He will never see how much he has hurt me.

"I'm done Hlubi. It's you I want; I knew that the first day I saw you at the hospital babe. Please don't run at the first sight of trouble," I raise an eyebrow.

"You call lying and cheating a first sight of trouble? Dedani, financial problems, health problems, that's what I vowed to stay through. If you lost it all I'd hold your hand and figure out a way to get back on top but that's not the case," he's burying his head in his hands.

"Hlubi, I admit to everything, but I need you to know that I never slept with Ndondo," stupid man, cheating is not sticking your penis in a woman's vagina or vice versa. "I'll tell you the truth about Londeka right now," he says, looking up. His eyes are blood shot red.

"I'm listening," I say and he swallows, causing his Adam's apple to bob like a monkey on a stick.

"What I'm about to say doesn't change the fact that I love you so much," why do I feel like Dedani is about to burst my brain.

"Hlubi, I fell in love with kaMageba. I want to make her my second wife," say what?!

Wow, Dedani won't shock me.

"Oh... Uhm... If she does agree to be your wife then she won't have to be number two because I'm divorcing you," he tries to reach for my hand, but I quickly retract it.

The waitress comes back and Dedani almost bites her head off. He must chill, this girl is not the cause of her problems.

I asked her to bring me a glass of juice and their pizza for take away. Dedani doesn't order anything but it's fine, it's his stomach.

"Hlubi, I'm begging you. Please don't do this to us, please," I'm done discussing this. I'm gonna contact a lawyer and get the train moving. I don't care if he gives me anything, I know how to work for my own money. I had everything I needed before I met him, so I'll be more than okay.

"The second thing I want to discuss is..." I pause and take a deep breath, "Before I say it, I want you to know that it doesn't change my mind now and it never will. Please don't try to use the situation to manipulate me into taking you back. I am really done with this marriage Dedani," he wipes his tears.

"I am pregnant Mkhize, I haven't gone to the doctor so I don't have answers to what you might want to know," I say and his jaw is on the floor. I cannot recognize the look in his eyes but it's definitely not happiness.

"Pregnant?... How?" I chuckle.

That is a rhetorical question, right?

"Don't tell me you thought babies come by airplanes," he's annoying me with this dumb question, "Well if you didn't know, the white milk that comes out of your penis met with an egg in my tubes when you were inside of me and they made a baby," simple Life Sciences lesson for our politician here.

"I have to go," he pushes his chair back with haunted eyes. Haibo! Just like that?

"That's all you have to say?"

"I don't have anything to say to you right now Hlubi. I'll call you when I do," with that said he quickly strides out of the restaurant. I'm not going to let his reaction make me feel some type of way. If he doesn't want to be a part of my baby's life because I'm divorcing him then it's okay. I'll gladly do this single mother thing with grace; I mean I watched my mom do it and we turned out beautifully.

MAWANDE DUMA

I step out of the shower and dry myself, I'm not in the mood to leave the house but I couldn't turn aunt Mbali down. All she wants to do is cheer me up, but I wish they could all understand that it will take some time for me to forget what Mafube did to me. I appreciate their love and support; I truly do but I wish I could be left alone for a little while.

The thought of what happened and what could have happened if Msebe didn't get home on time brings tears to my eyes; Every sound or touch that I didn't see coming gets my heart racing. I hate feeling this way, it wasn't my fault, but I can't stop blaming myself for being naive. I mean how could I have easily trusted Mafube after he had touched me inappropriately? I should have refused anything from him and went straight to the kitchen to finish cooking and leave the main house immediately after.

I step out of the bathroom and my husband is sitting on the edge of the bed with his laptop placed on his lap. He must be focused on something that has to do with work, he hasn't been going to Port Edward because he doesn't want to leave me alone. I told him he could go because the project has a timeline, but he said he trusts the foreman on the ground to keep things running and call him when there's an emergency.

I try to be discreet so I don't disturb whatever he is working on. I open the wardrobe and take out a dress he bought me when we went to Johannesburg to view the apartment. I put it over my head and

look for my gold sandals, I pivot after sliding my feet into the shoes and find my husband looking at me with tears streaming down his face. My heart immediately races in my chest, what's wrong?

"Ngidi, what's wrong my love?" I ask and he closes his eyes.

"Do you love me Mawande?" How could he even ask me that?

"You know I do. Msebe you are my whole entire life, my heart beats for you," that's the honest truth.

"Then why Wande? Why would you want to abort our baby?" he asks and my heart drops into my stomach when he turns the laptop. He's on the website of the woman's clinic I was on earlier, the appointment slip I filled up is starting at me. How did he find it?

"You just minimized the page, I opened it, and my heart broke into a million pieces," he gets on his feet and wipes his tears with the back of his hand, "I know you're going through a lot right now but Wande abortion? Why MaDuma?" The pain in his voice will haunt me for the rest of my life.

"I didn't book the appointment, baby," he shakes his head.

"Okay, but why was it even an option?" My knees are too weak to carry me so I lower myself on the couch.

"Msebe, I'm not ready for a baby. I mean my life is only about to start, a baby will just..." I can't find the right word, but I know he can understand what I want to say.

He cannot believe his ears. More tears are streaming down his face, "So you're aborting?" his question pierces through my heart. I'm also caught between a rock and a hard place.

"I... My love... I don't know," he grabs the towel I threw on the bed and wipes his face.

"Okay, I guess it's your body your decision," he grabs his phone and car keys on the pedestal and heads towards the door.

"Msebe don't leave. Let's talk about this, please baby." He doesn't even turn to look at me, he pushes the door open and walks out. I throw my head back and cry. I never wanted to hurt him this way, but I am honestly not ready for a baby.

"Mawande," I quickly wipe my tears and look at aunt Mbali who's narrowing her eyes at me.

"What's wrong baby girl? Msebe is crying and he drove out of here like a mad man and now I find you crying too. What's happening?" oh God, please keep him safe on the road.

"We just had a fight, I think," voices weren't raised but I think it was still a fight.

"Oh baby, I'm sorry. Married couple fight a lot, but he will come back calm and ready to sort it out," I shake my head.

"No, aunty. He might not even want to be in this marriage again," I say, and she gasps.

"Haibo! What happened here?" She hurries to my side.

"He saw that I was on a woman's clinic website, I filled their appointment slip but didn't press send because I was so conflicted," I don't even want to look at her. I'm afraid to see judgement in her eyes. I'm already judging myself for even thinking about it.

"You want to have an abortion?" she asks, and I shrug my shoulders.

"I don't know aunty," she takes my hands and squeezes.

"You're considering it, so tell me why. I mean you're a married woman with a husband that adores you," a husband I just hurt, he must hate me right now.

"I'm not ready for a baby," she smiles and wipes my tears.

"I understand that baby girl. I wasn't ready, Nandi wasn't ready too. Every woman is never ready to have their first child. But I don't believe the scare that comes with being someone's mother is the reason you'd consider aborting. I mean you have all this support system, you won't do this alone," she just saw right through me, "Tell me the real reason and we will find a way through," she says softly, and I swallow hard.

"I'm scared, Aunt Mbali. I'm scared that I'll die and leave my baby, I know how hard life becomes without a mother," sadness flashes across her eyes, "Aunt Nobantu was loving and caring when my parents were alive, but that changed when they died, and she was supposed to care for me. I don't want to bring a baby into this world to suffer the same fate as me," she caresses my cheek.

"Your fears are valid Wande. I totally understand where you're coming from but baby you can't compare your life now with the tragedy that happened. Nandi and Phila wouldn't want you to live in fear," I look away and take a deep breath.

"I have this dark cloud following me. I almost got raped by my husband's brother, my happiness is always short lived. What if I transfer my bad luck on this innocent soul?" She cups my chin and makes me look at her.

"You're over thinking things now baby girl. You deserve all these beautiful things happening in your life Mawande. You deserve to be Msebe's wife, you deserve to have this baby. You also deserve to move to Johannesburg with your little family and chase your dreams," I want to believe that so bad.

"That's another scary thing aunty,"

"What is?" she asks, and I sniff my tears back.

"How will I be a wife, mother and a student all at the same time," she chuckles.

"You are no super woman, Wande. That's why we have people to help us. I'm sure Msebe won't mind having a house manager, someone who will help the both of you to keep your heads above water," she's right.

"Every problem has a solution," she says, and I quickly get up from the couch and grab the laptop on the bed. I delete the appointment slip and close the page then delete it from our search history. My heart breaks further when I see the things he has been searching." How to help a person who was almost raped", he was also searching for therapists around Port Shepstone. All he thought about was helping me, but I was ready to take away something that made him happy. He is excited about the baby, but he hasn't voiced his feelings to me; He talks to my stomach at night when he thinks I'm sleeping. How could I be so selfish? I shouldn't have let my fears drive me that far.

"I have to call Msebe and ask him to come home. I don't want to kill our baby, he has to know why I thought I had to," my aunt stands up with a smile.

"That's how marriage works baby. You talk about your feelings, no matter how uncomfortable it is. He loves you Wande, he will understand and put it behind him." I pray so.

"Thank you for opening my eyes." She opens her arms and I go in for a hug.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 90

DEDANI MKHIZE

I still don't understand how Nomahlubi is pregnant, I mean Madlabantu said that isilwane will eat the babies in her womb before she even notices that she's pregnant. This cannot be happening, something must be seriously wrong here. That's why I'm almost at Mbumbulu, I didn't want to discuss this over the phone. Madlabantu has to look me in the eye and tell me what's happening; Something deep inside of me tells me that this man is hiding a big thing from me.

The past couple of days have been hell for me, my mother lost her home and cars. I lost one of my biggest contracts and now my wife is pregnant and she wants to divorce me. The man I trusted with my life didn't see any of these things happening. I'm scared out of my mind, things cannot fall apart right now. I have worked too hard and sacrificed a lot to just lose it all this way.

I get to Madlabantu's house and it's packed with young women. There's music playing and every single one of them is holding a glass of alcohol, what's happening here? Madlabantu doesn't want people around his yard for obvious reasons. He better have a good explanation for having a party when my life is falling apart right in front of my eyes.

I leave my car outside the yard and climb out, a few eyes are on me. I wave and a familiar face gets up from the chair and approaches me. She's wearing a maxi white dress with a belt across her chest written "bride to be". A bachelorette party? The witch is getting married to this pretty young thing? Wonders shall never end.

"Are you looking for my husband?" she asks and I nod.

"Madlabantu, yes,"

"Mpiyakhe is in the back with my uncles," she says and I raise an eyebrow.

I have known Madlabantu for the longest time but this is the first time I'm learning his government name. In my head he has always been Madlabantu with no surname. If I'm being honest I didn't even think he was born by a human, I thought he fell down to earth like Satan did.

"Thank you," I say and go find "Mpiyakhe".

I appear from the corner and laughter erupts, I spot him roaring in a group of 6 men. What a rear sight, I have never seen him act like a normal person. He sees me and says something to the men, they all look my way and I greet them. Madlabantu stands up and I'm shocked to say the least. Who is this man? He has a fresh hair cut, he's wearing black pants and a white shirt.

"Pick your jaw up from the ground," I never thought I'd live to see a clean Madlabantu.

I thought maybe his powers come from being filthy.

"You clean up nicely," I say and he smiles, looking at his shoes.

"MaShelembe is responsible for all of this. I feel good and I'm happy I made the decision to marry her," I chuckle.

"Your muti is powerful, I see you also have her uncles eating out of the palm of your hand," he turns to look at the men who are in deep conversation,3 sharing an expensive bottle of alcohol.

"I had to do what needed to be done. They would have refused me marrying their daughter if I didn't use my things on them," this man is something else.

"But it's not a bad thing because I'm going to treat their daughter like a Queen," he adds and I shrug my shoulders.

"Good for you but while you're celebrating my life is falling apart," I say and he narrows his eyes.

"Let's talk in the rondavel," he leads the way and I follow behind him. We both leave our shoes at the door and for a change he's not wearing torn socks. He points me to the reed mat and I settle down, he remains on his feet and puts his hands in his pockets.

"Where are your things?" I ask, looking around.

"They prefer peace and quiet and you saw the chaos in my yard. They'll come back once everything has settled down," he explains. "So what's happening? Why did you drive all this way?" he asks and I heave a sigh.

"Madlabantu, my wife is pregnant. Why is the baby still in her womb? You said every child we conceive will be a sacrifice until isilwane says so. Hlubi is aware that she's pregnant, why is that?" he closes his eyes.

"Dedani, I told you that I cannot see into your life. That means I cannot see into Hlubi's as well because she's your wife. Isilwane also cannot see and that is why the sacrifice wasn't taken by it. It hasn't made contact with me and I guess that's because it's furious with you, your promises to it weren't fulfilled. I told you what would happen if you made it angry didn't I?" a cold shiver is sent down my spine. The consequences of angering a spiritual animal scares the shit out of me.

"You not being able to see into my life is not my fault. I made the baby, it was isilwane's job to take it. Why am I the one being blamed here?" I ask a very valid question.

He chuckles, "You're blamed because it's your fault. Who went after Londeka after being warned? Who made the grandmother angry?" I swallow hard.

"Madlabantu I have pulled away from Londeka. Things should go back to normal now," he smacks his lips.

"You foolish boy. You think that's how it works in the world we are a part of? You stepped back but the old woman is still at work," I shake my head.

"Fix it then. That's your job," I burst out and he's taken aback by my reaction.

"I'll tell you this again, I pick my battles wisely. I won't be going after that ancestor, I will not risk everything for you, Mkhize," wow just wow.

"You are going to forsake me at a time I need you the most?" he heaves a sigh.

"You did this all to yourself when you went after someone you shouldn't have," I love Mageba but I curse the day I set my eyes on her.

"Madlabantu please, I can bring Hlubi here and you do anything with the pregnancy to help me out," he shakes his head.

"That's not how things work. We both cannot do anything right now. We have to wait for isilwane sakho to visit me and tell me the way forward," that's not good enough but what other choice do I have?

"So what do I do in the mean time? Sit and wait for your call?" he nods vigorously.

"That's exactly what you're going to do," what will be the point of me telling him about Nomahlubi's mother being awake? He's going to tell me that he can't see into my life or that we have to wait.

"My whole life is on the line here Madlabantu, don't gamble with it. I am begging you."

LONDEKA ZULU

My heart hasn't been okay since the day Hlubi left my place with a broken heart. I have been calling and sending her endless messages but she hasn't responded to any of them. I don't blame her though, I was wrong for not telling her the truth sooner. I just didn't want to hurt her but now I realize that I've hurt her even more by keeping the truth to myself and allowing our friendship to blossom on a foundation that was based on lies.

Dedani called me a few days ago, asking if I haven't seen Hlubi, I told him no and called Qaqamba. I didn't want to worry her so I down played my call and said I'm calling her because Hlubi wasn't answering her phone and we had plans. That's when she told me that her sister was at the hospital because their mother is awake and talking. I didn't relay the news back to Dedani because I figured Hlubi didn't want to talk to him like she didn't want to talk to me.

I have been working like a machine, going in early and leaving late. I don't want to be alone and thinking about the beautiful friendship I lost because I failed to be truthful from the very beginning. If I'm being honest, Hlubi is the first genuine friend I have ever had. We both didn't need anything from each other, just love and trust. Things were different with Ndongoloza, she needed me to make it through the qualification. Without realizing it, I needed her to fit in the world of varsity and later I needed her financial help when my step father lost his job and I was struggling in finding one.

Our friendship wasn't all bad, we had the best of times when she wasn't under Dedani's influence. Now that I know the kind of man he is I understand why Ndondo submitted to him. If you're not a strong woman, Dedani can manipulate you into anything. He is also a smooth talker, so you'll believe that all he's asking and telling you is for the best.

Durban has been heavy on me, I should go home next weekend. I know they'll cheer me up. I also have to go there to get them Christmas clothes and make groceries for the festive season. This will be the biggest Christmas we have ever had, we normally gather at my step grandmother's place and we would be uncomfortable the whole time. This year we are not stepping foot there, I want my family to be comfortable and enjoy their day.

A knock comes through my door, I hope it's not that annoying Indian guy bringing me curry. I think he wants to ask me out but he's afraid because I am always so serious, he's a nice guy but not my type at all. I know this will come out wrong but I don't see myself dating outside my tribe. I honestly don't have the time to be explaining myself and translating things.

I place the glass of gin on the coffee table and get up. This is why I love weekends, binge watching TV and getting drunk. If I was still tight with Hlubi we'd be out drinking stupid and speaking nonsense. Ugh, I forgot that she's pregnant. I'd be drinking for the both of us and listening to her endless stories. I miss her so much.

I open the door and gasp in shock, I can't believe my eyes.

"I'm sorry for just showing up," Hlubi says and I shake my head.

"No, it's okay. How did you get in?" it comes out in an almost whispers.

"Someone was driving out," she explains and I nod my head. There's an awkward moment of silence.

"I..." we say in unison then giggle nervously.

"You go first," I say and she takes a deep breath.

"I miss you, Londeka," she says and my heart is filled with joy and my eyes with tears.

"I miss you too, friend," we attack each other with a hug and sob in each other's arms.

"I'm sorry, Hlubi. I didn't mean to keep the truth from you. I just didn't want to hurt you, I didn't want to be the reason why your marriage would be in trouble," she gently pushes me off her.

"Don't keep things from me again Londeka, no matter how bad the truth is," I'm nodding vigorously, tears streaming down my face.

"I will always be straight with you, I promise," I say then step aside for her to walk in.

"Can I offer you anything to drink? We will order some food," I ask and she settles down on the couch.

"What are you drinking?" she asks and I point to the kitchen counter.

"Gin, I hate you Londeka. I can't drink because of this one in here and I could really use something strong," she says, rubbing her stomach. She's not showing yet.

"How is my baby in there?" I ask.

"Behaving, it's like she knows mommy is dealing with a lot right now," my poor friend.

"Want to talk about it?" I ask and she looks at me.

"There's a lot we have to cover friend. Can I please have juice," I get on my feet and head to the kitchen, it's an open plan so we can still see each other.

"Dedani says he's in love with you. He wants to marry you," my stomach freezes.

"Hlubi, I don't want anything to do with him. I swear to you," she nods.

"I believe you babe," that's a huge relief. "I met with him earlier and told him that I know the truth and I want a divorce. He didn't try to deny it, which is good. He obviously asked me not to leave him but there's no way I'm staying with a liar and a cheat," good for her. She deserves so much better than that man.

"Guess what he did when I told him I'm pregnant,"

"He was overjoyed?" she chuckles, shaking her head.

"He got up and left." claps once!

"Are you serious?" to say I'm shocked would be an understatement.

"I swear," I hand her the juice and settle down next to her.

"Urgh! Enough about Dedani. We are done and I just want to move on from that chapter of my life. I'm hurt but dwelling on the pain won't change anything. I have a lot of positive things to focus on," She says.

"That's the spirit babe, you'll be okay. You have us and we will make sure of it," her smile widens.

"I love you Londeka and I'm happy that my mother made me realize that our friendship is genuine and you are for keeps," her words melt my heart.

"I love you too, mommy bear." I'm relieved that we are good again, without glitches we just fell right into it. This girl is my best friend, my sister.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 91

MAWANDE DUMA

He didn't come home last night and his phone has been off. I am worried sick about him, this is unlike him. What I did really hurt him and I feel so bad for hurting the one person who has been guarding my heart like Alcatraz. Msebe lives to make me happy, but I almost took away the one thing that brought him joy without even thinking twice. As much as my fears are valid, I had no right thinking of aborting our baby. Aunt Mbali made me realize how important communication is, my husband also emphasizes this but it flew over my head. I am a married woman now, it's not about me but us. Every decision I make has to be what's best for me and Msebe.

I not only feel like shit for hurting my husband, but for also lying to my mother-in-law. She was asking for Msebe yesterday evening and I said he had to rush to Port Edward. She believed me because of the hiccups that have been happening with my husband's project over there. I couldn't tell maMokwena that her son left angrily because he saw an abortion appointment slip. That would have changed how she looks at me and I don't want that, plus, I am no longer thinking about that. I want this baby, there's a reason why God blessed us with this soul.

I just finished doing the laundry, with my hands. I just wanted to keep busy and not think about my husband and the drama around us right now. MaMokwena is not happy with me, she says I have to take it easy because I'm carrying precious cargo.

She told me that we must get a house helper when we get to Johannesburg because she doesn't want me on my feet. I wish we weren't moving away, I would have loved being taken care of by her.

I am about to walk into the rondavel when his car drives in. It's in a bad condition. The windscreen is shattered, and the bumper is down. Oh my God! He got into an accident and it's all my fault, it wouldn't have happened if I didn't think of having an abortion. My heart is thumping in my chest, tears streaming down my face. What have you done Mawande.

My mother-in-law walks out of the main house with a platter of cut fruits. She drops it to the ground when she sees Msebe's car in that condition. Unlike me, she manages to run to the car to check on her son. I'm glued to this spot, guilt eating through me.

Mama opens the door and Msebe climbs out, he is in the same clothes he left in yesterday. His mother is checking every inch of his body for any injuries, he doesn't look hurt though which is a huge relief. I wouldn't have forgiven myself if anything happened to him.

"Langoo, what happened?" mama asks with a shaking voice.

"I'm okay ma. Some asshole hit me just when I was about to take the corner that leads into the village. I couldn't even get his details, he hit me and sped off," he explains and I still can't say anything.

"God will punish him, I'm just happy you're not hurt. The car can be fixed," they share a hug and he looks at me.

"I'm okay, Wande. Please don't cry," he says softly and I just break down. He is so gentle with me even though I hurt him so bad. I love Msebe with all my heart and I hope he can forgive me for what I thought I had to do.

"Take her inside, Msebe. I'll bring her a cup of sugar water then prepare something for the both of you to eat," mama says and my husband gently pushes me off him and takes my hand, leading me to our room. We sit down and he helps me sit down on the couch then kneels in front of me.

"I'm sorry for not sleeping at home and coming back this way," he says and I quickly look at him, shaking my head.

"N-No baby... I am the one who is sorry, please forgive me Msebe. I don't want to abort our baby, I just had fears that made me think I couldn't be anyone's mother. I should have communicated better baby, I'm sorry for hurting you," I say between hiccups.

"I won't lie, Mawande. You broke my soul," he admits it and I feel ten times worse. "I know the timing is off and I thought you might have fears because you weren't talking about the pregnancy, but I hoped you'd confide in me. I was hoping you'd trust me enough to tell me what haunts you and keeps you awake at night. You are everything to me, Wande. It hurts to learn that I'm not everything to you too," he says with tears glistening in his eyes.

"Ngidi, you are my life. There's no me without you, my world begins and ends with you," he wipes his tears.

"If that were true then you would have turned to me with what was scaring you, not go behind my back to try and end our baby," I really messed up.

"You are right to feel this way but please believe me. You are my everything and I'll live the rest of my life proving it," I say and mama walks in with a mug in her hand. She hands it to my husband and he helps me drink.

"I'm going to make you two something to eat," ma says and hurries out.

"Please, forgive me babe," I say and cup his face.

"I love you MaDuma, that hasn't changed but I'm disappointed in you and how you went on about things," that's honestly fair.

"I love you more and I understand why you are disappointed. I will do better, that's a promise I make," he kisses my forehead.

"Why? What made you think of aborting? Talk to me, I want to know how to help you not feel that way," I swallow hard.

"I am scared of dying like my parents and leaving our baby. Life is hard without a mother," I say and he attacks me with a hug.

"Oh, sthandwa sami. I cannot guarantee that we will live forever but I swear I'll make sure that our baby is well taken care of. She will not suffer the same fate as you, I will make sure of that," I tighten the hug and he kisses my shoulder.

"I will always be here to help you deal with everything but baby I think you need to talk to someone, a professional," he says and I break the hug and nod vigorously.

"I need that baby, please get me the help," he pecks my lips.

"We are going to get through this, my love. We will take it a day at a time," I'm thankful for my husband, the father of my child.

I take his hand and place it on my stomach, he has been trying to touch it but I'd avoid it.

"I'm not aborting her, baby. I'm sorry that I even thought about it, I was just scared but now that I've voiced out my fears I feel the blessing God has given us," he kisses my stomach.

"Thank you, Wande. Thank you for everything," I know he's still hurt but I'm glad he stills loves me and he doesn't want out of our marriage.

"I'm sorry for walking out on you, I just didn't want to say things I wasn't going to be able to take back. I didn't do anything that would jeopardize our relationship. I went to Margate, got drunk and booked at your aunts lodge," I didn't think he was doing anything inappropriate, that's how much I trust Msebe with my heart and health.

"Your reaction was warranted, and I know you wouldn't hurt me like that," I say and he gets on his feet and helps me get up.

"Have a shower with me," he says and I smile.

"I'd love to," his eyes land on my dry hands.

"Haibo! Sthandwa sami why are your hands this way," I press my lips into a thin line and he narrows his eyes.

"I know that face, you did something you weren't supposed to do maDuma, what is it?" must he know me this well?

"I was doing our laundry," he shakes his head.

"The machine is automatic, what did you do?" he won't let this go.

"I needed to keep busy so I hand washed everything," he gasps in shock.

"You did what? Wande that's hard labor. You're in your first trimester, anything can happen. You really need to take it easy," like mother like son.

"What do you know about trimesters?" I ask and he chuckles.

"I've been reading about pregnancy and everything related to it since we found out," he is so sweet.

"You're going to make an amazing daddy," he blushes.

"I hope so," we enter the bathroom and he locks the door. We don't want his mother to open thinking we are decent and find me on my knees blowing him or him hitting it from behind while I bend over the basin. We have used everything in this rondavel as our sex prop.

NTUTHUKO GALLOWAY

We are in Cape Town, attending Daluxolo's ceremony. He went all out, his family from far and near are here. He slaughtered two cows and bought alcohol for everyone. He has been walking around with Singabakhe in his arms, I'm happy that ntwana is not giving him the cold shoulder. His father is really happy to have him home, he introduces him to everyone he bumps into. Some people have been introduced to Singa more than once but Daluxolo doesn't seem to care.

His immediate family has been very welcoming. They keep on coming to Nhlelo and I, asking if we are okay. We are more than okay, they are good hosts. His mother introduces me as Singa's other father. It made my heart swell with happiness, I'm glad they are on the same page as the three of us, myself, maHlomuka and Daluxolo. Our co-parenting has been going really well, no one has stepped over the line.

I was nervous coming here, I thought they would give me an attitude or try to rub the fact that Singa isn't biologically mine in my face. None of that has happened, that's why I'm so relaxed and enjoying the bottle of Hennessy VSOP Daluxolo gave me. I'm sharing it with my woman, Nhlelo knows how to handle her alcohol, but she takes a glass of water after three glasses of Hennessy. She is the one driving us but at least her apartment is not far from here.

We are going to stick around for a while, we want Singa to spend time with the Botha's. He has to get used to them, he belongs to three families, and he's used to two and it's only fair that he enjoys being everywhere. He will obviously have his favorite place in those three, maHlomuka says it's my father's house. There's everything there so it makes sense why he would love it.

"Daddy," his sweet little voice calls for me and I turn and find him approaching with Daluxolo.

"Yes my boy," I say, holding my hand out to him. He gets in front of me and doesn't take my hand but rather climbs on my lap and rests his head on my shoulder.

"What do you need?" I whisper in his ear.

"I'm tired," he loves people but when in a crowd you have to walk away with him for fresh air.

"Mzala, you really don't mind your son calling another man daddy?" this light skinned man with dreadlocks asks, he looks like a little bitch.

"Why should I mind? Isn't he his daddy?" Daluxolo asks with a deadly look on his face.

"You should mind, I mean you're the one who had to work on top of Nhlelozenkosi," he says and my girlfriend gasps in shock next to me.

I place Singa on top of his mother and get on my feet, Daluxolo quickly holds me back. He can see how angry I am.

"Say that again and watch me fuck you up in front of your whole family," I say in a low tone, I don't want Singa to hear me.

"Ntuthuko, let me deal with him," he asks and I nod and sit back down.

"The alcohol has traveled to your brain and it's now controlling your mouth. What nonsense are you saying? You will not disrespect Ntuthuko and Nhlelo in my presence or behind my back. I am raising a happy child with them and I don't expect a boy like you to understand our dynamic," he's talking to the little yellow bitch but his words are directed at anyone who thinks they have a right to speak nonsense. I get up and take my boy from his mother and head towards the gate, I need fresh air with him. We stop next to our rented car and I place him on top of the bonnet. He won't say a word, he needs quiet. Singabakhe was built differently.

MaHlomuka hugs me from behind, "We can leave if you're no longer comfortable," what? I'm not going anywhere.

"Never, we came here to support Daluxolo and have Singa spend time with them. I won't let a fool ruin our day," I say and she heaves a sigh.

"You're amazing, babe. I love you so much," she says and I smile, wishing I could turn and kiss her softly but our boy has his head on my chest.

"I love you even more,"

"I would seriously understand if you guys wanted to leave," Daluxolo says from behind me and my girlfriend let's go of me. I pick up the now sleeping Singa and turn to face them.

"No, we are staying. We won't allow anyone to ruin this day for us and most especially our son,"-Nhlelozenkosi.

Daluxolo heaves a sigh of relief.

"Thank you guys, I appreciate that you are here," I fist bump him, "I'm sorry about that, I told to him to go sleep it off. No one will try that again, I promise," not everyone will understand what the three of us are doing and that's okay but people need to keep their unsolicited opinions about us to themselves.

"Can we find a bed for this champ?" I ask.

"Haibo! Baby he's sleeping?" Nhlelo checks him and he's snoring softly.

"I'll put him in my mother's room," I give him to Daluxolo and we all walk back inside the yard.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 92

NOMAHLUBI MKHIZE

My marriage is over, there's no way I'm staying with a liar and a cheater. I don't believe that a husband who has wondering eyes makes it to the list of marital challenges. I would have stayed for everything else just not this one, I don't want to cry myself to sleep each night he's not at home and I definitely don't want to risk contracting anything filthy and putting my health in risk. But above everything, I owe my child a happy mom and that can only happen if I walk away from the situation at hand

I have already contacted a lawyer, I asked her to try and keep this out of court. I don't mind leaving this marriage with nothing, I didn't come for the money anyway, I genuinely loved Dedani. I am a qualified surgical nurse; I can make my own money. I will apply for a

job once I've given birth, I don't want to do it now and then face challenges when it's time for my maternity leave. I have some money saved up; I'll be able to survive with my baby for a while.

My mother will be discharged later this week, she's going back to Eastern Cape. I begged her to stay in Durban but she refused and wants to be in her house. I don't want to go back there; I have a life here now and I'm glad she understood. We agreed that we will get her a live in auxiliary nurse and Qaqamba and I will come home as much as we can.

I'm going to move in with Londeka until I can find my own place. She offered and I didn't think twice before agreeing. I need to be around someone who gives me positive energy only. My sister is sad that I didn't think of coming to live with her but it's for the best. Qaqamba now has friends that she made at work and her whatsapp statuses show that they are always in and out of her apartment. Plus, she has a boyfriend, and I don't want to be in the next room listening to my sister having sex.

We get to Dedani's house, I am here to pick up the rest of my stuff. I'm in my car with Londeka and the moving truck is right behind us. I'm so grateful for my best friend, she called in sick just to do this with me. I'm glad I listened to my mother and gave our friendship another chance, she's amazing in every sense of the word.

We both climb out and I tell the moving guys that I'll call them once everything is in bags and boxes. I'm just going to take my personal belongings, nothing else.

We walk inside and it's dark, the curtains aren't drawn. I take a deep breath and find the remote to open the curtains in the lounge. Light fills the room and exposes the mess in this lounge; There are boxes of take aways and empty alcohol bottles all over. Londeka and I share a look before heading to the master bedroom to pack my things.

I push the door open and stop in my tracks after taking two steps inside the room. Our eyes are locked, I didn't want to meet him. I sent him a text yesterday letting him know that I'm gonna pop up to get my things, I hoped he would have left the house to avoid the awkwardness. He heaves a sigh and moves his eyes from me to Londeka, my friend he told me he was in-love with. I won't even pretend like I'm not seeing it in his eyes, they twinkled at the sight of her.

"Uhm, we will be quick and out of your hair soon," I say and he shakes his head.

"Hlubi, please. I know I messed up but please babe we can work through this. I love you, don't leave me," He says softly and I shake my head.

"I have already made up my mind, I'm done Dedani," I didn't come here for him to beg me, I just want to take my shit and leave.

"Take a break, allow me to prove myself to you just don't divorce me," I chuckle lightly.

"Prove yourself? Aren't you the same man that told me he fell in-love with my friend here? I never signed up to share you with anyone, you cheated on me from the very beginning and as if that wasn't enough you went ahead to hurt Londeka and her family just to get what you want," I mutter, and he closes his eyes as if pained.

"I take full responsibility for all that I did and Nomahlubi I will do better. Yes, I fell in love with kaMageba and I don't want to have her as anything other than my wife. The three of us can make things right, you both have grown close, our polygamy would be smoother than most," Is this man listening to himself? "I love you both so much, you complete the man that I am. Let's not rob each other of the perfect life we could have together. Please, think about it," Londeka claps once!

"I don't want you, Dedani. I have made it clear more than a million times now. There could never be anything between us, I'll never be your friend let alone your wife. The sight of you makes me sick," Londeka says vehemently and there's pain in Dedani's eyes.

"Mageba, please don't talk like that my love," she groans in frustration.

I wonder if Dedani's ears have caps because he's not hearing anything Londeka is saying or me for that matter.

"Babe, come with me," I say, leading the way to the walk-in closet.

"Don't touch me, man," Londeka says behind me and I quickly turn, Dedani has his grip on her arm.

"Leave her alone," I say but he doesn't let go, his eyes are pleading with her. I don't know why but I feel a ping of jealousy. He does really love her and by the look of things more than he has ever loved me. I won't be mad at my friend because of that but it still stings.

"Dedani! Leave me alone," She's shaking with anger, I've never seen this side of Londeka. She's always so calm and in a good mood.

She yanks her arm and out of nowhere Dedani drops to the floor and starts moving like a snake on the floor, his eyes are rolled back and his tongue wiggling out of his mouth.

"Jesus!" I scream, moving away from the horror before my eyes.

"What the actual hell?" Londaka is not shaken like me. "What evil is this?" She looks back at me and I'm clutching at my chest. Fear taking over me.

"Has he ever done this before?" she asks and I shake my head vigorously.

"No, never. What's happening? Do you think he is possessed?" I ask and she shrugs her shoulders, still too calm for my liking.

"Take a video of him," she says and I raise an eyebrow.

"No! We should go," she shakes her head.

"Take a video of him first then I'll pray before we leave," I don't want to be here anymore, but this prayer warrior will not leave before she calls to the heavens.

I take out my phone and make a video of him, he's still moving on the floor like a snake and making weird sounds.

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Londeka prayed for about thirty minutes and Dedani was still making those movements. I have never experienced anything like that before. I got everything on record, whoever we decide to tell about this won't say we are lying because of this video.

Dedani is still on the floor, passed out. Londeka covered him with the towel he had around his waist when we walked in, it fell off when he was busy moving like a serpent.

I thought we'd leave once she finished praying but this girl dragged me to the closet and said we came here to get my things. I don't think I still want these clothes, what if the spirit of whatever that possessed Dedani is all over the house, even in my clothes. I have a baby growing in my womb I need to put first and protect against everything. I told this to Londeka Zulu, but she said I'm overthinking.

The guys have taken all the other boxes to the truck, we can leave this place now. Londeka hands me the small box and carries the bigger one. We walk out of the closet and find Dedani trying to sit straight, he has a hand on his forehead. Londeka sighs in relief, what is her problem? I didn't want this snake-man to wake up while we are here. What if he does something to hurt us?

"Mageba, what happened?" he asks all, confused.

"You don't remember anything?" she inquires him and he shakes his head.

"No, I don't," Londeka places the box down and holds out her hand to me. And then?

"Can I please have your phone friend," she says and I narrow my eyes at her.

"We really should leave, I don't want a repeat," I say but she's not backing down. I heave a sigh and place the box down too before taking my cell out of the back pocket of my jeans and opening it.

"Thank you," she says and presses my phone for a second or two then squats in front of Dedani and hands him my phone.

Christ! Does she want him to transfer the demon that possessed him to my phone? Some of us don't pray like we are Jesus' cousins.

"This happened?" he asks, his eyes threatening to fall off.

"Yes," Londeka answers.

This man I loved swallow hard, causing his adam's apple to bob.

"Dedani, who or what did you enter into a covenant with?" Londeka asks with a stern voice and Dedani picks up his eyes from the floor to her. Her question caught him off guard, he wasn't expecting it at all, neither was I.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he says hurriedly and Londeka shakes her head.

"You are lying, what have you gotten yourself into Dedani?" Londeka is not letting this one go.

I am standing here with every part of my body cold with fear.

"You know very well..." she says but Dedani stops her from saying more.

"I said I don't know what you are talking about so stop!" he roars, getting on his feet. The look on his face says Londeka is right, I have never seen this man so scared. He is even struggling to put on the clothes he had laid on the bed.

Who did I marry and give a baby?

Dedani grabs his shoes and phone then run out of the bedroom.

"Whatever it is, Dedani, you can't run away from it," Londeka says behind him.

"What the hell is happening?" I've been in the same room as with them but I feel clueless.

"Your husband did something bad, Hlubi. I don't know what exactly, but my spirit tells me that it's above him now, he is headed for doom," she says and I gasp in shock.

"Friend, do you have like a spiritual gift? I mean you pray in a way I don't understand, and one truly feels the holy spirit in the room when you do. Now this happened and you managed to say something to Dedani that made him run out of here ready to shit his pants," I say and she bites her lower lip.

"I don't know, Hlubi. I'm scared, something is happening to me and I don't even know what it is," she says and I quickly go and hug her when I see tears glistening in her eyes.

"Oh babe, I'm sorry. Have you spoken to your mother about whatever it is?" I ask and she sniffs before gently pushing me off her.

"No, what will I say? I don't understand myself at the moment," I honestly understand.

"We should find someone you can explain all this to and get answers. I don't think you're an ordinary person, babe," she blows out a heavy breath.

"Let's get out of here, something is heavy on my spirit," she grabs the box and I do the same and practically run out of here. My mother was always right about Dedani but I was blinded by love. What would have happened to me if Londeka wasn't in my life?

DEDANI MKHIZE

I am driving like a mad man, desperate to get to Mbumbulu. I know I was there a few days ago and he said he will call me once he has something. Things have changed since then; I saw a video of myself

moving and wiggling my tongue like a snake. It cannot be a coincidence, isilwane sami is doing all of this to me. Londeka pointed it out but how could she know? Does she maybe have a gift I wasn't aware of? Her grandmother, the one Madlabantu warned me about, it's her.

Now I'm confused, am I facing the wrath of the old woman for angering londeka and in turn, her. Or isilwane sami is at work, angry for not getting the sacrifice I promised to it. I am crossing fingers that Madlabantu manages to mix his things and get me answers, I'm ready to do anything to appease the grandmother. She honestly has to leave me alone. If it's isilwane sam that's angry then I'll go to the ends of this earth to make things right again.

Life cannot go back to how it was before I met Madlabantu. I refuse to be a nothing once again, I won't go back to begging these big-time politicians and businessman for chances to prove myself. I have a sit at the table with the big boys, I will not lose it all for anything or anyone. I'm willing to give whatever it is they may want to keep all the riches I've accumulated.

I finally get to his house and it's quiet today, unlike the last time I was here. His car is not in the driveway, I hope it's in the garage and he's busy working my situation like he promised he would.

I climb out and practically run inside the yard, there's no time to waste. Everything I have is hanging by a thread.

The kitchen door is open, I knock twice and walk inside. I bump into a girl coming to check who it is, she's not the new wife, MaShelembe. Madlabantu is a joke, he will not get rid of all his women. She's blinking rapidly, she probably thinks I'm some thug and I'm going to hurt her.

"Where's Madlabantu?" I ask.

"Uhm...He's not here," she answers in a shaking voice.

"Where'd did he go? I need to see him right now," she's shaking her head.

"I don't know when they are coming back. They left for Mpumalanga on Sunday, my cousin wanted them to go on a short romantic trip," oh fuck me now! He went on vacation in the middle of all this chaos? What the hell is wrong with Madlabantu?

I take out my phone and dial his number, it rings unanswered.

"Call your cousin," I say and she swallows hard.

"I can't. She made me promise to only call when there's an emergency," I chuckle and take two steps towards her.

"Does this not look like an emergency to you?" I scream in her face, and she quickly dials on her phone.

"Put it on speaker," it's ringing, she better answer this damn call and give her so called husband the phone.

"Mzala, my mansion better be on fire. I told you that Mpi and I don't want to be disturbed," she says and I roll my eyes.

"Mzala, there's a man here and he is angry. He is looking for sbari," this family is stupid, they all ate muti out of Madlabantu's palm.

"MaShelembe, give Madlabantu the phone. I need to talk to him right now," I say.

"Who is this?" she asks with an attitude.

"This is Dedani Mkhize, give your husband or whatever you call him the phone," she doesn't respond but there's movement on her side.

"Mpi, I have someone on the phone for you," she says.

"Hao, sthandwa sami I thought you said no phones,"

"Hei! Hei!" I say, clapping my hands.

"Dedani?" -Madlabantu.

"Yes, you need to come back here. Everything is on fire, you need to fix my shit," I say and he chuckles.

He thinks this is a joke?

"Who the hell do you think you are? Get out of my house and never come back again," he says.

"I'm not joking with you. My life can't come second to MaShelembe's pussy. Get your smelly ass back here, things are bad,"

"Yeiwena slima! Don't insult my wife, I'll struck you with lighting. Do you think I can't be a magician just because I'm not in that yard?" I take a deep breath. Fighting with him won't get me anywhere.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to disrespect you like that. I am just stressed, something happened today and I'm still shaking because of it. I honestly need your help," I say calmly.

"Let me be honest with you once and for all. There's nothing more I can do for you, you pissed off a powerful ancestor and in turn isilwane sakho got angry because it wasn't getting what you promised. There's nothing we can do, this is the end of your road," that's insane. He can't just throw me out to the wolves like this.

"Madlabantu no, please help me," I say with a shaking voice.

"It's out of my hands now, your life is going down south from here. I suggest you kill yourself because living is not worth it for you," I

cannot believe that he is saying all of this to me. "But what am I saying? Death is not a way out because your soul will not find peace in the after life. Go well my friend, I'll see you in hell." With that said the phone goes dead.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 93

NOBANTU DLADLA

Life has taken a sudden turn, nothing makes sense anymore. I have never felt so alone in my life, the money I have means nothing because those I got it for aren't here anymore. My son is somewhere in the world, he asked for forgiveness but I'm still not sure if I'm ready to welcome him back. Qophelo did a lot to hurt me, I have a right to question him. I miss him, don't get me wrong but my heart cannot take another disappointment from him. On the other hand, Ndongoloza is here but she's not really here. My daughter spends all her time with Sqalo, it's always this meeting and that presentation. It's impossible to get her on the phone these days, her excuse is that it's always on silent so she can focus on her new online store.

I've been nagging Madlabantu, asking him to cause a rift between them. I hate their relationship, it's taking time from my daughter and I. Ndongoloza and I used to be so close, we shared everything together but now I've turned into a stranger in my own child's life. I feel like Sqalo is doing this on purpose, he wants to frustrate me for making him stay here and not move back to Durban. I'm keeping him from his children so what better revenge than taking my daughter and making her his little project. It's time I cut ties with him; he has to move out of my house.

We are going to have a conversation once they are back from Johannesburg, they left a couple of days ago for another meeting with suppliers from China. I don't know when they will be back, I tried calling their cells, but they are both off. It's frustrating because when they are here, they are always on their phones, I must shout to get their attention.

I finish eating and get up from the couch to go wash the dishes, I had to force myself to eat this breakfast. My appetite has been down for a while now, but I can't starve myself. I clean the kitchen until it's spotless, I need to get myself a helper. I am not the domesticated type; I only chose to do things myself because I didn't want girls anywhere near Sqalo. I was afraid that they would do things behind my back, and I'd be the laughing stock of this village.

The door opens as I'm about to leave the kitchen, I turn and it's Ndondo and Sqalo with the widest smiles on their faces. Their eyes land on me and those smiles quickly disappear, they share a look and I narrow my eyes. Sqalo clears his throat and asks to have a word in the lounge. This sounds serious, I can't help but be nervous. I lead the way and throw myself on the single couch, they decide to settle on the same couch, too close to each other if you ask me.

"Nobantu, I want you to know that I never meant to hurt you in any way," he says and I roll my eyes, "I never cheated on you with my ex wife, Viv would never allow me to touch her like that and I also didn't want to," I don't believe a single word that's coming out of his mouth.

"Is this really what you wanted to talk to me about? I'm over you and your shit, Sqalo. I want you out of my house," I say briskly, and he is nodding his head.

"I understand and I'll soon move out, we have found a place to live in Durban. We are only waiting for the current occupants to move out," he says, and I narrow my eyes.

"Who is we?" I ask, shifting on the couch to sit on the edge. I have a feeling that I'm going to hear something that's going to make me explode. My heart is thudding in my chest at this point.

He takes out something from a file and takes a deep breath, he looks at Ndondo and my daughter nods.

What the hell is going on here?

"I don't think we should have had a relationship from the very beginning. But it had to happen because how else could I have met my wife? I know I didn't do things right, but I promise to rectify my mistakes as soon as possible. I just need you to accept it and call your family elders for me to pay lobola," he says and I chuckle. What makes him think I would marry him? I see him for the trash that he is. I don't want a husband that will go out there and cheat on me with young girls or worse his ex.

"I'm not interested in being your wife Sqalo, we are over," I say and he furrows his forehead.

"You misunderstood me, Nobantu. I wasn't asking you to be my wife, I agree that we are over," he says and now I'm confused. What's all this talk about me calling my elders and him paying lobola then?

"Here," he hands me something and my eyes land on the words "Marriage certificate". I quickly move to see who it belongs to and my heart breaks into a million pieces.

"Is this some kind of sick joke?" I ask with tears burning my eyes. This has to be a prank, Ndondoloza can't do this to me.

"Unfortunately not. We love each other, Nobantu. I feel so alive when I'm with Princess, she completes me in every way possible. I have always been a selfish man, always taking and never giving. But with Ndodo it's different, I want to give her everything without expecting anything. That can only be love," he explains and I'm just looking at them with a sharp pain attacking what used to be my heart.

"You married him? Ndondo how could you betray me like this?" I ask but my daughter doesn't respond, she has locked hands with Sqalo.

"He tricked you right? You forced my daughter into this just to hurt me, right? You are the devil, Sqalo," I say with tears streaming down my face. He took it too far.

"No, mama. He didn't force me to do anything. I love him, he makes me happy. No man has ever made me feel like a princess the way he does. He wants to see me winning in life and that's someone I want to call my husband. I'm sorry for hurting you mama but the heart wants what it wants," -Ndondo.

I cannot believe my ears.

"You, Ndondoloza? After everything I've done for you? You have a clean vagina to give him today because of me, I found you help. Do you think he would have fell "in-love" with you if you still had maggots coming out of there?" I ask with so much anger. I throw the stupid marriage certificate in their faces.

"You're angry mama so I'll take everything you say. We hurt you but it's not something we had control over," they have been lying to me, having sex behind my back. How can two people who have benefited from me the most do this? I will never forgive; in fact, I am going to destroy this little happiness they think they have.

"You will both one day regret this," I leave the room.

"Mama," Ndondoloza calls after me.

"Leave her baby. She will come down, she has to accept this because it will not change," I hear Sqalo saying before I'm out of the house. He doesn't know me well, I would burn my enemy with me in the same house.

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I never expected Ndongoloza to stab me in the back like this. We have always protected each other, that's why I'm so hurt by what she decided to do. I told my daughter how much Sqalo means to me, just because I'm angry at him doesn't mean I still didn't have hope of rekindling our love sometime in the future. Yes, I'm aware that I am contradicting myself. I said I hate him, and I want him out but that all came from a place of hurt. Deep down I wanted him to fight for me, for our relationship. But what did he do? He went to marry my daughter.

I am on my way to Durban, driving like a mad woman. Other drivers have been flicking their lights at me but I just don't care, I need to get to Sqalo's law firm and destroy his career and his life. I'm going to tell them that he has been stealing from Mawande. I know I'm also a part of it, but I am a very good actress, I'll cry my eyeballs out and say he didn't explain fully what it meant to be Mawande's guardian. I'll say I did everything he told me to do, I'll play the character of an illiterate

woman seeking help and justice for herself and her niece. Sgalo crossed the wrong one and he is about to regret it.

This damn truck is moving slowly in front of me, I don't have time to waste. I need to get this over and done with whilst my blood is still boiling. I don't want to calm down and start feeling sorry for the both of them. We are on a sharp curve and I don't see any vehicle in the oncoming traffic, so I quickly overtake and regret my decision immediately after, there are many cars in front of the truck and there's another one coming towards me, I won't make it to the front on time.

My heart starts thumping against my chest, this cannot be how I die. All the cars start hooting for me, they can all see the danger. It's either I collide with this truck head on and die or I drive off the road. It's not clear on the side but I need to try and control this car, hopefully I'll hit a tree and come to a stop. I quickly sway the car off the road, but the truck still manages to hit my tail light, it wasn't a light bump because my car is rolling over, I'm screaming at the top of my lungs with my eyes closed. I don't want to see my death.

DEDANI MKHIZE

The person who told me to have isilwane is now telling me that I should kill myself because there's nothing he can do to help me. I still cannot believe Madlabantu said that to me a couple of days ago, that man promised that everything will always go smoothly but when shit hit the fan, he left me to fend for myself. My heart is broken, I'm scared. I trusted him with all my heart but I guess to him I was just

another paycheck. He is living it up with his new wife, mine wants a divorce and the love of my life doesn't want to give me a chance.

I've been locked in my house, I'm afraid of going out there and turning into a man-snake again. I cannot afford the public humiliation; people will figure out ukuthi ngithwele and I'll trend. My family cannot know about it, how would they look at me? My mother would be so disappointed, she would disown me immediately. I'm already losing too much, I can't lose what I have left.

I contacted a traditional healer that advertises on Instagram, he's around my age and looks very successful. I hope he can help me with my predicaments, I know Madlabantu told me not to set foot in another traditional healer's rondavel but right now I don't have a choice. He left me out in the cold and I have to help myself.

I get to Kwamashu, that's where the traditional healer lives. I park my car outside the yard and thank whatever that's good that I didn't have an episode on my way here. Hopefully I make it back to La Lucia without it happening again. I take a deep breath and climb out with my wallet.

I walk inside the house and there are two kids playing in the garden, they don't mind me. This place feels a little lighter, unlike Madlabantu's yard. You feel it's heaviness as soon as you step one foot in, but that's expected because of the dark things that live in that yard.

I knock on the door of the main house and a lady in a floral dress appears, we exchange greetings and I tell her that I'm here to see mkhulu Ngonyama. She tells me to go to the rondavel and leave my shoes outside before entering. I thank her and make my way to the rondavel, the door is open and there's smoke coming out of the room. I take off my shoes and socks and enter, I don't greet, I just sit on the reed mat and wait for him to speak first. I'm nervous as hell, I hope I get the help that I need here.

"No one can help you but her," he says and my eyes widen, he read my thoughts?

"Who is her?" I ask and he looks at me, his eyes are blood shot red.

"Why did you get into a covenant with a spiritual animal and that witch? You would have made it in life, you just didn't have the patience and now look at where it has landed you," he says and I swallow the lump clogged in my throat.

"You mean I still would have been rich?" I ask and he chuckles.

"That's exactly what I'm saying but you just wanted everything when you wanted it. You were not ready for it all, that's why it was delayed but you just had to go out there and get into an evil covenant for something you were always meant to have. You shot yourself in the foot," Madlabantu had to have seen this when he was looking into my future, why did he allow me to go that far for something I was meant to have?

"Why didn't the man who helped me ngo'kuthwala tell me this?" he looks at me like I just asked the most stupid question.

"That man is a witch; he has animals and creatures he has to keep happy. You think he'd choose you over them?" he asks and I close my eyes. I hate Madlabantu with all my heart. He advised me to go into this form of ukuthwala because he wanted to use me, it was

never about helping me. He also had something to gain from this whole thing.

"What's going to happen to me?" I ask and he shrugs his shoulders.

"You need to break the covenant you made," he says and I narrow my eyes.

"How do I do that?" I ask and he takes a deep breath.

"I told you that no one can help you but her," he is annoyed for some reason.

"Please tell me who? I really need help,"

"And she will help, all you need to do is come clean to her about everything you have done. Her strongest ancestor hates you, but she will not stand in the way of you getting help," say what?

"You're talking about KaMageba?" I ask and he nods. Oh God! This cannot be happening. Londeka will hate me when she learns of everything I've done. There will be no chance of us getting together, all she will see when she looks at me is a witch.

"Is there no other way?" I ask with a heavy heart.

"I don't know what you want me to say. Go to her, confess everything and she will help break the covenant between you and that animal. If not, you will live a painful life. You'll run mad and move around like a serpent. You choose your fate," he says and pull my t-shirt over my face.

"Not everyone who enters this deadly covenant has a choice of breaking it. You are lucky your path crossed with that girl," life, what are you doing to me?

"What's going to happen to my wealth when I break the covenant?" he raises an eyebrow at my question.

"Would a company keep paying an employee after he has resigned? You are losing everything," he says and I swallow hard. I should have waited for God's timing.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 94

LONDEKA ZULU

3 MONTHS LATER

I won't even lie, I am tired, emotionally, physically and mentally. I never thought my life would take such a turn in a short space of time. This is something I never saw coming, it still feels surreal at times.

At the beginning I refused to acknowledge it because it felt like a life sentence; I wanted to run away but I was told that I cannot run from myself. The prophet said I am the gift, and the gift is me, that one cannot exist without the other.

A couple of months ago I met with Hlubi's mother's pastor, it was a few days before she was going to get discharged from the hospital. The man made me feel uncomfortable the entire time, he gave me looks that made me feel like I had grown a third eye in the middle of my forehead.

I was about to leave when he asked to have a word in private, I was surprised but I didn't want to be rude, so we excused ourselves and went to the hospital cafeteria.

He told me that I was heavy on him but not in a bad way, he said my spiritual gift was strong and the Holy spirit surely moves with me. I frowned of course and he chuckled and started asking me questions I didn't have answers to. He told me that God has chosen me to deliver his people, those that have been led astray but wish to repent and come back to him. He told me that I am the vessel God will use to deliver truths, shed light and heal. I heard everything he was saying to me, but I couldn't really wrap my head around it.

He noticed my confusion and explained that I have a gift I'm not yet aware of and I need to go home to my mother and ask her to take me to my grandmother's church in the village. The pastor said I will meet someone who will clarify everything and help me understand my gift and how I will use it.

I have never been one to attend church, I just pray when I want something from God or after I watched a horror movie and I start seeing things at night. I used to mix up the Lord's prayer and freestyle with things that didn't make sense; God had a good laugh over my prayers. So imagine how scared I got when I started feeling overwhelmed with something I couldn't explain and it always led me to praying fluently while crying.

I ignored Hlubi's pastor's instruction to go home and ask my mom to take me to my grandmother's church. I didn't want to deal with whatever gift he was talking about, but I wish I didn't do that. I started falling everywhere, without being tripped or pushed. I fell everywhere, the office, the mall, in the apartment, the streets you name them. Hlubi raised an eyebrow and that led her to calling her

pastor who told her to tell me that I know what I must do. He said she should tell me that my stubbornness will not get me anywhere.

As shit scared as I was, I got on a taxi and went home in Petermaritzburg. I explained everything that had been happening to me and what Hlubi's pastor said. My mother was obviously shocked by that and explained to me that she had been dreaming of my grandmother in her all-white regalia, holding another one in her hands. I never met my mother's mom, she died before my mother even thought about having me. My mom told me that her mother was a great prophet, that she helped people from near and far.

We didn't waste time, the next day which was Sunday, we woke up early and headed to my grandmother's village. The church service was already in progress when we arrived. It was nothing like the churches I attended in the past, majority of the people were wearing uniform in one color, except for one old man who was dressed in white then others in personal clothing like my mother and I. Yes, the set-up was different, but my soul felt at home.

A few minutes before the service ended the old man in white prayed over a drum of water and asked that everyone who has physical pains, bad dreams and everything else that disturbs their spirit to come drink from the drum. I was hesitant but something deep inside of me was pushing me to go drink. I got to the front and the man smiled at me and asked me to stay behind after church.

We sat down when everyone left, and he introduced himself as bab'Khoza. He knew my grandmother, they both had spiritual gifts. He explained that my grandmother passed on her gift to me, and the

heavens were in favor of her decision. He told me that there was no time to waste because my first clients are already in desperate need for my help. The shock of my life came when he told me that the first one will be at my door step the next day.

My mother was scared more than me, she started crying and asking questions I had in my head. She asked if I will have to go away to train and the answer was yes, but it was not in a way we both thought. Bab'Khoza said after my first client comes to me and tells me his troubles I was to go to the mountain, to fast and pray for guidance. He said I can only come back when I have answers I need to help the man. I joined my mother with the water works, why did it have to be me? What did I know about staying in the mountains alone?

I went back to Durban, terrified and feeling alone. Hlubi tried to comfort me but it was hard, her words couldn't get through to me. I kept hoping that it was all a bad dream and morning was approaching and I'll wake up soon and live life how I know it. But that was obviously not the case.

I decided to call in sick the following day because I wasn't in the right frame of mind. Also, because I wanted to see if the first client I was told about will show up. Right when I was about to make a cup of coffee a knock came through my door. I didn't think it's the client because whoever is outside the yard needs to call me to open the gate.

I went to open the door thinking it was that annoying neighbor of mine but it wasn't him. Before me stood Dedani Mkhize looking

nothing like the arrogant man I know him to be. His clothes were wrinkled, he was bare foot and he needed to shave. I could tell he hadn't slept in a while too.

I didn't even bother asking him how he got in or what he wanted. I knew in my heart of hearts that he was the client, and I was right because the first words that came out of his mouth were, "I need your help Mageba". As much as I hated the guy, I couldn't tell him to leave, my spirit was so calm and ready to hear him out.

I stepped aside to allow him inside. My fingers were crossed that Hlubi doesn't wake up while Dedani was here, I was right to hope for that because hell did break loose. So, Dedani and I sat down and he started crying, expressing his regrets and the fear he had been living with the last couple of days. I didn't say a word, I wanted him to say his truth and figure out the next step from there.

The things Dedani shared with me send chills down my spine, it was all a horror movie. I couldn't contain my tears, I was breaking on behalf of Ndodo, Hlubi, her mother and others who fell victim to him and the things he entered a covenant with. I wanted to be mad at him but I couldn't, my spirit wouldn't let me judge or hate him. I hated myself for praying silently as he laid it all to me. How could God and the ancestors want me to help such an evil man? A man who used innocent people for riches?

Once Dedani was finished telling me his story, Hlubi appeared with tears streaming down her face. I have never seen her that mad, she charged straight to Dedani and started hitting him with her little fists, hailing insults at him. She had overheard everything Dedani told me.

He didn't try to stop her or defend himself, he just kept on asking for forgiveness.

Hlubi was broken, the man she loved and trusted with her life had sacrificed their first child to evil. She was besides herself and Dedani being in front of her was making her worse. I had to get him out of there before she could do something that will get her in trouble. I instructed Dedani to go to his house and wait for my phone call. He left and my best friend and I stayed behind, she was mad that I said I'm going to call him. I understood why she felt that way, I am her person, and I should be on her side but the gift... The gift I only knew about for a day was already messing up my life.

I managed to calm her down and we prayed, after that she took a shower and left for Eastern Cape. She told me she needed a few days to think, and she couldn't do that here knowing that Dedani was going to be my client. I didn't blame her at all, I would also want some time out after learning that I was married to a man like that and had absolutely no idea.

The same day Dedani came I called bab'Khoza. I explained the situation to him and asked which mountain I must go to. He told me to pray about it and I will be shown and giving more clarity.

I missed work for an entire week, praying like my life depended on it. It was frustrating because I wasn't shown anything. I kept getting calls from Dedani and that was pressure on me because I didn't have answers for him. Bab'Khoza would tell me to be patient and not give up, it was easy for him to say. He wasn't the one stressed and scared about the changes happening in his life.

I woke up the following Monday ready to go to work, I had a fake sick note to explain the days I missed work. I was about to walk out of the door when I got overwhelmed with a feeling I cannot explain. It required me to light two white candles and place a glass of water in the middle then pray. When I was done praying, I suddenly knew which mountain I had to go to. That's when I realized that this gift was going to affect my job, everything of mine was changing and fast.

I called bab'Khoza to tell him that I was shown which mountain I had to go to. He ordered me to get on the first taxi to him the following morning. He gave me a list of things to bring and leave behind.

I went to the office to have a word with my boss, I didn't know how I was going to explain my situation to him. I decided to be honest with everything, excluding Dedani.

He gave me a week off and told me to figure things on my side or he will be forced to let me go. It broke my heart to hear that, I needed that job. My family depended on me for everything.

I was with Bab' Khoza for the first two days in the Drakensburg mountains. He just wanted to help me get the hang of things and I will say that I'm grateful for having him as my mentor on this spiritual journey I'm on.

All in all, I stayed for 8 days in the mountain, doing nothing but praying and filling my stomach with water only. It was really hard on

my body, I have never gone that long without food. Dry fast was the most painful experience of my life.

Staying on the mountain wasn't scary as I thought it would, there were others like me around the mountain but we weren't in each space. I connected with parts of myself I never knew existed while I was there, it was truly a bitter sweet experience.

I went back to bab'Khoza and told him that my guides have shown me how my gift is going to work. I am only going to use water and white candles. Through prayer and dreams I will get answers and guidance to help my clients.

I went back to Durban ready to help Dedani but it was unfortunate that my contract was terminated because my boss couldn't get a hold of me. I wasn't allowed a phone when I was on the mountain. But God is good because my stepfather managed to find another job and he was able to hold the family down. Hlubi was happy to pay rent alone till I got on my feet. I am never at the apartment anyway, we are in Dedani's village. I was told to take him back home, where his ancestors are.

I thought helping Dedani was going to be quick and easy but that's not the case. It has been months and we still have a long way to go. He has many ancestors angry at him and fighting him, each one wants to be appeased and he is struggling to meet their demands. He lost everything, money is hindering him from buying cows and goats to apologize to those that live in the spiritual world. Because of this delay, some ancestors felt disrespected, so they have decided to take his sanity. It's been three days now and I had to leave his aunts house

to find a peaceful place where I can pray and beg those ancestors for mercy.

This gift is hard, it's taking everything away from me. I haven't seen my family and friends in months. I sometimes have to sleep out there so I can better connect to God and my guides. I share a small house with Dedani, his mother, forever complaining brother, his aunt and her disabled son. I'm broke, I live on the little Hlubi sends me every now and then. I have every reason to give it up but I just cannot, something deep inside of me won't allow me to.

I get back to the house and Dedani's mother walks out of the rondavel where we kept her son. He couldn't live with us in the house because he is very violent, as inhumane as it may sound, we have him chained and locked inside the rondavel. It's for our safety, the villagers' safety and his.

"MaZulu, you're back. I was getting worried" she says with a faint smile.

"I'm sorry ma, I just had to be out there," I say, lowering myself on the bench near the kitchen door.

"You must be hungry. Give me a few minutes to dish up for you," I have gotten used to not eating. I cannot believe I'm suffering so much for a man who once hurt me and my family.

"I am, thank you maMkhize," I say and she disappears inside the house. I take a deep breath and lean back on the wall with my eyes closed. Why did God choose me for this? This is not the life I signed up for.

"Here you go sisi," she hands me the plate of food and I take it. It's just phuthu and spinach, I don't judge, it's food and I'm grateful for it. They don't expect me to contribute for groceries. We live on the aunt's disabled son's grant and Dedani's mother now gets the pensioners' grant. She applied when she realized that her son's riches are gone.

"This tastes good, thank you," I say and she settles down next to me.

"No, thank you Londeka. You have been here with us for a while now and I can see that it's hard. This is not how you must have envisioned your new year. We aren't feeding you good food; you haven't seen your family..."

I quickly interject, "It's okay Ma. I am just doing what God sent me to do. Yes, it's hard. I won't even lie about that. I miss home, my family and the life I had before all of this. What's hitting me the hardest is that I don't see any progress with Dedani, I don't know what to do anymore," she places a hand on my knee.

"Londeka, you have helped my son a great deal. He no longer moves like a serpent, you prayed and fought with evil and came out victorious. The spirit of the baby he sacrificed was saved from the claws of the devil and he is now resting in peace, all because of you. The covenant he was in is broken, he has nothing tying him to that evil. That's also on you Sisi. I know we have a speed bump right now but that's not on you or your gift, it's on us for failing to raise the money to buy the animals Hlubi's ancestors want," she says with a shaking voice.

"I wish we could get one cow and one goat to start with Hlubi's father. He is the angriest of them all, Dedani tormented his wife and daughter. He wants Dedani on his knees begging for his forgiveness and promising to stay away from Namahlubi and the baby. He wants Dedani to give up his rights as the baby's father completely. He

doesn't want the Mkhize's anywhere near them," I says and she gasps in shock.

"I understand the anger, but what about me? I didn't do anything, why must I be excused from my grandchild's life?" she asks with tears streaming down her face. She's genuinely hurt, "MaZulu, Dedani also hurt me. What he did broke me badly. I didn't think the son I raised well would enter into such an evil covenant. I love Hlubi, I always have, this is not fair," I place my plate of food down.

"I'm sorry mama but we don't have any choice in this matter. If we want him to be better, we have to give into their demands," there's no other way. I even feel like this is a small price to pay. Hlubi wasn't going to allow him in the baby's life anyway.

"I guess I will have to go into town tomorrow and see if the loan shark won't help me," I don't like those people, their interest is insane and it's not pretty when they come collecting after a few missed payments. But what can I say? Desperate times call for desperate measures.

"Please try. I'm afraid things will get worse if we waste more time." I say and she wipes her tears.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 95

NOBANTU DLADLA

I wish I had died in that car accident, this is not a way to live. I have become a nothing in this house, Ndongoloza and Sqalo take every opportunity to let me know that I'm a burden to them. My own daughter is disgusted by me, she cannot even make me a plate of

food without saying painful words to me. It hurts so much, everyday I pray to God to take my life because I cannot continue living like this.

I have been home for a month now, after spending two months in a public hospital. Yes, Ndongoloza and Sqalo didn't bother moving me to a private hospital. My injuries were severe, I could have died in the hands of public healthcare givers. We all know how overworked they are with limited resources the government provides but my daughter didn't care. She and Sqalo just went on with their lives like nothing happened. They came to visit me once in a blue moon and they wouldn't even stay the whole hour.

When I woke up from the coma I realized that I didn't have a right arm, it was severed during the accident. The doctor explained that I also had heart surgery to remove the glass that had pierced through my chest. As if that wasn't enough, I lost my eye too. They had to remove it because another glass had gone through my eyeball and damaged it completely.

The doctor kept expressing how lucky I was to be alive after my accident but his words made me angry. I didn't feel lucky, I still don't. What kind of luck leaves a person with one eye and arm? I became a freak just like that, the mirror is something that I avoid at all costs. It breaks my heart by just imagining how I look, it would kill my soul if I were to see my reflection in the mirror.

A part of me believes that this is my punishment for everything I've put Mawande through. It feels like Nandi and Phila are finally fighting for their daughter and that's scary because I know it's only going downhill from here. The only person that can help me is Madlabantu,

he would know what to do to stop their spirits from coming after me. But I don't have his number anymore, my phone got lost at the hospital. I can't even get in a car and drive to see him, my vehicle was obviously a write off and my daughter refused taking me to Mbumbulu. Ndondo told me she was too busy to drive me to a witch, yes, the same person that helped her when she had maggots is now a witch.

I get off the bed and put on my slippers. I need to use the bathroom and get something to eat before I take my medication. My accident happened a few months ago but I'm still in a lot of pain, the doctor did say my recovery was going to be long and painful.

I get in the lounge after using the bathroom and find my daughter and Sqalo cuddled on the couch, my heart still breaks at the sight of them. I still cannot believe that they betrayed me like this; Not only did they break my heart, they are the reason I am like this today. If they hadn't gone behind my back and got married, I wouldn't have needed to drive to Durban to expose him but ended up getting into an accident instead. I can't expose him anymore; I can't hurt him and Ndondoloza the way they hurt me. One day Sqalo showed up at the hospital without my daughter, he came to ask me where I was going when I got into an accident. I refused to answer him but the son of a bitch had already put 2 and 2 together. He told me not to even try to expose him to his employers because I'll go down with him. The bastard saved everything, our communication, paperwork and money trails. If he goes to jail, I'm right behind him.

"Ndondoloza, can I please have food," I say, standing awkwardly at the door.

"In the oven," she responds without looking at me. Wow, just wow.

"Thank you," I slowly make my way to the kitchen to get my food. She cooked rice and chicken with two salads. At least they aren't starving me or giving me food they aren't eating themselves. I go back to the lounge and they are kissing, I'm now used to their display of affection. It hurts but what can I do? They are husband and wife. Plus, I am at their mercy. Sqalo is now in charge of everything that belongs to Mawande, he just makes me sign documents. I can't say no, he threatened to turn everything around and pin it all on me. I don't doubt that he can, he is a lawyer afterall.

I settle down slowly and start eating my food, my eyes are on the television, I'm trying my best not to look their way.

"Uhm, Nobantu. We have something to discuss with you," Sqalo says and I look at him.

"What is it?" I ask, nervous.

"Ndodo and I have plans, Mzumbe is not a place where we can realize our dreams. We were set to move to Durban in January but your accident had us pushing it back, but now our plans are back in motion. You are well and can survive without us here. We will be leaving in three weeks. My wife convinced me to hire a helper for you, we will send the person money to keep the household running," he says and I look at Ndodo, she's leaving me at a time I need her the most.

"Okay," I say and continue eating.

I don't have the strength to ask questions or fight anyone. Them leaving is good for my heart, I won't see them everyday being lovey dovey and inconsiderate of my feelings.

"Good. I'm glad we are on the same page," -Sqalo.

"Babe, I could do with a glass of wine," Ndondoloza says and Sqalo immediately gets on his feet and leaves the room.

My daughter reaches for the remote and flips through the channels, she's acting like I'm not in this very room with her and it hurts. I went through so much with my children and they both turned to hurt me in the worst ways possible.

"Why are you treating me this way, Nondoloza?" I ask and she rolls her eyes.

"Like what ma? You have food, drinks, a comfortable place to live and when my husband and I leave Mzumbe we are getting you help. So what do you mean?" she's annoyed.

"It's okay, my child." Sqalo walks back in the lounge with a glass of red wine.

"Here you go, Princess," she smiles widely and pouts, he pecks her lips then Nondo takes the glass from him and sips.

LONDEKA ZULU

MaMkhize couldn't get the money she needed from the loan shark. Somehow he heard that Dedani was down and out and back in the village. He told her that he couldn't give her the money because she was going to fail paying it back and he would hate to hurt an old woman to get what's his back.

She has been besides herself since then, the poor woman is running around the village borrowing money but no one wants to help. Everyone is now laughing at her, even those she helped when she still had the means. It's sad how people rejoice at another person's down fall. MaMkhize didn't do this to herself, she's a victim of circumstance.

We are sitting under the tree on a reed mat, I'm exhausted. I just came out of the rondavel to pray with Dedani, his situation is heartbreaking. He went from bad to worse, we woke up this morning and he had hurt himself. He hit himself with the chain we used to restrain him and his face is all bruised. This has everything to do with Hlubi's ancestors, they are showing their anger. I have tried to explain that we aren't just sitting in idle, we are doing everything in our power to get the money to buy the animals but they don't want to understand.

A car drives in the yard, it has Durban number plates. I look at Dedani's mother and she shrugs her shoulders. Who could it be? We honestly don't need any visitors here, a lot is happening. The door opens and Qophelo climbs out, haibo! What is he doing here? He flashes me a smile and I return one. I explain to Dedani's mother that Qophelo is a very good friend of mine.

They exchange greetings and after that MaMkhize excuses herself.

"Hey you," I say, getting on my feet.

"Look at you, I've missed you," he says with open arms and I go in for a hug.

I'm so happy to see him. I didn't realize how much I longed to see one of my people.

"I missed you too. How did you find this place?" I ask and we break the hug.

I haven't spoken to Qophelo since I started this journey.

"I lost my phone and I didn't have my phonebook backed up. I went through your Instagram and I found that friend of yours, Hlubi. I inboxed her asking for your new address and she explained your

situation a little and gave me your location. I knew I had to come see you," he explains.

"Yeah, this is my life now. I have a spiritual gift and I'm here helping my first client. It has been very hard, Qophelo," I say with tears burning my eyes.

"Hey, shhhh. I'm sorry," he wipes my tears and folds me into another hug.

"Let me get the bench for you," I say, gently pushing him off me.

"No, I'll sit on the mat with you," he says and we both settle down.

"How have you been?" I ask and he heaves a sigh.

"Good, I'm back in the country permanently. I'm excited for new beginnings," Qophelo answers.

"That's great, I'm really happy for you," he clasps my hand.

"You look like you're going through a lot here. How long till you come home?" he asks and I chuckle.

"If I ever come home," I say and he furrows his eyebrows.

"What do you mean, Londeka?" he asks and I shrug my shoulders.

"I can't leave until I've helped him completely," I explain and he gives me a questioning look, "I can't say much about his situation but we have hit a hurdle. We need to perform some rituals but he cannot afford to buy the animals needed for that. Until he can I am here," he closes his eyes.

"That's not fair. You can't be stuck here because he doesn't have money. Does that mean you will be stuck with every client who can't afford things you need in order to help them?" I shake my head.

"No, this one is different," I say and he blows out a sigh.

"His mother is trying to find the money but she's struggling,"

"Can I help them with the money? I'm doing it for you, to help you move forward and come back to Durban," I narrow my eyes. He wants to help Dedani?

"Did Hlubi tell you who I'm here for?" I ask and he shakes his head.

"No, she just said you discovered that you have a spiritual gift and you had to move here to help a man," I close my eyes.

"I appreciate you for wanting to help but I can't accept it, Qophelo," how can I let him help Dedani after what he did to Ndongoloza?

"Londeka please. You're not okay, you obviously miss your life. I'm doing this for you, let me give them the money," He insists and I bite my lower lip. It's tempting, it really is but it's not right.

"I will pay back every cent, son. Please help," MaMkhize says behind us.

"I'm sorry for eavesdropping, I was just bringing some refreshments," I can't blame her for jumping at the opportunity Qophelo is presenting. She is a mother desperate to help her son.

"We can go buy whatever that's needed at Londeka's earliest convenience," -Qophelo.

How will I live with myself after this? Allowing the brother of Dedani's victim to help him.

"You are sent from above son. Thank you so much." -MaMkhize.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 98

DEDANI MKHIZE

How the mighty have fallen!

Who would have thought that I'd end up in this village, moving with the sun? This has to be the hardest period of my life, I lost everything as fast as I had it. The only thing I'm left with is regret, I should have waited on God's timing. My impatience was my doom and now I went from riches to rags. The biggest lesson I learned from all of this is that there are no short cuts in life. Whatever that comes easily will disappear within a blink of an eye.

Being here is hard, I'm a burden to my mother and aunt. They are old women, I should be taking care of them not the other way around. I'm ashamed of myself for bringing disgrace to them, they are a topic of gossip for the villagers. I have turned my darling mother into a laughing stock and I will never forgive myself for that.

I honestly don't know where to start picking up the pieces of my life. Everything is just blank, I have no money and I know that all those I called friends will turn their backs on me as soon as they know what has become of me. Shortly after Londeka started helping me my businesses collapsed, clients were pulling out of contracts left, right and center. I had to use the money I had in my bank accounts to pay my workers, creditors and taxes before closing business officially. The cars stopped working for some reason and I took them to the mechanic, they are still there. I don't know if they are working or not, I haven't bothered reaching out because I have no money to pay for them.

The only thing I'm left with is my house in La Lucia, I'm still wondering how it got spared because everything else is gone. I cannot move back in because I can't afford it, the rates are too high and I don't even have money to feed if I move there. As

embarrassing as it is, my mother is helping me stay alive here, so I'll be in this village until I come up with a plan to get back up on my own two feet.

Out of everything I lost, my heart aches for just two. My baby, the one Hlubi is pregnant with right now, I was told that I have no claim over him. If I dare, try to go near them Hlubi's ancestors will come for me. It hurts that I won't be a part of my baby's life, I know I shouldn't be because I wanted to sacrifice him to great evil. But I had no other choice, I had sold my soul to the devil. I am a changed man now and I would really love the chance to right my wrongs.

The second thing I lost that makes me feel like my whole life is a perpetual night is Mageba. She wants nothing to do with me, she made it clear that we will never be. I truly love her, and I would have gone to the ends of the world to make her happy. In the back of my mind, I had hoped that she will fall in love with me while helping me, but I guess not all dreams come true.

I cannot stop thinking about her, she runs wild in my head all day every day. It kills me to know that she's with that Qophelo boy; there's no way that they are just friends. No man travels this far to help out a friend, he even paid for the things I needed to get better because he wanted her back in Durban.

"Dedani, here's your food," MaMkhize says, holding out a plate of food to me. I always feel some type of way when I have to take food from my mom. I didn't contribute anything for her to be able to prepare this meal.

"Did everyone have enough?" I ask and she heaves a sigh.

"Everyone had their fair share, please take your food," she answers, and I take the plate and start eating. I am famished, I refused breakfast because of the shame of not providing.

"Thank you, ma," I say with a mouthful. She disappears to the kitchen and I murder the plate. She comes back a few minutes later with a glass of water and to say I am embarrassed would be an understatement. She just handed me this plate and I've already finished everything on it.

She settles down next to me and hands me the glass and attempts to take the plate.

"It's okay, ma. I'll go wash the dishes," it's the least I can do, "If there's washing powder in the house I can help with the laundry. I want to help out around the house," I say and she throws her head back and blows out a heavy sigh.

"I'll let you know when I need help," she says with a hoarse voice, she's trying so hard not to cry.

"Dedani, you are a smart boy. You can still get on your feet and make something of your life," she says and I bite my lower lip.

"MaZulu said you should not cease praying," it's really hard praying. How do I ask God to help me back up when I decided to team up with the devil to get rich? How can God even love me after this?

LONDEKA ZULU

I spent the whole week with my family and my mother spoilt me rotten. She cooked for me three times a day, I swear I gained all the weight I lost while I was staying with Dedani and his family. I feel like myself again, I really just needed to see and be around my people.

They have been doing really good aside from missing me. My stepfather is able to provide for my mother and siblings, as well as his children from the first marriage. The job couldn't have come at a better time; I'm not stressing too much about getting a job and helping them out. I'm still not sure if my gift will allow me to work or I will focus on it alone, I will ask bab'Khoza, Qophelo and I are on our way to see him.

Qophelo insisted on coming to Pietermaritzburg so he can take me to my grandmother's village. I owe him so much for being such a good friend. I know he says he's doing this from the goodness of his heart and expects nothing in return, but I still want to do something nice to show him my appreciation. It's not every friend that goes out of their way to show support, he and Hlubi have been really amazing.

We get to bab'Khoza homestead and he's standing near the rondavel, he has a white cape covering his shoulders. Qophelo stops the car and we both climb out, my spiritual mentor is wearing a big bright smile. I don't know what I would have done without his help, this journey would have been more challenging without his guidance and advice.

"Londeka," he says, holding out his hand. I shake it, returning the same smile that he is wearing.

"Baba, unjani?" I ask and he looks around.

"I can't complain, my daughter. God and the ancestors have been faithful. Unjani wena? How does it feel to be back home?" I heave a sigh and chuckle.

"I'm happy to be back. I felt like I was losing myself back there but now I feel like Londeka again," he places his hand in shoulder and squeezes a little.

"You're still new at this, you will get the hang of things fully with time," he looks behind me and smiles.

"Mkhwenyana, why are you just standing there?" bab'Khoza says to Qophelo and my stomach drops into my stomach.

"Oh no! Baba, Qophelo and I aren't a thing. We are just good friends," I explain and he laughs, a belly deep laughter.

"Come this way," he says and leads the way.

"Should Qophelo come too?" I ask.

"Yes, MaZulu. We are here today because of him," what is that supposed to mean? He didn't even know that Qophelo was... Oh right, I don't have to tell him. The ancestors beat me to it.

Qophelo looks at me with fear in his eyes.

"Don't worry, I'm sure it's nothing serious," I say but I'm not sure if that's true.

We walk into the rondavel after leaving our shoes at the door. There's nothing much in here, just white candles and water then his different regalia's. We all settle down on the reed mats and Qophelo is literally shaking. I want to clasp his hand but I don't think it's appropriate in here.

"Baba, is it necessary for me to wear my cape? I have them in the car," I'm already wearing my white doek.

I brought everything else. He told me at the beginning of this journey to carry my regalia everywhere because I never know when my guides will want me to gear up and work.

"No, today you came as a support system for umkhwenyana. Udokotela akazi laphi,"

What does he mean a doctor can't heal themselves? He's saying this is about Qophelo, not me. And why does he insist on calling him mkhwenyana? He's no one's son-in-law. We are just great friends.

"Son, I know you didn't come here thinking this will happen, but the angels say this is the time for your healing," bab'Khoza says to Qophelo then grabs the box of matches.

He lights up the candles and starts singing. I join in and Qophelo is just sitting next to me scared.

"Londeka cannot help you herself because she cannot see within her home. I am tasked to help you get rid of the dark cloud hanging over your head. You are a very troubled man Qophelo, but you're still a good man, nonetheless. If that wasn't the case then the heavens wouldn't have agreed with MaZulu," I frown, he's just confusing me today.

"Help cannot be forced on you son. I am here, ready to do everything in my power to help you but you need to ask for it and say all you have done that got you here," bab'Khoza explains and Qophelo just breaks down. Jesus Christ! His painful cry hurts me, I cannot help myself so I console him, rubbing his back in circles. I want him to know that he has my support, I'll walk this journey with him until his things are okay.

"I carry a lot on my shoulders baba, I truly need help." he says and bab'Khoza starts praying. I get on my knees and call on the holly spirit too.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 99

LONDEKA ZULU

Qopehlo and I are finally going back to Durban after spending the whole week with Bab'Khoza. There was a lot that needed to be done in order to help him; It wasn't easy on all of us but most especially Qopehlo. He had to live with the guilt of killing his own father all alone for years and years. I now understand why he found solace in drugs; he was desperate to exist in a world that wouldn't remind him of what he did.

Bab'Khoza cleansed him at the river after asking for forgiveness from his father. To our surprise his father's spirit wasn't angry at all, he understood why his own son took his life. He said he long forgave Qophelo and he just asks that he moves him from the shallow grave in the kraal and give him a proper burial. That wasn't too much to ask, Bab'Khoza will go to uMbumbulu with him to carry out the burial rights after the work that needs to be done in Mzumbe is concluded.

There's a lot happening in Qophelo's family. His mother did a lot of things to hurt people and the time to pay for it all is here. I still cannot believe all that was revealed this week, my skin crawls when I think of how evil Qophelo and Ndongoloza's mother is. Her wickedness is the reason why her children faced all the hardships in life. It's payback time, she's going to feel like someone ripped her heart out of her chest. Her favorite child, Ndongoloza's time on earth has come to an end. It should have happened long ago, after Dedani was done with her. But someone their mother wronged years ago healed Ndondo temporarily so he could use Ndodo to further hurt her mother. That someone is the evil sangoma Dedani entered into a covenant with. We can't tell Qophelo, it would break him and send him down a dark path. Imagine knowing that your twin sister is going to die and not be able to stop it from happening. He will hear the news of his sister's demise after it has happened. I wish I could help them but this is their fate.

The car stops and I'm brought back to the now. I look outside the window and we are at the patrol station. Once the attendant is finished pouring patrol Qopheho asks me what I would like to eat. There's a Steers and Nandos here and I am hungry for sure. I ask that we get anything from Steers, he climbs out of the car and heads to get us a bite.

My phone rings, I take it out of the handbag and it's MaMkhize calling me.

What is it now?

"Mama," I answer, closing my eyes.

"Mageba, it's me," yoh!

Dedani needs to rest, honestly. I don't know why he doesn't want to accept that I don't want to be with him.

"Is everything okay?" I ask bored and he heaves a sigh.

"Yes...No... Honestly, I don't know, Mageba. I just feel so lost, I don't know where to start picking up the pieces of my life," he says and sniffs. Is he crying right now?

My job was to help Dedani spiritually and that's done, I'm not his therapist.

"I told you to pray and not give up hope. You are a smart man, Dedani. Yes, you sought dark magic to get ahead but the business ideas came from you. I believe that you can do it again, just give it your all," I say, hoping that my words somehow give him the motivation he needs.

"I hear you, Londeka, I do but I don't know where to start. I don't have anything to my name, absolutely nothing," I can't think for him, that's not on me.

"Dedani, you have that mansion in LaLucia. Why don't you sell that expensive furniture and rent out the house for a monthly income that you can use to support your family and start a business," I pause and take a deep breath, "You also have those cars at the machenics compound. Sell them to him and use the money to invest in something else, you have options Dedani. Pick up the pieces of your life and make the best of it. Please, do not forget what the Lord had done for you when you're back up," I murmur.

We couldn't do all of that to get money when he was crazy because everything would have required his signature.

"Ndabezitha, Zulu kaMalandela ngokulandela izinkomo zamadoda, Zulu omnyama ondlela zimhlophe, Wena kaPhunga noMageba, Wena kaMjokwane kaNdaba, Wena wenkayishana kaMenzi eyaphuza umlaza ngameva, S'thuli sikaNdaba, S'thuli sikaNkombane, Wena kasihhawuhawu siyinkondlo bayikhuzile ngoba ikhuzwe abaphansi nabaphezulu, Wena kanogwaja omuhle ngomlenze, Wena kaMbambelashoba,

Ndabezitha!" he praises me and the Zulu girl in me is ululating.

"Thank you so much," he adds.

"You're welcome. Keep well, Dedani,"

"You too, Mageba. I will always love you." he says and hangs up.

The door opens and Qopelo climbs in with the food, the smell hits my nostrils immediately and I'm salivating.

"I got us burgers, chips and ribs," sounds great.

"Thank you," he hands me my food and I start eating immediately.

Qophelo chuckles, "You are such a foodie," he says and I pout.

I'm the first to kill my food, he offers me the last of his rib and I gladly accept it and wash everything down with the Fanta orange.

"That was great," I say, smiling at him.

"So now that you're full can we talk about the elephant in the room?" he asks and I narrow my eyes.

"What elephant now?" he takes a deep breath.

"Londeka, you heard that I killed my own father, and you haven't said anything to me about it. I'm wondering what's on your mind," huuu!

"I won't lie, I was really shocked to hear that but when you explained why you did it, I understood. I would have done the same if I was in your shoes, Qophelo. I will never judge you for it, I'm not perfect myself," I say, opening my arms. He leans in and we share a hug.

"Thank you, I really needed to hear you say that" tears well up in his eyes and I quickly clasps his hand.

"Plus, you heard Bab'Khoza. You're chosen for me," I joke, and his stoic expression makes me regret it immediately. I know it's something we need to discuss but maybe this wasn't the right time to do it.

"My heart is very welcoming of that, Londeka. I don't know about you," he says and I'm left blinking rapidly.

"Uhm, are you serious?" that's a fair question.

"Yes, Londeka. I have been seeing you in a different light ever since I visited you secretly last year," that was unexpected, I won't even lie.

"I know you might not be feeling the same way at the moment and you don't have to. We can get to know each other, move slowly and eventually we will get there," I'm suddenly shy, I can't look him in the eye.

"Okay, we can do that." my gift has changed my life in every way possible but the last thing I thought would happen is them choosing a life partner for me.

"It's not going to be easy being with someone like me, Qophelo. You understand that right?" he nods vigorously.

"Bab'Khoza sat me down and explained your gift to me Londeka. I know what to expect."

NHLELOZENKOSI NGIDI

Ntuthuko needs to come out of the house right now or I'm leaving him behind. We are late and Viv is going to have our heads on a platter for making her wait at the patrol station in Phoenix like she's lost. That's our meeting point, we want to arrive at my mother-in-laws house together. It's her birthday today and we decided to come together, braai some meat and celebrate her life. She has no idea that we are coming, it's a surprise.

Ntuthuko has been excited about it but now he's worried because he can't get a hold of his father on the phone. He forgot to tell bab'Galloway that we will be gathered in Phoenix before he left for a meeting yesterday. We don't want him coming back from his short trip and finding the house empty, plus I'm sure he'd love to celebrate with the mother of his son.

Yes, the three of us live with my father in-law and it has been amazing. It was supposed to be for a short while because we were finding it difficult to find something we like. Bab'Galloway said we could stay indefinitely if we want to and as much as my man wanted to buy me a house, I told him we could stay with his dad. It's good for their relationship, they lost so many years, and they need all the

catching up. Plus, I don't have to worry about the cooking and cleaning here. The house helper is also kind enough to look after Singabakhe after school and when mommy and daddy need some time alone. Lastly, the house is big and we don't have to worry about privacy.

"Singabakhe, go get your father," I say and my son is about to climb out of the car to get Ntuthuko when he runs out of the house.
FINALLY!

"It's still on voicemail," he says, climbing in. I roll my eyes.

"We discovered that a while ago, babe. I told you to leave a voicemail and send a text, he will get the message when he opens his phone. Hopefully, we will still be celebrating," I say and his phone rings.

"Eish!" he says, showing me the phone.

I start the engine immediately and reverse out.

"Viv, we are on our way... Sorry sis, I'm the one who wasted time... I'll make it up to you." he hangs up the phone and I'm glad he didn't shift the blame to me.

"Why are you looking so beautiful today sthandwa sami?" he's trying to soften me up.

"Am I not always beautiful?" I ask with my eyes fixed on the road.

He chuckles, "You're forward yazi. I think it's time you get a nose enlargement and swollen feet," he says and I'm thrown into a fit of laughter.

"Your jealousy, mfwethu!" he joins me in laughter.

"What's funny?" Singabakhe asks and I roll my eyes. This one can't allow my man and I to be silly in peace.

"Nothing ntwana, continue with your iPad,"

"Daddy, you can't laugh at nothing. That makes no sense," Singa says and I look at Ntuthuko, muffling my laughter.

"Listen to him speaking through the nose, I'm the one that pays the fees of the school that teaches him English to reason with me," I never intervene in father and son matters.

We get to the patrol station in Phoenix and I spot Vivians car. I go and park next to it and the kids see each other and start making noise, they are so excited. Ntuthuko climbs out and runs inside the shop to buy ice. His sister gets in the front passenger seat after helping Singabakhe in her car.

"Were you too having sex while I was waiting here?" she asks and I shake my head.

"I wish. It's hard stealing quickies with Singa around. That boy is everywhere, I just can't," I say and she laughs at my expense.

"Distract him with the TV or something," she advises.

"Quickies aren't supposed to be planned, Viv. Sometimes your brother gets naughty mid conversation while we are standing on the balcony and I just want to drop my panty and bend over, but Singa always shows up right there and then. It's like he has "they want to be nasty" sensor," this girl throws her head back and chortles. These are my life problems she's making fun of.

"Babe, open the boot," Nthutuko shouts and I press the button and boot opens.

"Edward, drive my car," Viv shouts to her brother.

"Cool,"

We get to Ma's house and it's quiet. She must be sitting and watching Nigerian movies and feeling sad that none of us have called or texted her happy birthday. We park outside the yard, we don't want her seeing the cars. We climb out and I tell the children to be quiet; Each one of them is given a present for grandma. Ntuthuko takes the cake, Vivian takes the branded balloons and I get the flowers. We will get the cooler boxes and food afterwards.

The kitchen door is open and we can hear the TV playing. The kids walk in first singing happy birthday and when we walk in, we find the person we have been trying to call cuddled up with the birthday girl on the couch. The siblings and I exchange a look but continue singing, it's none of our business. There are about three gifts on the table and a cake that has been cut.

"Oh, my children," ma says, getting up from the couch with tears of joy streaming down his face.

"This is so beautiful. Why didn't you tell me you were coming? I would have cooked," Viv and I laugh.

"It's your birthday, you can't be cooking. We are here to have a young braai and celebrate with you," -Viv.

"Thank you so much, this means a lot to me," she hugs us all.

"I have to ask," Nthutuko says, and his mother looks down embarrassed.

"Yes, Edward. Your mother and I decided to try again. Life was unfair back then, but we found each other again and we want to be happy," must be nice. They are even in matching gowns.

"Another reason to celebrate I guess," I say.

"That's true," my father in-law says with a huge grin on his face.

"Darling, let's go freshen up," he gets up and holds out his hand to mama. She blushes and links her hand to his.

They are so cute.

"Your father Vivian!" Ntuthuko says and they laugh and high five.

"You two are clowns," I say, walking further in the house to get a vase.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 100

MAWANDE DUMA

We just drove into Mzumbe and I'm super excited to be home. I haven't seen my family since I moved to Johannesburg in January. Everyone is already waiting for me at home, preparing for my big weekend. Saturday is our membeso at my house then Sunday we are sealing everything with our Zulu traditional wedding. I'm grateful to aunt Mbali for organizing everything regarding umembeso and Nhlelo and MaMokwena for organizing umabo that's going to happen at the Ngidi household. I know everything is going to be perfect, they consulted me where they needed to, and I gave them the go ahead.

We drive into the yard and aunt Mbali's car and uncle Hamilton's bakkie are parked next to each other. They got here earlier today, I didn't want them to arrive before today -Thursday- because I didn't want aunt Nobantu to know about my plans. That woman is not to be trusted, her knowing before hand would have given her enough time to come up with plans to sabotage everything. She might have been

involved in a car accident that took her arm and eye but that didn't miraculously cleanse her dark heart.

My husband climbs out of the car and rounds it to open my door. Msebe thinks being pregnant means I am handicapped, he won't allow me to do anything. I'm only five months pregnant but he's treating me like I'm about to pop this baby out. I understand that this is his first born, proof that he doesn't shoot blanks, but he is honestly too much. He is already having a hard time leaving me here because he won't be fussing over me.

A car with Durban number plates drives in, who could it be? The decor people or caterers? I was told that both of them will be coming to finalize a few things with me.

I already trust them both, I mean they helped us with our Lobola celebration.

The car stops in front of Msebe's and three doors open at the same time. It's Qophelo with a young lady and an older man, I haven't seen him in such a long time. The three of them make their way to us.

"Wande," he says with a nervous smile.

This looks and sounds nothing like the evil boy I know.

"Hey," I greet him and his eyes fall on my belly.

"Oh, congratulations," -Qophelo.

"Thank you," Msebe answers and I want to laugh. He is always the one to say thanks, it's like he wants everyone to know that what they are seeing is his hard work.

"You're the father?" Qophelo asks.

"Yes, I am," Msebe clasps my hand and gives me a squeeze.

"How are you MaDuma?" the older man dressed in white asks with a smile plastered across his face.

How does he know my name? Qophelo told him about me?

"I'm very well baba, how are you?"

He nods his head.

"I am well sisi, thank you for asking. My name is Bab'Khoza, and I'd like for you to join us in the lounge, I was sent here by God and my guides to shed some light" he explains and I look at my husband with narrowed eyes.

"Uhm, okay," I respond. What light is he here to shed.

"Wande, I'll call you later," Msebe tries to let go of my hand, but I don't free him.

"Please stay babe," I say and he nods, "I hope it won't be problem, baba. This is my husband, Msebeyelanga Ngidi," I want my person next to me. I'm not sure what's going to be said and how bad it might affect me afterwards.

"This way please," I lead the way and everyone follows behind me. I step into the kitchen and aunt Mbali is busy on the stove, she's probably cooking lunch for everyone who is here to help out.

I greet her and we share a hug then she extends greetings to everyone else. I explain the little Bab'Khoza said to me and she seems confused.

"MaDuma, there's an elder from your father's side of the family in the yard. Please get him for me, he is needed," he mutters, and I believe he's referring to uncle Hamilton.

"He's at the back with the village men," Aunt Mbali.

"I'll get him," Msebe says, walking out of the kitchen.

"Mkhwenyana, please find your mother and sister," Bab'Khoza is looking at Qophelo.

He's married? To the girl next to him? When did that happen?

Footsteps approach and all our eyes move to the door and a second later Ndondo appears, behind her is her husband, her mothers ex. Mzumbe spoke about this abomination the whole of December. Everyone even concluded that Nobantu almost died in the car accident because she had found out about her daughter taking her toy boy.

"Qophelo?" the other twin says, tears glistening in her eyes.

"Hey, half," Qophelo opens his arms and his sister goes into his embrace.

"Where have you been?" Ndondo asks, looking at her twin from head to toe.

"I moved to Eswatini for a while but I'm back now. I've been around with Londeka," he explains, and his sister looks at the girl next to Qophelo, I'm guessing that's Londeka.

"I see," Ndondo looks guilty for some reason. What did she do to this girl?

"The bags?" Qophelo asks, looking at his brother in-law.

"Oh, we wanted to give Mawande and her family space to do their things this weekend. We will be at the Lodge in Shelly Beach" Good, I don't need their negativity anywhere near me.

Ndondo's husband keeps stealing glances at me, what's his business?

"Are you here for Mawande's membeso?" Ndondo asks and Qopehlo shakes his head no. Why would I invite any of them to my things? After all that they have done to me.

"No, where is mom? We all need to talk,"

"Talk about?" -Ndondo.

Msebe walks in with my uncle, he greets everyone with curiosity visible in his eyes.

Can we all move to the lounge and hear what Bab'Khoza came here for.

"Can we all go into one room and sit down so I can explain what brought me here," its like the old man read my mind.

"Princess, you'll find me in the car," Sqalo says to Ndondo.

"Please join, Shozi," -Bab'Khoza.

It seems like no one is spared in this shedding of light.

We start moving to the lounge and settle down on the couches, others take the dining room chairs and gather around. Ndondo walks in with her mother, she went to get her from the bedroom.

Wow, just look at the mighty Nobantu. She's so humbled, it feels good seeing her this way. Call me evil but I am rejoicing over her pain. This woman has hurt me in the most painful ways, it's her turn to go through the motions.

Qophelo starts wailing, it must be hard seeing his mother like this. He gets up and hugs his mother who is now crying with him. The room is tense, everyone is trying to figure out what is happening here.

"Khoza, what brings you here?" uncle Hamilton asks, he's impatient now.

Qophelo and his mother settle on the same couch.

"First of all, let me start by apologizing for showing up unannounced but the ancestors of this family knew about my visit and they are in support of it. That's why they gathered you here to make it easy for me to shed some light and help everyone who needs healing receive it," my heart starts thudding in my chest.

"I do not hold any titles; I am just a man who was chosen to help God's people. Simply put I am a vessel," he adds and my husband drapes an arm around my shoulders. He must have felt how uneasy I just got.

"I will start where it all began," he says and looks at Nobantu who quickly looks down.

"Mama, you're the reason why everyone in here went through trying times," Bab'Khoza says and everyone gasps in shock.

Why though? Nobantu never tried to hide her true colors, what this man is saying shouldn't shock any of them.

"How do you mean?" Nobantu asks, her eyes still glued to the floor.

"Go back to the time when you were still a maiden in Mbumbulu. Do you remember a young man named Mpiyakhe Mngomezulu?" the twins' mother wrinkles her face, trying to think.

"I don't remember anyone by that name," she responds.

"Let me remind you. He was the son of the man that was a dark nyanga in Mbumbulu. All the villagers hated him, no one wanted to be associated with him except for one boy named Bonga," Nobantu and the twins share a look.

"Yes, Bonga the father of your twins. They were close, finger and nail kind of close. Mpiyakhe was in love with you, he expressed this to you in front of your friends. You all laughed at him and he was humiliated, as if that wasn't enough you hailed insults at him. You made him feel worse," wow! Nobantu has always had a heart of a stone. Who does that? She could have politely denied the man.

"As humiliated as he was his feelings never changed. He wanted to leave his father, the person who made everyone hate him. He planned on moving to the city to make it big and come back for you. That's when he decided to rush to his best friend to tell him his plans but he found you and Bonga in the throes of passion and love quickly

turned into hate," is Bab'Khoza narrating inganekwane? Because wow!

"He was hurt and wanted nothing to do with you and Bonga. His father used his son's hurt to his advantage, he told Mpiyakhe that there was a way to make you and Bonga pay for all you did to him. For years and years, he trained his son to become better than him, he trained him to be the darkest and most fearless. The young Mpiyakhe who had love in his heart transformed into the ruthless Madlabantu, eater of man," In unison, my aunt and Ndondo cover their mouths with their hands. Their eyes widened with shock.

"He is behind every bad thing that has ever happened in yours and the twins' lives. He is motivated by hate to destroy you and he managed to do so. Madlabantu turned Bonga into a wild animal, he wanted him to beat you and make you miserable and then Qophelo would feel the need to kill his own father to protect you. He then took Bonga's spirit and used it in the dark spirit world," everyone's jaws are on the ground.

"Mama, you said baba left us. Qophelo killed him? You both lied to me?" Ndondo whimpers but gets no response from their mother who is clutching at her chest, crying silently.

"Ndondoloza wasn't spared either. As your favorite child, Madlabantu wanted to deal with her in a way that will break you down," I watch as the princess shifts uncomfortably, waiting to hear what that Madlabantu man did to her.

"Madlabantu had a client, a politician and businessman from Durban. He had already sought help from him in getting money but the level of his sacrifice was low, he was offering isilwane sakhe cow blood. Madlabantu advised him to go higher and sacrifice with women, the spiritual animal would have sex with the woman while she slept," Ndondoloza drops to her knees and screams. Wait, is her crying

confirmation of what Bab'Khoza is saying? Something along those lines happened to her? Is it that guy my aunt used to brag about?

"Your daughter didn't meet the man by coincidence, it was Madlabantu who made their encounter to happen. They used her and when they were done, they tossed her to the side. You were starting to rot from the inside, Ndongoloza, I'm sure you know what I'm talking about," haibo!

He can't decide to not share some of the information. We are already invested in this.

Sqalo kneels down and takes his wife into his arms, comforting her.

"Your mother unknowingly took you to the man who was responsible for you being a sacrifice to a dark entity for help. Madlabantu decided to heal you temporarily to further hurt your mother. He used things on you that would make Shozi here to see you in a different way," say what? Uncle Hamilton claps once!

"W-What? Their rela... Relationship was orchestrated by that devil?" Nobantu stutters and Bab'Khoza nods.

"Yes, he knew how much you loved Shozi, so he made it happen to break you. To do to you what you did to him with Bonga. That was the last chess piece he moved to ruin you," is all this real?

"Can I please have a glass of water?" Bab'Khoza asks and aunt Mbali quickly gets on her feet and rushes to the kitchen.

This man deserves more than water, his throat needs something strong. He has been revealing sgaxa after sgaxa and Nobantu hasn't even denied anything which can only mean that all of this is true.

"All because of your rudeness mama, had you been nice to that man then all of these things wouldn't have happened," Ndondo sobs. She's an emotional mess. I'm trying to feel for her but I just can't, I don't know my heart is so hardened today.

Aunt Mbali walks back in and hands baba a glass of water, he gulps it down and says thank you.

"We will pray, and I will cleanse Ndondo and Sqalo to break the spell and their eyes will open. There's no love between them," the room goes quiet for a few minutes, with Ndondo sniffing now and again. She is still in Sqalo's arms, they both don't seem to fathom what was just said about their relationship.

"Before I continue, MaDuma. Your parents are asking me to tell you that they saw everything that happened to you and they were not asleep. They say I should tell you that they are proud of the woman you have become, they are in awe of your strength and resilience. They want you to know that they bless your marriage to Ngidi and they wish you nothing but the utmost best," he says and I hold my breath, tears streaming down my face. I wasn't expecting this, It's... Oh my God.

"Can you give them a message back?" I ask and he smiles.

"I don't need to, they are always listening when you speak, sisi," I bury my face in my hands and Msebe envelopes me in his arms. I'm glad I asked him to stay.

"Mawande, they never committed suicide. You did well by never believing that, even if things went bad they would have never chosen to leave you alone," I knew it, my parents loved me. Our life was beautiful, they had absolutely no reason why they could have killed themselves. I gently push Msebe away and look at Bab'Khoza.

"Then what happened to them baba?"

"I need to use the bathroom," aunt Nobantu says, trying to get up from the couch.

"MaDladla, sit sisi. I gave you answers to all that's been happening in your life, tell Mawande the truth. You can't run away from this,"

Bab'Khoza mutters and I quickly look at my aunt. She's shaking, you'd swear we are in the coldest room in the world.

"Tell the truth, ask for forgiveness and repent. God will accept you back to him,"

She starts crying again and anger just bubbles in my stomach.

"Nobantu, what did you do?" I roar and she jumps a little.

"Baby, calm down love. You can't risk shooting your blood pressure," Msebe says, holding me back down. I take a deep breath and start rubbing my belly. Aunt Nobantu's eyes widen, she can't believe that I'm pregnant.

"Ma, please tell the truth. It will set you free, aren't you tired of living with the burden of everything you have done? There's no peace there, come clean now," Qophelo says softly and his mother tries to speak but her voice doesn't come out.

Nobantu clears her throat, "I'm so sorry, Mawande. I didn't mean to do it. I allowed jealousy to drive me, I shouldn't have because Nandi had always been there for my children and I. She tried her best to help us but I always failed her and the twins. I needed someone to blame because blaming myself was hard," she says with a shaking voice and I chuckle.

"What did you do?" I ask through gritted teeth.

"I went to the house to clean while you all went on a weekend getaway in Durban. Your parents had a bar fridge in their bedroom if you can remember, they stored wine in it. I found an open bottle and poured the poison I took from Madlabantu. They drank it the night you came from Durban and it killed them in their sleep," my chest is closing in on me, I'm struggling to breath.

"Look at me baby, look at me," I look at Msebe and he coaches me into taking deep breaths.

"Just like that my love, there you go," he says, holding both my hands.

"You are the devil, Nobantu. Your sister loved you, she tried to help you get away from that useless man and offered to help you start a new life. You never took her up on her offers and you turned around and killed them because of jealousy?" aunt Mbali is genuinely hurt, she was my mother's best friend.

"You will never know peace, Nobantu. Not now or in the after life," she adds, wiping her tears with the back of her hand.

I'm numb, I'm just looking at this woman that cut short my parents' lives and took everything that belonged to them and treated me like a slave for years.

Uncle Hamilton gets up, looks at aunt Nobantu and walks out angrily.

"Tell her the rest, Nobantu," nothing she confesses now will shake me. She did her worst.

"I... Sqalo and I... He was your parents' lawyer..." oh wow! Jesus Christ.

I look at him and his head is thrown back, eyes closed.

"Uhm, we schemed and stole from you. Your parents were never in debt Mawande. We have been sharing the profits of the lodges and I take the monthly allowance that's supposed to go to you," I close my eyes. My heart is broken, they trusted her to take care of me but she was greedy, she wanted everything for herself and her twins.

"I didn't want you to go to university because we'd have to give you your inheritance. I also kept you busy so you didn't have time for boys because the clause in the Will said you will get everything once you graduate or get married and have a child," it all makes sense now. She wasn't really punishing me; she was protecting her livelihood.

Uncle Hamilton walks in the room and charges straight to Nobantu. He grabs her arms and drags her out, she's crying asking my uncle to let go of her.

We all get up and follow behind them. We find him forcing Nobantu on her knees, there's a tyre and a 5 liter bottle on the ground. Oh my God!

"You witch. I'll teach you a lesson today," he says vehemently.

"Duma, please. This is not the way to go on about it," Bab'Khoza says as my uncle puts the tyre around Nobantu's neck.

"I'm begging you, please don't do it," Ndondo is stomping on the ground, crying her eyeballs out.

"Baba, please," Qophelo tries to pull my uncle away from his mother, but the angry uncle Hamilton pushes him with force, he falls hard and Londeka quickly attends to him.

We all watch as he pours petrol over her.

Nobantu has her eyes shut, waiting to be burned alive.

"Bhut'Hamilton please, she's not worth you going to jail," aunt Mbali begs.

Why are they trying to spare the life of this witch? She killed my parents, she doesn't deserve to be alive too.

"Burn her, baba," I demand and everyone looks at me, including uncle Hamilton.

"Sthandwa sami, no. You can't have her death on your conscious," Msebe pleads with me.

"Baba, burn that witch right now!" I repeat and my uncle takes out the lighter from his pocket

CHASING PAVEMENTS

CHAPTER 101

MAWANDE DUMA

I am so tired, it has been a stressful couple of days. I had to deal with the truth of what my aunt did to my parents a day before my big weekend. I hate Nobantu with all my heart, she's the devil's reincarnate, and she deserves to rot in hell. I wanted my uncle to burn her alive but Msebe managed to talk me out of it, he made me realize that I had a lot more to lose. He made me remember the life we are building in Johannesburg and the baby we are waiting for. As angry and hurt as I was I listened and realized that dying would be an easy way out for Nobantu. She must face the music and suffer for all that she has done to me and my late parents.

I'm happy that Qophelo came with Bab'Khoza. Yes, the news he brought weren't really good but they gave me closure. I always believed that my parents didn't take their own lives but hearing someone confirm it felt really good. I was also grateful for the message they sent me through baba, it left me emotional and wishing they were still alive to witness my life with Msebe. I would have loved to see them becoming grandparents, my baby was going to feel so much love from both sides.

I decided to throw Nobantu out of my house, I didn't allow them to leave with anything but their clothes and personal documents. I made sure to take all the important documents so I could be able to claim my inheritance back. Nobantu was begging me to give them a few days to find another place but I refused, she never showed me mercy so why should I?

I asked uncle Hamilton's son to move into my house and he gladly accepted. Msebe suggested that I rebuild the business center and have my cousin run it for me. That's a very good idea, the supermarket meant a lot to my mom and it helped out the villagers a lot.

My husband and I just got back from Durban, we have been there since yesterday morning. We went to the law firm to inform them of what my aunt and Sqalo have been doing with my inheritance for over 10 years. They were horrified, Sqalo was called in but didn't show up, he's obviously scared to face the consequences of his actions. One of the senior partners went through my case file and realized that I'm telling the truth. An internal investigation was opened immediately and once everything is compiled, they will call me to open a case of fraud with the South African Police Services. I can't wait to see them locked up and the key thrown in the ocean. They promised that Sqalo will not run away, they said they will get one of their investigators to follow his every move to make sure that he doesn't skip the country. Nobantu is not someone I'm worried about, she has no means of running away.

"I'm back," Msebe says, walking in with a plastic basin that has water. He is going to wash my feet and give me a massage, my feet are swollen.

"You're the best baby," I say as he places the basin down and sits down on the rug, helping me put my feet in the water.

God, it's already soothing.

"Ma will bring some herbal ointment, she said it will help," he says and I giggle.

MaMokwena is extra with everything that has to do with me. I'm going to miss her once we are back to Johannesburg. We are heading back on Monday. The remaining days here I need to go to the lodges with aunt'Mbali and inform the staff of the change in management. My mother's best friend was kind enough to volunteer to help me check on the lodges while I'm in Johannesburg. I offered her compensation but she refused it, I'll have to find a way to show my appreciation now and again.

"As long as it's not some bitter drink," I say with a smile and Msebe is thrown into a fit of laughter.

"Have you checked your emails today?" He inquires after catching his breath and I shake my head.

"Not yet baby, I will do that later," I asked one of my classmates to email me lessons from our lectures everyday. I am missing classes but I don't want to be behind on lessons.

"How are you feeling today?" he has been asking this a million times since the truth came to light.

"Honestly babe? I feel blessed you know? Yes, my life was miserable after my parents died and before you came along but right now I'm genuinely happy. I feel like all the hardships prepared me for this life I'm living with you. It's beautiful, Ngidi. Your love is so much more than I thought I deserve. We are not perfect but we are in sync, our relationship is healthy and I wish it on everyone. Thank you for everything," I say softly and he is looking at me with so much adoration. I thank God that he led me straight to this man, love was not another battle he wanted me to fight.

"No, Wande. Thank you for everything. I thought I had it all but you came along and I was complete in every way possible babe. This journey with you has been a total bliss. I know it's not always going to be rosey but I promise you that when you tell people that we have faced hardships in our marriage you will never mention me cheating

or abusing you in anyway. Young people have normalized toxicity as hardships, they have accepted being treated badly that a healthy relationship to them seems boring. I pray to God that we be boring and happy together forever," he says, caressing my leg.

"Oh bathong! My Romeo and Juliet," we both turn and find MaMokwena clutching at her chest. My husband and I exchange a look and burst out laughing.

"I didn't mean to eavesdrop; I just couldn't hold myself. You two make me miss my husband, may his beautiful soul continue to rest in peace," she says emotionally.

"Amen," Msebe and I say in unison.

"Langoo, rub her feet very well with this ointment and she will feel some relief. MaDuma danced like tomorrow didn't exist this past weekend," I had to dance, I wasn't going to rob myself off a good time, especially on Sunday. Umabo is very important in our Zulu culture, it's the last ceremony of the Zulu wedding.

"Thank you, mama" I say and she offers me a sweet smile.

"You're welcome baby girl. Come get your food when you're done, Langoo. I am not coming out after I dish out, it's time for my soapies," Ma walks out and her son chuckles.

"A subtle drama queen she is," I agree shame. My mother in-law can be a diva for sure, but we love her like that.

NOBANTU DLADLA

I'm back where I started, Mbumbulu. I promised myself never to come back here but life had other plans for me. Mawande and everyone know the truth about what happened to Nandi and Phila and my secret dealings with Sqalo have also been exposed. I'm left

with nothing now, Mawande threw me out with just my clothes. All my furniture is left there, she refused giving us the Mercedes I bought for Ndongoloza. I honestly wish that they could have gone ahead with burning me alive. I feel like death would have been better than this suffering.

I'm sitting outside, staring in the kraal where I buried Bonga after our son killed him. Qophelo and Bab'Khoza dug up his remains and performed a ritual before burying him properly. His family died a while ago and thank God for that because we didn't have to explain what we were doing to anybody. I know it's a horrible thing to say but if his people were still alive, they would have wanted to involve the police and Qophelo and I would be in jail for murder and it's cover up.

I get up from the bench and walk around the yard, it's cleaner now. It was horrible when we arrived last Thursday night. Weeds were overgrown, the perfect home for a snake. I don't want to mention the house, it's dilapidated on the outside and when we got in that night after breaking the padlock, we all coughed violently after inhaling the dust. We had to clean that same night because we weren't going to sleep in that dirt with spiderwebs and rats. At least the next day Qophelo and Sqalo went into town to buy new beds and blankets and a few important household appliances.

Sqalo then left on Sunday after Bab'Khoza cleansed them. The spell was broken and both their eyes opened, both of them were disgusted. They couldn't believe that they were bewitched into loving each other. Sqalo said he will call Ndongolo soon so they can go get their marriage annulled. I'm relieved that this whole thing is over, it was very hard seeing my daughter and the man I love being all over each

other. But I have lost my daughter, she hates me and blames me for everything. I cannot really blame her, Madlabantu did what he did because I was rude to him.

Speaking of which, Madlabantu came here Saturday morning. He was laughing and gloating about all he has done to me and my children, he said he's happy that I'm destroyed but he will be overjoyed soon because I'm about to feel a pain like no other. I didn't say anything to him, there was really nothing to say. He won, he got his revenge against Bonga and I. He only left when Londeka walked out of the house, you should have seen him running away like mice seeing a cat. Qophelo explained that Londeka has a gift and her ancestors and guides are powerful, that's why Madlabantu ran for the hills. Londeka was heavy on him.

"Mama, we are about to leave," Qophelo says, standing next to me.

"Already? I thought you'll be staying longer," I say with a shaking voice and he heaves a sigh.

"I wish we could, but Bab'Khoza and Londeka have to go back now. What they came here for is done," he explains and I close my eyes. How am I going to survive here with only Ndondo who hates me at the moment?

"What if Madlabantu comes here to attack us?" I ask with tears streaming down my face.

"I doubt he will. You heard the man, he has done his worst to you but if he bothers you then call me and ask Londeka to help out if she can," I wipe my tears.

There's nothing I can say or do to make them stay longer.

"So, you and Londeka are really a thing? The old man calls you son in-law," I have been dying to ask but Qophelo doesn't give me the light of day. This is the longest conversation we have had since we got here.

"We like each other ma, it's going to grow into something bigger. Her ancestors have chosen me for her and I'm happy with that. She's an amazing woman and I feel truly blessed," he says and I caress his face.

"I'm happy for you, Qophelo and I'm sorry for everything that's happened," a tear escapes his eye and I wipe it immediately.

"Qophelo, please come with your mom," Londeka says behind us, the look on her face is not pleasant. My son and I exchange a look and follow behind her. She leads us straight to the bedroom Ndongoloza has been using. Bab'Khoza is standing over the sleeping Ndongoloza. What's happening here? Is my daughter sick again?

"What's happening?" I ask with a heavy heart.

"Londeka, what's happening?" Qophelo asks and she looks at him with tears glistening in his eyes.

"No, please, don't say it," I beg.

"I came to wake her up to say goodbye but she didn't respond. I checked her pulse and there was none. I'm sorry, Ndongoloza is gone," Londeka explains, and it feels like someone just ripped my heart out of my chest. This can't be happening, the apple of my eye cannot be gone. What will I be without the one close to my heart?

"This is a joke right?" Qophelo asks, tears streaming down his face. Londeka shakes her head and takes Qophelo in her arms.

"Move," I say, pushing Bab'Khoza to the side and settling on the edge of the bed. I shake Ndongoloza but she doesn't open her eyes. I start slapping her but still nothing, they can't be right. There's no way Ndongoloza is dead.

"She's gone, MaDladla," -Bab'Khoza.

I grab Ndondo by her dress and wail. This is not happening to me, I can take everything as punishment for everything I've done in my life but not losing Ndondo.

"Mkhwenyana, I know this is difficult but we need to make calls. Her body can't stay here longer than it needs to. She is going to decompose at a faster rate, like I said last week, she was already rotting on the inside before Madlabantu gave her temporary relief." that witch! Why didn't he kill me instead of my daughter? She doesn't deserve to be punished for my mistakes; she wasn't even born when Madlabantu took offense to my rejection of his advances.

SQALO SHOZI

The walls are closing in on me and it's my fault. I fucked up my own life and now I'm full of regrets. I had the perfect life with an amazing wife and children. Viv and I were successful in our careers and our marriage was healthy but I just had to be greedy. I had to listen to outside noises telling me what I was missing out on. I was stupid to think that there was something better than the life God blessed me with.

If I could turn back the hands of time I would go back to the day my colleagues were telling me that it's necessary to have a side chick to make my marriage stronger. If I knew then what I know now I would have excused myself from the toxic conversation. I wouldn't have given into temptation and approached the first woman who was giving me eyes. I wish I stayed faithful to the mother of my children and our union.

Now I've lost it all. My family and career. Mawande went to the office a few days ago and reported me. They called me asking that I come to the office for an emergency, and I didn't show up, it would have been me handing myself over to the authorities. I know what happens to those that have committed fraud. I'm not the type that would survive in prison, I'm too soft for that.

I know the firm is looking for me, that's why I've been hiding in this guest house. I have my passport with me, I'm going to skip the country. I'll run to Lesotho for a little while and then make my way up north, I'm yet to find a country that will be able to accommodate me and my family. Yes, I'm going to ask Vivian to follow me with the kids. It won't be easy to convince her but I'm going to try until she agrees. I love her and I know she loves me too. I made mistakes but I believe they are worth forgiving. I will change for her and our children. This is a lesson learned.

I look at the wristwatch and it's shortly after 9pm. I know Viv has tucked the kids in and it's time for her to sit in front of the TV and enjoy her wine. This is the perfect time to have a conversation with her without any disturbances. I get in the car and drive out of the yard, I won't be coming back. From my house I'm headed straight to the Lesotho-KZN border.

I drove past my house five times to make sure that no one is following me, I can't risk being made and arrested. I quickly punch in the gate code and it slides open. I park my car on the garden so it's hidden by the high wall. I don't want anyone spotting it in case they have the house under surveillance. I climb out and round to the kitchen door, I press the doorbell and wait anxiously for her to come and open.

"Who's that?" Viv asks with a steady voice.

"My love, it's me Sqalo. Please open for me," I say hurriedly, looking from my left to my right.

"Sqalo? What are you doing here at this time?" she asks annoyed.

"I need to talk, please open up," the key turns after a few minutes. What took her so long?

I push the door open and walk inside, stepping on Viv's toes.

"What the hell?" she asks, stepping back.

"I'm sorry babe, really sorry," I try to bend down to sooth her toes but she slaps my head before pushing me away.

"I'm sorry for just showing up Vivian. I just need to talk to you," she folds her arms across her chest with an attitude.

"Does your wife know that you're here?" she asks and I close my eyes. I don't even want to think about my situation with Ndondo and Nobantu.

"It's a long story, my love..." I say and she holds a hand to stop me.

"Your love? Kahle wena! Your love is in Mzumbe or wherever you stay now," this is going to be harder than I expected. She won't fold easily.

"Listen, Viv. I can't stay long, a lot has happened. I know you have an idea of the things I've been doing at work even though I've always denied it. The firm is now aware of my dealing and they are looking for me. I don't have any other choice but to run, I can't go to prison. I wanted to come here and tell you that I love you and I'm really sorry for all the pain that I've caused you. Vivian, I'm going away and I'd like for you and the kids to join me as soon as I've settled. I know this is a lot to ask for but baby please give our family another chance," I beg and she's thrown into a fit of laughter.

"You gotta be kidding me, bhuti. What makes you think I'd leave my perfect life here and follow a fugitive? Please, make it make sense because..." the kitchen door open and I quickly turn. It's two cops in uniform.

"Viv, you called the cops on me?" I ask in disbelief. How can she do this to me? I wanted to run away to save our family and she turns around and gets me arrested. This is just cruel.

"I'm the father of your kids, how could you?" she shakes her head.

"You're a fraudster, Sqalo." she says calmly.

"Hee baba! Woza," one cop pulls me by my arm and cuffs my hands behind my back.

CHASING PAVEMENTS

EPILOGUE

MAWANDE DUMA

6 MONTHS LATER

I'm standing under the tree looking at Msebe walking around the yard and showing off Mnini to the villagers. This is the first-time people who aren't close family and friends are seeing him. My little man turned 3 months a week ago, this has been the happiest time in our lives. I never thought I had so much love in my heart, my son is the center of my universe. There is nothing I wouldn't do for him and his father ofcourse.

To this day I still cannot believe that I am a mom, that God trusted me with a life. Motherhood is the highest calling and I'm grateful that

my womb was blessed enough to accept and carry my baby until he was born. Every time I think of the day I gave birth I can't help myself, I shed a tear because that is the day my life became complete. The minute the nurse handed him to me my heart was alright, I couldn't think of anything more perfect.

It was a Wednesday when I felt a sharp pain in my abdomen and my water broke. From all the pregnancy books I read, I knew it was time. Little Ngidi was ready to come into the world, even though it was 3 weeks earlier than the estimated delivery date. I was panicking because we weren't planning on me giving birth on our baby moon in Durban far from MaMokwena. My whole pregnancy I thought my husband would be the one running around like a headless chicken when the time came but he was so calm.

He drove me to the hospital and he called his mother when he was done opening a file for me and I was in a hospital gown in pain. My mother in-law was so mad at us because she warned us that this would happen. A month before I was due to give birth, we moved to Mzumbe because I needed to be close to mama so she can help me out as a new mom. A few days after we arrived Msebe told me that he planned a baby moon for us. He booked us to stay at Zimbali lodge in Ballito.

I was so excited, I needed the time out before bringing a life into this world. Mama was against it, she said I'll give birth in the street, and it happened.

Mniniwezintozonke Ngidi was born that evening and my life changed forever.

"MaDuma, come sit down and eat. You need to generate milk for my grand baby," that's MaMokwena. I'm not hungry but I'll eat because I don't want to be accused of wanting to stop breastfeeding.

"Okay, Ma," I walk behind her to the main house to take my plate of food. Every room is filled with our relatives, there's no space for me to sit so I go to the rondavel.

I can't wait for this to be over, I just want to take a shower and sleep. I didn't have a goodnight sleep last night, Mnini and I had to sleep in the ancestral rondavel because an imbeleko ritual - introducing a child to the ancestors- was performed for him yesterday. Today people are gathered here to eat the goat that was slaughtered and drink umqombothi.

"Mama ka boy," Msebe says with adoration, walking in with our son in his arms.

"Hey guys, isn't he tired yet?" I ask as he lowers himself next to me.

"I think he has had enough, he's been yawning. Can you feed him so I can put him to sleep," he says and I nod, placing the plate that still has some food on the coffee table. I take Mnini from his father and he coos, urgh! My baby boy is the most handsome little boy ever.

"I bought you a bottle of wine, I figured you'd use a drink after the week we had," I'm salivating. I haven't touched alcohol since the day I found out I was pregnant.

"I'm gonna need to pump some milk before I touch it," I say and my husband laughs.

"There's enough in the fridge babe. Remember you pumped last night and this morning and none of it was touched. You've been breastfeeding him," oh yeah, that's true.

"Let me get you a mug, everyone will think you're drinking tea," Msebe adds and I'm thrown into a fit of laughter.

"You know what wine does to me right?" I ask and he bites his lower lip.

"Why do you think I bought 1.5 liters of it?" he asks and I gasp in shock.

"Ngidi, you naughty boy!" he pecks my lips.

"I'm going to ask mama to sleep with Mnini. We don't need anyone disturbing our night," I'm excited. Our sex life has slowed down since the little man came into the world. After giving birth we had to wait six weeks before we could have sex, doctors' advice. It hasn't been as wild and frequent like it was when I was pregnant but I'm planning to change all of that when we get back to Johannesburg.

"Oh, look at that. He's out," Msebe says with a smile.

"My poor baby, he was tired," I take out my nipple from his mouth and kiss those pink pouted lips.

"Let me put him down," Msebe takes Mnini and this little boy burps like a giant, bathong!

He places him on the bed and covers him with the net, we don't want flies disturbing him.

"MaDuma, come see what we made mfwethu," he says, looking down at our son. My heart can't help but swell with happiness.

I stand up and stride towards him; He snakes his arm around my waist and pulls me closer to him.

"You made me a man amongst men, Mawande. Thank you, sthandwa sami. I will love you till the day I die," he says and kisses my forehead.

"Ngidi, Hlomuka. You made all my dreams a reality."

NTUTHUKO GALLOWAY

"Where are you taking me Ntuthuko?" she asks for the millionth time and I roll my eyes. I'll get away with it because she's blind folded, if she saw me she'd be freaking out. MaHlomuka has been snappy this past few weeks, Singa and I are scared of her.

"We are almost there babe, just exercise a little patience please," I say and she heaves a heavy sigh.

She's going to love this surprise. She has been looking at that house everyday for the past couple of months and I knew I had to get it for her. My wife deserves everything she desires because she has made me the happiest man in the world. Nhlelozenkosi didn't want to ask me to move out of my father's house because she knows I enjoy spending time with my dad, making up for lost time. But the time has come for me to move out of the nest, especially now that my parents are married. Yes, they tied the knot a month ago and I want my family to be out of their house by the time they get back from their honeymoon.

We are here, I'm excited to see her reaction. I press the remote and the gate slides open, I drive in and leave the car just a few feet from the gate. I want her to see it from the outside, her dream house. I climb out of the car and quickly round to her side, I help her out of the car and kiss her cheek. I know she's annoyed as hell right now but that's going to change when I remove the blind fold.

"Ready?" I tease and she groans in frustration.

"Ntuthuko Edward Galloway, I'll murder you," she answers and I'm thrown into a fit of laughter.

"I love you, MaHlomuka. I want to see you happy and I'll go to the ends of the earth to make all your dreams come true," I say and she sniffs. Ahh! She's crying.

I quickly remove the blind fold and she attacks me with a hug, I hold her and allow her to cry in my arms.

"You are everything to me and thank you for being an amazing husband and dad, we are so blessed to have you," she breaks the hug and pecks my lips.

"Now, where are..." she turns and gasps in shock, "Ntuthuko, this is the house I look at every morning on the property website," she says and I nod vigorously.

"It is baby and now you don't have to look at it on the laptop screen. I bought it for you, this is our home," I say and she covers her mouth with both her hands. She's shaking her head, she's in disbelief.

"Don't joke like this, babe," I take her hand and we walk towards the front door.

I take out the key from the pocket of my jeans and unlock the door. She walks inside and starts screening, running further into the house.

"Oh my God!" her happiness means everything to me.

"You happy?" I ask, following her.

"Happy? That doesn't begin to explain what I feel right now. Thank you so much," she says and I walk in the kitchen. She's running her finger over the kitchen counter. There's a bottle of champagne and a "sold" sign on the island. The realtor left it so Nhlelo can take pictures with it, she asked me to send them to her so she can upload them on her profile under the company website.

"Let's take this baby here and look at the rest of the house," I say, grabbing the bottle of champagne.

"Uhm, you can enjoy it on your own," she says and I laugh. Nhlelo never says no to champagne.

"I know it's hot so we will have it back home once it has chilled," I say and she shakes her head.

"I have a surprise of my own, babe. I was going to tell you in a few days, I wanted to really confirm," she mutters and I narrow my eyes.

"Carpe diem, seize the day love," Nhlelo takes a deep breath and walks towards me, she takes my hand and places it on her stomach.

"You're already an amazing father to our son and I know you'll excel with this one too," she says and my eyeballs almost fall off.

"MaHlomuka, are you...? She nods vigorously.

"Yes, we are pregnant babe. I took three tests yesterday morning and they all came back positive," she explains and I cup her face, tears streaming down my face.

"What did I ever do to deserve you and the happiness you bring?" I ask and she wipes my tears.

"I ask myself the same thing every morning I wake up next to you," I close my eyes, drinking in her words.

This explains why she has been temperamental these last few weeks.

"I finally scored," I say, proud of myself and she's thrown into a fit of laughter.

"You're so stupid." she says and leans in for a kiss.

The End!!!!!!!