

The minister's wife



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Chapter 1

Him: "Do.....you..... think I enjoy..... Hurtingyou likethis?" he says with each word accompanied by a kick on my body.

This has been going on for the past 30 minutes or so. The swearing, the kicking, he punches and dragging.

I am laying there crying helplessly crawled up like a fetus protecting my face with my hands. It's just another day in the Mamabolo house hold. Nothing new, nothing unusual here. My husband of 12 years is kicking me like a dog while I lay there defenseless.

You would think I would be used to it by now, but I am not. I refuse to normalize this situation right here. It doesn't matter how many times it has happened before, but its shock me each and every time it happens.

I can't believe that this is what has become of my marriage. I can't believe that this is the man who was once my everything. He was my best friend and there was a time I couldn't imagine my life without him. It's sad how he changed into something unknown to me over the past few years. My once loving husband has now evolved into a monster, a monster that I have grown to fear in my own home.

Him: "Why? Why do you keep pushing me mara Pheladi? Why?"

He asks softly as he crouch in front of me to take a closer look at my face. He grabs both sides of my cheeks with one hand and make me look at him. He doesn't seem to understand what pain he is inflicting on me, even worse now that he is looking at me pitiful.

I close my eyes as he moves his finger to wipe off my tears. How I feel like vomiting right now as he touches me. He doesn't seem to notice that I hate his touches of late with every fiber of my being. If he did maybe he would stop caressing my face right now. Yes, his once gentle and warm touches now makes shiver to a point I even feel like crawling out of my own skin.

Him: "Stop making me this monster my love. I beg you Pheladi" he says with pauses in between while he is rubbing his face.

Words are just failing me right now the only sound I am able to make is to sniff. The best I can do is just to nod because I can't afford to give him silent treatment. I can't take anymore beatings tonight. I have had enough.

Him: "I want to hear you say it won't happen again my love"

Me: "It won't happen again, I promise" I say in between my sniffs and hiccups.

Him: "good" he says before getting up and walking to the bathroom.

I hear the sound of the water running, I guess he is filling up the tub for me to bath. This has become a tradition. After every beating, he prepares bathing water for me filled with essential oils. He will be all lovey-dovey and nursing my wounds like he cares.

You must be asking yourself what is it that I keep doing that pisses him off like this cause clearly I provoke him right? I used

to think so too. That maybe if I stopped doing certain things like going out with friends he would stop beating me up. If I quit my job and stayed at home full time he will have no to reason to get angry but noooooooo I was just fooling myself.

It seems nothing I do is ever good enough because I get beaten up for silly things that can't be pissing off a rational human being.

Like now, I got a beating because I did not answer my phone when he called earlier. Why would I not answer his call? Who was I busy with when he was calling? Those are the silly questions I was asked when he called me into the bedroom. The fact that I was in the kitchen preparing supper and my phone was on a charger in the seating room and I did not hear it ring was not a good enough reason for him.

Him: "Come baby, let's get you cleaned up" he says picking me up from the floor.

He carries me bridal style and walk with me to the bathroom. It is very easy for him to do so this days because I have lost so

much weight in the past few years. No one think anything of it because slander is the new beautiful. To think I did not have issues with my thick boned body and now people keep congratulating me for losing weight. Mxm, If only they knew.

I sit on the edge of the bathtub and watch as he undresses me. Like a caring husband he gently lays me in the bathtub. He takes the sponge and gently wash my body while he is careful enough around my wounds so not to hurt me. He dries me with towel as soon as he is done, gently applies lotion before dressing me up in my sleep wear. He carries me back to the bedroom and tuck me in.

You are confused right, I know. He is very unpredictable this one, he blows cold one minute and hot the next.

Him: "I love you very much" he says planting kisses on my back as soon as he joins me under covers.

He moves closer to spoon me.

Me: "I love you too" I say softly.

Ofcourse I don't mean any of it, that ship has long sailed. I fall asleep crying silently. I cry for me that I lost over the years trying to accommodate this man. I cry for all the dreams that I gave up because they did not fit in his plans. I cry for the young me that was once charmed by this man

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because he was not always like this. I cry for the old me that has stayed in this obviously loveless marriage for years hoping things would get better.

(The next morning)

I woke up to a very painful body, thanks to all the beating I took last night. If it was on any other day I would go back to sleep, unfortunately for me today is Sunday. Sundays are strictly for church to everyone in this house, come rain or sunshine.

I take a look around the room because I am obviously alone on this bed. Tshepo is probably in the study preparing for today's sermon. My eyes lands on a glass of water and two tablets on my side table. Yay, pain killers exactly what I need. I grab the pills and down them with water before rolling out of bed.

I walk to the closet and pick out matching outfits for Tshepo and I. We always wear matching outfits to church. Yep, we are still keeping up the facade of a perfectly happy couple. To people outside, I am the luckiest woman on earth. I have a husband who loves and worship the ground I walk on. If only they knew what transpires behind closed doors.

I make sure that I pick out a dress with long sleeves and covers up to my neckline. I must make sure that all the bruises from last night are covered up, we wouldn't want people asking a lot of questions. I gently lay everything on the bed and walk to the bathroom to take a shower.

I am done in no time. I walk back to the bedroom and apply body lotion and tissue oil all over my body before applying makeup on my face. I get dressed and make my way downstairs.

Me: “Good morning children” I say kissing them on their forehead.

Them: “Morning mom”

I move to the pots and dish soft porridge for myself. Maria, our helper has already prepared breakfast.

I settle in between the kids as we enjoy our breakfast over a light conversation. My kids are my happy place and I pray to God that they never meet that monster that my husband usually transforms into when he is angry for no particular reason.

Tshepo soon walks down looking all shades of hot. It’s true what they say, a devil doesn’t walk around with horns and a tail sticking out. He normally comes in a hot attractive vessel that is well dressed in expensive clothing.

Tshepo: “Good morning fam, today is the day the lord has made” he says cheerfully before kissing the kids on their foreheads and me on both cheeks.

I wonder what is so good about it. Mxm.

Kids: “good morning Dad”

Tshepiso: “Parents can I please skip the choir today, my throats are acting up. I am sure I am coming down with tonsil” she says looking from her father to me and back to him.

I look at Tshepo with raised eyebrows expecting him to answer her. I don’t want to be stepping on anybody’s toes because my body is still sore.

Tshepo: “Ofcourse baby, we wouldn’t want to strain you throats” he says with a smile.

Tshepang: “So, Daddy what are you going to preach about today”

Tshepo: “A very interesting topic my boy, but you will have to wait like everyone and hear the sermon at church” he says brushing his head.

We soon finish up eating and pack our things in the car before driving to church like a perfect God fearing family.

My name is Pheladi Mamabolo, married to Tshepo Mamabolo and we live in Polokwane. We have two children Tshepiso (12 years old daughter) and Tshepang (8 year old son). My husband is a well-known business man in Polokwane and has a ministry in Seshego.

To the outside world he is a man of God who lives by the word. To the world, I am the luckiest woman in town married to Pastor T Mamabolo. When my husband ministers, he touches lives, gives hope to the hopeless and changes people's situation.

I am the minister's wife walk with me on this unpleasant journey as I share with you what transpires behind closed walls of my home.

2

Tshepo: "In the book of Genesis 2 verse 18. We hear the Lord say that it is not good for a man to be alone. That's is why God himself made a suitable helper for him. Amen Bazalwane"

Congregation: "Amen"

Tshepo: "My young couple, now that you have found each other. The word of God in Ephesians 4 verses 2 to 3 tells us that. You need to be completely humble and gentle with one another. You need to be patient with each other and be supportive to each other's dreams. You both need to make every effort to keep the unity of spirit through the bond of peace in your union and home"

Congregation: "Amen" they say clapping hands

Tshepo: "Your house is not a battle field, it's a place where love and peace reign throughout. You are now going to be one, his dreams are yours and yours are his. Her pain is yours and yours is hers. I am going to tell you a secret, when my wife is sick, I

feel her pain. When she burns her beautiful fingers cooking for us, I feel the pain because she and I are one”

I faintly smile at my daughter who takes my hand in hers and squeeze it tight while she keeps a straight face, a gesture I don't understand. It's as if she is offering me comfort but that can't be it because she doesn't know about the abuse. No one else knows about it except Tshepo and his family who never did anything when I first reported in to them.

The congregations is busy clapping their hands while others keep shouting hallelujah. I am seated here listening to my husband preach to a young couple about to get married next month. Some people are just hypocrites, preaching one thing and practicing something else. What makes me angrier is his nerve to lie in this holy place. I pray that this young man will not make his young wife go through even half of what I have been through.

Man like my husband can make you question the existence of God sometimes. I know I shouldn't be speaking like this because I do know that God exist but sometimes his silence is just too much. His silence when I am being beaten up, cheated

on and verbally insulted sometimes makes me question his existence. I am disturbed from my thoughts by someone nudging me.

Me: “Mmm?” I say looking at the older woman next to me.

She doesn't say anything but directs my attention to my husband in front.

Tshepo: “Mma Mamabolo, could you please come and join me in front as I bless this young couple and wish them well on the beautiful journey they are about to undertake” he says with a beautiful smile.

A smile I once fell in love with all those years ago, how I wish my husband was like this even when there was no audience around. Loving and patient. I stand up and make my way to the front while the congregation is on its feet singing along with the church choir. I get to the front and do my duties as the minister's wife and stand side by side with husband in front as he bless the young couple. I hug both the bride and the groom at the end of the blessings and wish them all the best.

They look so in love which remind me of the young us all those years ago. We had dreams and most importantly we were in love.

Every Sunday after church, my family and I helps out at the center run by the church. It was built for orphans

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survivors of abuse with nowhere else to go (how ironic) and old people whose families are ill-treating. I watch with a smile on my face as my son is busy feeding a small child about 2 years of age. I wonder what he will grow up to be. My fear is for him to grow up and be like his father. A monster who rules by the fist and thrive on inflicting fear. My son should be the reason I change my situation. I can't let him grow up in this situation.

Koko Tlou: "Powerful sermon by your husband today. As usual I am sure the heavens are singing hallelujahs for all the souls he is saving through his preaching" she says cheerfully disturbing my thoughts.

I smile and nod as I continue chopping the veggies.

Sister Bethina: “He is a true man of God. Nothing like this fake pastors we see every day on TV”

Koko Tlou: “Not every pastor has God’s anointing. Some are just wolves hiding in sheep clothing to scam money from their congregations. Not even once have I ever had Pastor Mamabolo requesting money from us. Other than the offerings we give here in church on Sundays which we know very well that it is used for the center. We should count ourselves very lucky to have him as our spiritual leader”

I smile and nod as they continue singing praises of their precious Pastor. If only they knew that people hide behind the word of God for different reasons. Some hide to scam people money while others like my husband, the most dangerous of them all hide their dirty laundry. I say he is the most dangerous of all the fake pastors because he hides his abuse very well. Who would believe that a man of God, who not only ministers but also takes care of his community is a woman beater?

Unfortunately the man they know and the one I live with are two different people.

Sister Bethina: “You are a very lucky woman to be married to such a man. Some of us are married to heathens who drink and sleep all day on Sunday” she says shaking her head

Me: “Blessed indeed. So sister Bethina does your husband start a fights when he is drunk” I ask curiously

Sister Bethina: “Mang John? Never. He is a sweetheart yena shame, if only he could quite his drinking and start attending church with me. I mean lenna, I would love to have my whole family present at church like most families here. But John says he doesn’t need a church to worship God, or a pastor to pray for him as God is capable of hearing his prayers wherever he is” she says the last part shrugging her shoulders.

Me: “Interesting” I say softly.

I think she is the lucky one. I would trade my husband for any man, God fearing or not as long as he would love and protect me like a husband is supposed to. People think that being married to Tshepo is the biggest achievement like I have made it in life. How can they mistaken my curse for a blessing? If only they knew that the grass is greener on the other side because it's either fake or watered with someone's tears and blood.

If only they knew that my body is covered in bruises as we speak. If only they knew that I had to sneak out during the sermon to go to the bathroom and take pain killers because the pain was getting unbearable. If only they knew that I would have liked to wear a different dress today but it would not have covered up my bruises and scars. If only they knew that I went to sleep in a heavy heart last night while I cried myself to sleep.

I think Sister Bethina's husband is the most intelligent of us all. I mean he knows better than to follow a man who thinks God hears only his prayers and no one else. I remember my old friend from my backroom renting days who never liked Tshepo. She used to call him 'Mr Holier than thou', I never understood why until few years ago.

I wipe my hands and walk away from these woman who can't seems to stop singing praises for Tshepo. I meet Mmabatho by the door on her way out.

Mmabatho: "After noon Ma" she says avoiding eye contact.

Me: "Afternoon Batho" I say with a forced smile.

Mmabatho is our choir leader and she and my husband have been having an affair for some time now. Something they think I don't know but I do, especially after my name was used on his medical aid to have an abortion done for her.

I walk the kitchen and check on the pots that are already on the stove. I smell his scent before I even know he is here. My heart sink because I know what he was up to. His level of disrespect for me has become too much for me to handle. I have cried enough and I will not be shedding anymore tears for him or this marriage.

Tshepo: “My love I need to go to Cape Town tomorrow to take care of business. I know its short notice but I will make it up to you” he says hugging me from behind and placing a soft kiss on my neck.

Me: “How long will you be gone?” I ask while busy stirring the pots

Tshepo: “Just 2 weeks. Will you and the kids cope?”

Me: “Its fine, I understand. Our business put food on the table” I says softly.

Tshepo: “Thank you for understanding, could we please leave so that you can start packing clothes for me”

I smile and nod. Ofcouse I am understanding and yes I will cope. Two weeks of his absence is all I need. I don't care if he is really going on a business trip or not. At least I get two weeks without his presence, enough time for me to meet my lawyers and start working on the divorce papers. I am done with this marriage, my kids and I deserve better.

3

Let's take it back to where it all started, maybe together we could figure out where it all went wrong. Maybe we can be able to identify all the signs that were there but I failed to notice.

It now 14 years ago and I am 20 years old. I am doing my teaching practical at a school in Seshego. My name at this point in time is Pheladi Molopa from Glen Cowie in Sekhukhune district. I am new at this place and I don't know anyone, I am renting a back room not far from my school.

Today is Sunday and I need to find myself a church to attend while I am this side. I am a God fearing child who was raised in a God fearing home. One of the tenants in the yard tells me she is off to attend a church in a zone 2 after she heard me tell my mom over the phone that I am going church hunting. I decide to tag along with her and hope to enjoy the service there.

We drive to church in my sgedlembe (Jalopy) as we get to know each other. Okay maybe the car is far from being a sgedlembe but it's not new either. My mother passed in on to me when she bought a new one last year.

The drive with Cate is very pleasant, she is bubbly, energetic and outspoken while I am what you would call 'the shy type'. Cate directs me to church while she gives me her whole life story in just 10 minutes. I think I like her already.

We soon arrive at church. Its big and modest you can tell they have a large following. We are welcomed and ushered to our seats the moment we walk in. The service is beautiful and I am in love with the way the pastor ministers. His delivery of the scripture is somewhat interesting and powerful. I have now decided Glory to God Ministries is going to be my home during my time here.

"Hi, my name is Thapelo and I have never seen you here before is it your first time in our church" says the guy who was playing the keyboard earlier.

It's now after church and I am waiting for Cate to come back from the ladies so that we can make our way home.

Me: "Hi and yes it's my first time" I say with I smile.

“Thapelo, they are looking for you at the back” says another guy who just reached where we are standing.

Thapelo: “I hope to see you around” he says before walking off.

“Hi, I hope my brother was not bothering you”

“No he wasn’t” I say giving him a smile.

“My name is Tshepo Mamabolo and I hope you enjoyed the service today”

Me: “Actually I did”

Tshepo: “So we will be seeing you back here again soon”

Me: “Every Sunday, I plan to make GTG my church away from home”

Tshepo: "Church away from home, where is home?"

Me: "Glen Cowie"

Tshepo: "Glen Cowie as in Guardian Angel?"

Me: "Yes, Guardian is in Glen Cowie"

Tshepo: "Okay. Since you plan on making us a church away from home maybe you can join us for bible study on Wednesdays at 17:30 if you are free"

Me: "I will make time, thanks for the invite"

Tshepo: "I will see you on Wednesday then" he says walking off as soon as Cate arrived.

Cate: “Ne areng Mr holier than thou?” she says as soon as we get to the car.

Me: “Wow Cate ‘Mr. holier than thou’ come on” I say laughing

We drove back to our rooms with Cate telling me about the whole Mamabolo dynasty

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when and how the church was started and how it got to where it is now. Apparently, the pastor who runs the church now is the 3rd generation in the Mamabolo house hold to do so. The church was passed on from one generation to the other with each generation getting better and better at ministering and growing the church.

So Wednesday came and after School I went home and prepared myself to attend the Bible study at GTG. I drove alone because Cate was preparing for a test that she was writing the

next day. You see Cate was a student at Capricorn FET College studying electrical engineering.

When I arrived at church I was shocked to see how packed the place was. I wasn't expecting a large crowd especially considering that the Bible study was only for the youth and it was during the week. I was welcomed by Thapelo at the door.

We stood there for some time while making small conversations. He was down to earth and easy to get along with. He had this soft spoken aura about him. I later learned that it was not just an act, Thapelo is still the most humble person I have ever met. Down to earth and patient. To this day I have never seen him lose his cool no matter how hostile the situation is.

Tshepo: "Hi, you came? Thank you very much for honoring my invitation" he said excitedly giving me a hug.

Thapelo stood there shocked at his brother who just disturbed our conversation without any care in the world. The guy came

out of nowhere and boom we were sharing hugs like old friends. All I could do was smile shyly and nod.

Tshepo: "She did say she is here with me right?" he said to his brother who looked very disappointed.

Thapelo looked at me with eyes seeking an answer and all I could do was just smile. I mean what do you say to that?

Thapelo: "I guess I didn't not give her the chance to explain that since I was talking too much. You know how I get sometimes. It was great seeing you again Pheladi, I guess I will be seeing you around" he said with a smile before walking off.

Tshepo and I stood there making small talk until it was time for us to get started. He offered me a chair before taking his place in the middle of a center to lead the Bible study. It was amazing how good he was, his interpretation of the word was mature and interestingly beautiful.

Tshepo was also down to earth but not at Thapelo's level. He had this leadership thing about him and he was good with his tongue. When he spoke, he spoke with such authority and confidence, something I found lacking in Thapelo.

It was clear that as much as Thapelo was older than Tshepo, he didn't possess Tshepo's leadership or communication skills. It's no surprise that Tshepo grew up to take over the ministry after his father's passing even though he was not the first born male child.

After the Bible study session Tshepo insisted on driving me home because it was not safe to drive alone at night as a woman while making his brother to drive behind us so that they could drive back together in one car. From this day going forward Tshepo and I grew closer and eventually fell in love.

He was only a year older than me and at the time doing his second degree because God showed him that he is not the type to seek employment but his destiny was to be a business man and create employment.

Now that I am recapping all this, I think Tshepo has always been a bully. A bully that used his tongue as the most dangerous weapon. He could charm his way out of a very sticky situation by just using words just like he charmed his way into my life and later my heart.

He also had a sense of entitlement, if he wanted something he would make sure he gets it. It's all clear now, he wanted me and he went out of his way to get me disregarding his own brother's feelings. I am talking about his brother because I later learned that Tshepo knew how Thapelo had a thing for me and still went out of his way to court me.

I must have been blinded by love not to notice this up until now when it's way too late. But how many of us could have seen this as a red flag?

4

I have never really understood the term 'Nyala onyele' until I got married to Tshepo Mamabolo. I thought people were exaggerating. I mean how can something so beautiful, something that is encouraged by all religions be so bad? I thought maybe those who are not happy in their marriages must have been unhappy even when they were still dating. But I was wrong, experience taught me that marriage is nothing like dating.

You see dating is easy but marriage can be hard. I learned that you cannot really say you know a person no matter how many years you have been dating. I say this because I only got to know the real Tshepo after we got married.

Maybe this is because before getting married we lived separately and only spend few hours together. It was only when we started living together and being in each other's spaces most hours of the day that we truly got to know each other very well. Only then did we notice and get to live with each other's annoying habits. Tshepo and I dated for a whole year before we got married.

In the year that we were together, he was the best boyfriend ever. He was patient, loving and supportive of all my dreams. I enjoyed his company and he enjoyed mine too. He never pressurized me into doing anything I did not feel comfortable with. For example, I believed in no sex before marriage and he understood and waited until I was his wife both traditionally and legally before he had his ways with me.

I use the phrase 'had his ways with me' because I never really got to enjoy sex with Tshepo. It was always about him, how he wanted it, when he wanted it and where he wanted it. My sexual needs were never taken into consideration. I still remember the night I cried myself to sleep because I was so horny and my husband told me he was not in the mood. I did not cry because he said he is not in the mood, I cried because that was always his response whenever I made sexual advances. It happened so often I even stopped initiating sex.

My marriage to Tshepo made me question our marriage system so many times and each time I would come back with one conclusion. The day he paid lobola for me is the day I become his possession. He owned me like he owned his cars, and since he owned me he could do whatever he pleased with me like he could go where ever he wanted with his car. I say this because

my journey to hell began as soon as I became Mrs. Pheladi Mamabolo.

I had to change my dreams to accommodate his and make decisions that favored him. I lived for him and my life became about him and his dreams. Maybe I should stop putting all the blame on him and share in his responsibility of how things turned out. Maybe I was too submissive in my marriage that I substituted my dreams and goals for his. Like the time I turned down a job in Bloemfontein because it was far from him and he couldn't just pack up and leave. Well I thought relationships are about compromises but what happens when you are the only one compromising?

If you have never been married before, don't let my experience with Tshupo scare you off. Marriage is a beautiful thing, I would like to believe that. It's not like we did not have our happy days because we did. You can even check his Facebook page and Instagram you would be inspired our love stories there. Our happy moments were all captured and shared with the world. We were part of the #couple goals, #love lives here #my smile

keeper #happily married and so on, even though most of it was just a facade.

I don't doubt that Tshepo ever loved me because I know he did like I once loved him. Maybe he loved me too much that his love for me became an obsession

an obsession that later became toxic. I did not realize then because sometimes we see certain gestures as love only to realize it's an obsession later on. I say obsession now because I see his behavior was not normal neither was it healthy love. Too bad I am only seeing this now.

For one, Tshepo would call me every two hours or so just to check up on me even when he knew I was at work. My friends and colleagues found it weird at first and later got used to it. I did not have a problem with it either because it meant my husband loves me, cares about me and misses me until I learned he was just keeping tabs on me. Until I realized he was using the calls to check where I was, who I was with and what I was doing.

As if the calls were not enough, I was driven everywhere I wanted to go. The fact that he was not employed but owned a

business worked to his advantage. He was always available. He would drive me to work in the morning and collect me after school. He was always on time and readily available to drive me around. Just like the phone calls I did not have a problem with it at first, in fact I enjoyed it.

This also made me feel special, I thought my husband was romantic until it became too much. It became too much because it meant I couldn't go anywhere without his knowledge or approval. It suddenly felt wrong because sometimes he would collect me from school and drop me off at home but I would want to go to the complex to buy few things but I had to wait for him to come back and drive me as if I did not know how to drive or there weren't enough cars in the yard.

I couldn't even catch a lift from a friend male or female because I would have to answer why I couldn't wait for him. He really had his ways to make sure he knew exactly where I am. Come to think of it, I was a prisoner in my own marriage.

As if that was not enough, he made me cut off my friends and reduce communication with some of my cousins. Cut them off because they were too loud, too ratchet or did not live their

lives in a Godly manner. He did not trust them around me because they were likely to become a bad influence in my life. He said as a married woman I do not need friends, especially those who are not yet married. We have nothing in common, how would they advise me on to treat my husband when they don't have one.

It is now clear Tshepo was obsessed, manipulative, possessive and a stalker. More red flags right? But what would you have done if you were me? Because clearly I mistaken all of this for love.

5

It's been a week since Tshepo went to Cape Town, as usual he is calling every 2 hours or so. How tiring. If only he knows what awaits him when he gets back from his trip. Truth be told his presence is not even missed instead I used my new found freedom to plan my future away from him. I have been staying with this man for 14 years now and I am shit scared of the road ahead. I know it's not going to be easy but I don't expect it to be, hence I believe it will all be worth it in the end.

I can't even say I know where to start but I am happy that the first step has been taken. I have meet with my lawyer a few times and a divorce petition has been filled with the court, now I shall let the process take its course. I have chosen to do my things silently because I don't want anyone trying to talk me out of the divorce. It has happened few times before, this is not my first attempt at leaving. The first attempt and many times after that, I changed my mind before even meeting with a lawyer because I allowed people's voices to fill my head and convince me I was making a wrong move.

People will always try to talk you out of leaving maybe because the pain you feel is not what they experience. I have had my in-

laws say 'don't give up on him he will change', 'he loves you and he won't survive the breakup', my all-time favorite 'You are a Christian, give it all to God and have faith in him, he alone will change your situation'. I have done all that, prayed to God, live in hope and faith that my situation will change but still things are getting worse and worse. My husband is beyond redemption and my marriage to him is beyond salvation. The sooner I accept that the less difficult it will be for me to walk away.

No one can say I was a coward and gave it all up easily because my pain is not theirs. I stayed for 14 whole years hoping for things to get better but they never did. Instead they got worse, the cuts became deeper and the scars multiplied. I stayed because I thought staying signified strength and resilient but Tshepo saw this as a weakness, a weakness he could feed on. But now I am done feeding his weakness because he is a weakling in this marriage not me. If he wasn't a weakling he wouldn't want to rule by installing fear. I allowed him to get away with a lot in the past but those days are gone.

Speak of the devil, I frown as I take a look at my phone with his name flashing on my screen. It must have been two hours

already since we last spoke, I guess it's time to check in on what I am being up to.

Me: "Kolobe" I say trying to sound respectful as always.

Tshepo: "My love, how are things at home"

Me: "All is well, how are things in Cape Town?"

Tshepo: "That good to hear, Cape Town is beautiful baby, I wish you were here to experience all this beauty with me"

Me: "Well, I would have loved to be there too. I was just not invited"

Tshepo: "Next time my love. I promise?"

Let me just roll my eyes because there will be no next time. I just laugh because I have no words for him and I wouldn't want him to suspect what I am up to.

Tshepo: "Is Tshepang back from school, I would like to speak to him please"

Wow

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that's his way of checking if I am at home.

Me: "He is let me call him for you"

I call Tshepang who comes running, my happy child energetic as always.

Tshepo: "Pheladi, I love you very much. I hope you know that"

Me: "I love you too, Kolobe. A lot" I say before handing the phone to Tshepang.

I walk away thinking of the lies we tell. How many times have we used the word 'I love you' when we don't even mean it? Do we even understand what love is? It must be true, the line between love and hate is very thin, for I have nothing but hate for the man once loved.

If you must know, Mmabatho also left Seshego the day my husband left for Cape Town. I have no doubt that they are together in Cape Town as we speak. I wish I can confidently say that my husband never cheated on me before Mmabatho. Because then I would find it easy to shift the blame from him to her. Isn't that what we always do? Blame the other woman for our husband's betrayal. Insulting and threaten her as if she is the one who broke the marriage vows that she never even took. I guess attacking and insulting the other woman is always easier than dealing with the real problem. THE CHEATING SPOUSE!

To be quite honest my husband cheated on me so many times way before we even got married. He just hid it well. I guess with a friendly personality like his, it was just easy for him to hide it.

They were all just his 'friends'. What a hypocrite right, I wasn't allowed to have male friends but this girls could be friends with him. So like many I choose to buy the whole friends story because I was more comfortable with that than accepting he could be cheat on me.

I remember once when I confronted him about my suspicions and I was sold a beautiful lie. "How can I cheat on you when everyone knows I am with you? I mean I have never hidden you. Everyone knows I love you" I sat down and really thought about it. He couldn't have been cheating on me because I was always plastered all over his social media pages. Which girl would date a guy who clearly loves 'Pheladi' and shouts it to the whole world every chance he got?

Imagine my shock when my suspicions were proven right. Imagine the heartbreak and disappointment. Finding out about Tshepo's infidelities was the most heart shattering moment ever. I went through all sorts of emotions, emotions such as denial, shame, emptiness and hurt. I started to blame myself, I wasn't enough for him. If I was he wouldn't have cheated on me. I started compering myself to the woman he was cheating with, trying to identify where I was lacking. Maybe if I fixed

myself, maybe if he got it all from me, maybe, maybe just maybe he would be satisfied and stop cheating on me.

The worse part was learning that I possessed more than most of this woman he was cheating with. None of them were prettier, more intelligent or had personalities better than mine. So why would he continue cheating on me? I soon learned that his cheating ways had nothing to do with me or my shortcomings. That's just who Tshepo is, a cheater. The sooner I accepted this the better things became for me because I also stopped blaming the other woman.

Mmabatho like other woman before her is as much as a victim of Tshepo as I am. For now she is blinded by love, manipulation and my husband's charming and conniving nature. I know it well because I was once in her shoes, the question is how long will she survive in mine? Now that I am leaving an opening, will she find it easy to be this Minister's wife?

6

Tshepiso: "My beautiful mother"

She says bringing me back from my thoughts. My body is here but my mind is somewhere else. That has been happening a lot lately, thinking about what the future holds for me and my kids. I can't help but worry about how this whole divorce is going to affect them. Knowing Tshepo, he is not going to give up without a fight and things are likely to get very messy.

All I know is that staying will cause more damage to them than leaving. I am doing this for them, they might not see it now but they will thank me later. Being a parent is a very difficult task because whatever decision you take will end up affecting the kids one way or the other. I'd rather leave and have them being angry at me now than let them grow up in this toxic environment that will scare and damage them for life.

Me: "Yes baby" I say giving her a very warm smile.

Tshepiso: "I just wanted to say that I love and appreciate you very much. You will always be my number one" she says throwing herself at me.

Me: "aaaa baby, I love you too my sweet child" I say shedding a tear.

Tshepiso: "Mma, you are beautiful inside and out, never let anything change that about you. You are stronger than you know. Tshepang and I are lucky to have you as a mother. You are loved Pheladi"

Me: "I love you too my babies, you are my life and I live for you"

Tshepiso: "As long as you don't forget to live for yourself too mother. Your life did not stop when we were born" she says breaking the hug

Me: "When did you become this smart?" I say squeezing her chubby cheeks.

Tshepiso: “Well, I am my mother’s daughter”

I smile as I watch her walk to the kitchen. My daughter just spoke a life into me unaware, she gave me a strength I did not know I needed. I am now convinced that the divorce is exactly what I need, if I can’t do it for me I must do it for my kids. I need to be a perfect example to them, teach them that ‘Sehla sa mmuši ke go katoga’ meaning the best way to deal with a toxic environment is to move away from it.

This kinds of moments with my daughter are very emotional for me always. I might have not shared this with you before but Tshepiso is my miracle baby. My pregnancy with her was not an easy one. Most husbands would like to protect their wives when their carrying their first child but mine made my pregnancy unbearable with his behavior. It might have been before the physical abuse but his cheating ways were too much for me, so much so that I nearly lost my child.

It’s one thing suspecting that your husband is cheating on you and finding proof that he is. He can lie and make up excuses while promising you that he will end things with the other

woman because he loves you more. Isn't that what we always want to hear? For a cheater to tell you that it's you that they love, it's you that they need, they can't leave their lives without you and you shouldn't worry about the other woman because she was just a mistake. Because that what we always want to hear right

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I don't love her it's you I love.

I wish that's all had to deal with when it came to Tshepo's infidelities. Alas, I always had to deal with the worst case scenarios. I still remember when I was 4 months pregnant with Tshepiso and I had to be rushed to an emergency ward because I was attacked by one of Tshepo's mistresses. Worse of all she was also pregnant with his child imagine.

As if finding out that he impregnated another woman was not enough, she had to come to my home, disrespect me by attacking me verbally and physically. I remember the events of that day very well. We were still staying in Seshego at his home while our house was under construction. I was coming from work and as usual I was driven home by Tshepo himself. He did not stay long after dropping me off, he said something about

going to assist his father with something at church of which I did not have a problem with.

A knock came through after few minutes of him going out. My mother in law was in the back yard picking spinach from her garden so I answered the knock. I was meet by 3 woman on the other side of the door. They greeted and told me they were here to see me. My mistake was letting them in because I assumed they were probably from church and needed some spiritual guidance or wanted to discuss something regarding one of my learners assuming they had kids or a child in my class. But that was not the case.

Imagine my shock when one of them told me how selfish I was. How I think I am better than other people because I have a ring on my finger. How Tshepo didn't love me but had to marry me since I was his parent's choice (news to my ears). The 3 ladies went on and on and on, but what caught my attention was how selfish I was for telling Tshepo to instruct one of the ladies to have an abortion because the child will never be welcomed in my house. How could Tshepo use my name to solve problems I did not even know about, problems he created on his own?

“You are selfish Pheladi, may the God that you pray struck you down for thinking the child that you carrying has more right to life than the one that I am carrying because Tshepo did not marry me. How could you expect me to go ahead and have an abortion while you carry your child full term? My child has as much right to live as that brat you are carrying. This child is not a mistake but a results of an act of love between Tshepo and I. If you think I will kill my child to make you feel better about your failed marriage forget it. I am keeping this child and his father will take care of him because his father loves him like he loves his mother” this were her words to me verbatim.

I tried to defend myself and tell them that I did not know what they were talking about. But that alone seemed to set them off. Next thing I knew the 3 ladies were on their feet and I was on the ground taking kicks to my stomach and body. They kept shouting that they will give me the abortion that I asked for by making sure I lose the child that I am carrying. I was lucky enough my mother in-law came back to the house when she did because it could have been worse.

I woke up in Mediclinic a day later with a broken heart, bruised belly and some internal bleedings. From that day forward my pregnancy became high risk. I was discharged from the hospital

3 weeks later. I wanted to pack up my bags and leave but the elders sat down and decided my fate for me. I was young and believed them when they said Tshepo was remorseful and had moment of weakness when he slept with that lady. She meant nothing to him so did the sex.

Unlike everyone else my brother told me to leave his sorry ass but was later painted as the bad person because he was trying to break my marriage and not help me build it. I was young and scared of being labelled a divorcee at the age of 22 so I chose to forgive Tshepo and work on my marriage while prayed for the best.

I was in and out of the hospital for the remainder of my pregnancy until I gave birth at 36 weeks, 4 weeks before the actual due date. My baby had to breathe through machines for the first 2 days on earth due to respiratory distress syndrome. I have never prayed to God like I prayed in that two days. God came through for us and she survived even though we had to stay at the hospital for a week since doctors had to keep a close eye on her.

I now smile because she has grown to be a strong, beautiful, loving and smart child who respects her parents and most importantly dedicate herself to the Lord and praises him through singing in the church choir.

You will think that Tshepo would have learned from nearly losing his first and changed with ways but no he did not. Rumor has it that he has 7 known children, 2 which are mine, 1 whose' mother nearly killed me and my child born 2 months after Tshepo, 2 that he confessed to after I threatened to leave and 2 others that I hear about but no proof that they are indeed his. Did I tell you that one of them is actually 2 months old?

7

Today is the day Tshepo is coming back from his little business trip. I am a bit uneasy with what might transpire. I have played different scenarios of how things might go down more than a million times in my mind, none of which plays out well. In all the scenarios that I played, there is mostly swearing, fighting and deadly threats from him but in all of them I leave one way or the other. I am more than determined to leave this God forsaken marriage and nothing or no one can stop me from leaving.

I decided I will not be running away from my house because this is my children's home. If there is anyone who must leave it's him, I have done nothing wrong to disrespect him and our marriage. So I am not going anywhere. I worked too damn hard to build this house from scratch, my sweats, blood and tears all went into making this house a home that it is today.

My brother suggested I find a place of my own and move out but I am determined not to disrupt my kids' routine by removing them from a place they have known as their home all their lives. As much as things are about to change, a lot still has to remain the same for the sake of my children's sanity.

Our family members are already here sitting in the dining room my brother, mother in-law, Thapelo and his uncles. None of them knows why they are here except for my brother who has been my pillar of strength throughout the past 2 weeks. My adviser and confidant. The rest just assumed I am throwing my husband a surprise welcome home lunch, if only they knew the surprise is about to be on them. I want them to bear witness as I hand him the divorce papers. My mind is already made up and I have no room for their advices, they better not attempt to give any.

My heart races as I hear the gate slide open, I look through the kitchen window curtains and see his car drive in. Why am I feeling sick all of a sudden? My knees are getting weak, heart rate elevated and my breathing just intensified. Breathe Pheladi, breathe, in and out, I say to myself to come down my nerves. I can definitely do this, there is no turning back now. The end goal is to leave this marriage alive because staying is not an option.

Thank God for my brother who walks in and pull me into his embrace just in a nick of time. In his arm I feel safe and I

appreciate his presence as I am about to take this huge step. “No need to be scared, I am here and I won’t let anything happen to you” he whispers to me. Just the words I needed to hear, I nod rapidly as I try to convince myself that I am strong enough to do this. I feel him tightening his hold around my body as the front door opens.

Tshepo: “Honey I am home” he says cheerfully.

There he is, holding a bouquets of red roses and flashing a warm beautiful smile as he walks through the door. A smile that used to melt my heart and send shock waves throughout my entire body. I free myself from my brother’s hold and force a smile on my face as Tshepo walks towards us. He hold out his hand and greet my brother who greets him back. We have spoken about this, my brother and I. We are going to pretend as if everything is normal until after lunch when I finally announce to everyone I that I want out.

My brother leaves us alone and join others in the dining room as Tshepo pulls me into his embrace. One thing I can say is, my brother’s hug was warmer than husband’s.

Tshepo: “Where are the kids?”

Me: “They went to church for a choir practice” I say breaking free from the hug.

I had to force Tshepang to attend the choir practice today with his sister because I did not want them present as things may get messy. He wanted to be here when his father arrived but I did not want any of them to witness the drama that is about to go down.

Tshepo: “I missed you so much my wife, remind me not to go away for so many days next time because these two weeks was an absolute a torture” he says cupping my face and looking deep in my eyes.

Me: “I missed you too” I say lying through my teeth as I try to search for his soul in his brown eyes.

He places his cold lips on mine and kisses me deeply. I have no option but to reciprocate the kiss. It is taking a lot in me not to

puke right into his mouth and her scent on him is not even making things any easier. But to pull this off, I have to push myself and pretend that everything is normal. Thanks to Tshepo I have gotten better and better at this acting and pretending game.

Me: "Come

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our families are here and I have prepared lunch" I say pulling back from the kiss.

Tshepo: Letting out a deep sigh "Ooo, here I was thinking the first thing I will do when I get home is to bury myself deep inside my wife. The things I am planning to do to you tonight. Nx nx nx nx" he says biting his bottom lip.

Like a school girl I giggle, taking his hand in mine and pulling him to the dining room where everyone is seated. If you did not know better you would envy this moment right here. We look so perfect and in love with one another, something we both learned to master over the years.

The room is filled with joy and laughter as Tshepo goes around exchanging greetings and hugs with everyone in the room. I look at my brother pleadingly as he wears his angry and disgusted face. I smile and mouth thank you at him as his face softens up. I know how difficult all this is for him, but I need to do this my way and he needs to trust me.

I dish up for everyone like a perfect makoti that I am expected to be, before all sit down and enjoy lunch over light conversation and laughter. I look at everyone around the table enjoying themselves and laughing at silly jokes being shared. How I wish things were different and moments like this lasted for ever. But I guess I am not that naïve and I know better that we don't always get what we want.

Mrs. Mamabolo Snr: "Thank you Pheladi, the food was nice. I really enjoyed myself. Ke gore I don't know when was the last time I enjoyed a meal so well put together" she says as I clears the table echoing everyone's sentiments.

Me: "Thank you, I learned from the best" I say with a warm smile.

It's true, my mother in-law thought me all that I needed to know in the kitchen when I was still staying with them in Seshego. At least that something to add to the list of positive things I gained from this marriage, with my kids being on top. I did out do myself today, the plan was to cook a meal they will never forget. As Christians they may treat this lunch as the 'last supper'.

Me: "I would like to thank you all for joining us for lunch today. I know some of you had commitments that you had to cancel when I pleaded for your presence here and for that I am grateful. Unfortunately my mother couldn't join us today because she is feeling a little under the weather and traveling a long distance is something her doctors advised against. I know it's unheard of for a makoti to be addressing her in-laws and for that I would like to apologize in advance because I don't mean any disrespect towards any of you"

Tshepo: "Pheladi, what is going on?" he asks giving me a puzzled look.

Kgaugelo: “Let her speak” my brother says sternly earning himself cold eyes from everyone.

I take in deep breath and let it all out slowly as I push back my tears. I promised myself that I will not cry and that’s exactly what I am going to do, hold back all the tears.

Me: chuckling “It’s funny how I had a whole speech prepared, but now I don’t feel it’s necessary. The fact of the matter is my marriage has run its course and I want a divorce” I say handing Tshepo a brown envelope with divorce papers inside.

The room that was filled with laughter few seconds ago is now filled with echoes of gasping and whining. The look on my mother in law’s face is that of anger while Tshepo looks at me with a blank face before turning his attention to the envelope in his hands. My brother is keeping his eyes on Tshepo and I feel better knowing that he is ready to pounce should he make a wrong move.

Mrs Mamabolo Snr: “Pheladi!! Wa gafa? (Are you crazy?)” She says at the top of her voice while banging her fist on the table.

She should just save the theatrics, this is one decisions I am not planning to back down from.

Tshepo: “Mogatsaka, what is this all about?” he says softly like he is lost.

Me: “This is about me chose myself. It’s about me walking away from this sham of a marriage before I lose my sanity. It’s about me finally standing up for myself and saying you have bullied me for far too long and I am choosing to leave before you finally take the abuse too far and kill me or God forbid, I finally kill you in your sleep or poison your food like I have been fighting the edge all along” I say the last chuckling earning myself a deadly look from my mother in law.

Uncle Sam: “Pheladi, can we please talk about this as a family and try to resolve whatever issues you two have. You can’t just decide you want out without trying every possible option there is. If you have an issue with your husband the first step is to go to your mother in-law and if she can’t solve it you call the rest of us and we solve it for you. Not this” he says with a voice filled with disappointment.

Kgaugelo: “She has done all that, and each time she was told to go back to an abusive husband.... Mma Mamabolo, how many times has my sister come to you crying regarding your son’s behavior and treatment. How many times did you promise her you will talk to your son? I bet it’s more times than you can remember. Of all those times she came to you, how many times did you really address your son? I bet you laughed it off every time she came to you and did not even feel the need to address your son.

We are done talking. Tshepo if you know what is best for you, you will sign to papers and finally let my sister live her life in peace. I am back in her life now and any more abuse from you will deal with me and trust me when I say, you don’t want to mess with me”

Tshepo: “Pheladi, can we please talk about this? Just me and you alone please” he says looking at me pleadingly.

Me: “I know how that ends. With my body covered in bruises and few broken bones. Your bags are packed up stairs and ready for you. I would appreciate it if you took what belonged

to you and moved out for the sake of the kids. It's the middle of the year and it wouldn't make sense for me to pack up the kids and move to Glen Cowie. Your home is only about 10 km from here and moving back there would not offset your life. So please, do this for your kids"

I watch as my mother in law spit on the ground and shake her head. I guess she is disappointed with me but I wouldn't expect anything else from her. Tshepo is her son and I am just a daughter she gained through some cows.

Tshepo: "I am not signing anything. I will move back home for few days and let you think about it carefully I really hope you love me enough to allow us to work through this. We have come a long way and we can't just throw 14 years of marriage just like that"

He says before looking at his family and getting up. I let out a deep sigh and shed a few tears as they all get up and follow Tshepo. I must say, step 2 has gone a whole lot easier that anticipated. My brother moves his chair and crouch next to me before pulling me to his embrace. I let out a soft cry as soon as

my head hits his shoulders. The road to freedom has finally began.

These are not tears of sorrow but tears of joy. I may not be divorced yet but I have set the wheels in motion. It may have taken too long but what matters is that it's finally happening.

8

Tshepo's POV

I couldn't sleep a wink last night. I tried to call my wife but it just rang unanswered until she switched the phone off. I don't understand why she suddenly wants a divorce and she won't talk to me about it. If she thinks I am going to give up on her so easily she better think twice. I will not be signing any divorce papers.

Thapelo: "You too calm for someone who was just served with divorce papers less than 12 hours ago" he says disturbing me from my thoughts.

If he knows what is good for him, he will leave me alone. I am not in the moods for his lessons in marriage, my marriage to Pheladi has nothing to do with him.

Thapelo: "So are you going to sign them?"

Me: "Why would I do that?"

Thapelo: “Because she wants out of this marriage. I mean you can’t force her to stay married to you if she wants out”

Me: “Pheladi doesn’t want out of this marriage believe me. She is probably angry at me for something and throwing her toys around just to scare me, but I am not scared. Do you know why?..... Because it’s not the first time she threatens to leave, and we are still here after 14 years, 14 damn years why would she leave now? If she really wanted to leave she would have left many years ago.”

I look at him shaking his head like I am losing my mind. What he doesn’t know is that I know my wife very well and I know this, she is not going anywhere. This is all she knows, being married to me. Where would she even start rebuilding her life and what man would want to marry a divorcee with 2 kids? She will soon learn that the world gets lonely out there and come running back to me.

Thapelo: “Talk to your son to do the right thing because he is clearly losing his mind” he says to my mother who walks to the dining room holding two bowls of soft porridge.

Mom: “That girl is the one losing her mind, she clearly doesn’t deserve my son. We welcomed her so warmly into our home and took her like one of our own but she goes and do this? How dare she try to make us a laughing stock in this community? People respect us and she want to ruin all that with this divorce. What will the congregation say about all this? Hai man that girl is just being selfish, man”

Me: “Come down mother, you will give yourself a heart attack. No one is getting divorced here. Let’s just enjoy our breakfast and prepare to go to church, we have a lot to be thankful for. The gift of life being the top of the list”

Thapelo: “Maybe you should let one of the senior pastors to lead the service today. I don’t think you are in the right state of mind to be ministering to the masses. You are hurt Tshepo and scared, there is no need to act strong while things are falling apart in your life”

Me: “There is nothing falling apart in my life Thapelo. Don’t allow yourself to be used by the devil the same way he is using my wife. We are going to church and I am going to lead the

service like I always do as per the schedule of the church. We need to pray now more than ever, the devil is testing this family and he is using my wife to get to us. This is a spiritual war and requires us to be stronger than we have ever been spiritually” I say getting up from the table.

I need to prepare for church

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the devil is a liar and I shall not give in to him. I am a child of the most high and I know I serve a living God who shall not forsake me. My wife allowed the devil to use her by becoming weak in her faith as her husband I vow to be strong for both us. God has always heard my prayers and answered my prayers and he will not stop now.

Pheladi

Today is the day the lord had made. I am in a very good mood because I woke up feeling lighter and refreshed. Maybe it's

because for the first time in a very long time, I slept like a baby. I did not have to worry about anything that had to do with Tshepo. I did not even have to stress about him coming to the house while I was sleeping because I changed all the locks in the yard, the security code and the gate remote. I also slept better knowing that my brother was sleeping in the guest room next door.

For the first time in a very long time, I slept with my kids on the same bed. It felt really good cuddling up with my minions and talking about stuff. It also gave me an insight into their minds and feelings about the changed that are currently taking place in our home. I had to sit them down and explain to them that mommy and daddy will no longer be together and that daddy will not be staying with us anymore. Tshepiso was very understanding however Tshepang was the total opposite. All he wanted was his father and kept asking me why daddy doesn't love us anymore. I am not going to lie, but it really broke my heart hearing my son think that his father left because he doesn't love them anymore.

I had to explain to him that Daddy loves them very much and they can still visit him in Seshego whenever they want to see him and he will always be part of their lives. I know it's not

going to be easy for my children but I believe they will soon realize how life has changed for the better since their father left. I have book therapy sessions for all three of us so that we can talk to a professional about how we really feel. I know I need these sessions more than the kids because I have a lot of scars that's still needs healing so I am very committed to attending all my sessions.

I can't believe that today is Sunday and for the first time in a very long time I am not going to church. I have made up my mind that I will no longer be worshipping at GTG ministries, so I still need to look around for a new church to start attending. Until then, I will allow my kids to go and attend church if only they want to, I am not going to keep them away from their father, his church and family.

Come to think of it, GTG stopped catering for my spiritual needs a long time ago. It got to a point in life where I hated being in that church especially on Sundays that Tshepo was ministering. I got to hate Tshepo's preaching's because I knew all his dirty secrets. I hated how he would stand in front of God's children like he was holier than all of us while preaching lies. I don't even know how I managed to restrain myself all those years from standing up from my seat and shout 'LIAR, LIAR. STOP

LYING BECAUSE YOU ARE THE BIGGEST SINNER IN THIS HOUSE'
'MAYBE YOU SHOULD TELL THIS PEOPLE HOW YOU ABUSE
YOUR WIFE, HOW YOU LIE, CHEAT AND MANIPULATE ME LIKE A
PUPPET'. But I am glad I never did any of that because people
would think I am the crazy.

I laugh now because Tshepo though he was weakening me by
being an oppressive husband but what he did not know was
that he was making me stronger. Akere sekgowa sere 'What
doesn't kill you can only make you stronger', I am a living
testament of that. Tshepo married a weak woman but he is
about to get divorced to the strongest willed woman who shall
never bow down to mediocre ever again in her life.

9

Does it ever get easy? I don't think I can take it anymore, Tshepo is draining me emotionally and mentally. Phela it's been a month and two weeks since I handed him the divorce papers and he still hasn't signed them. He has even escalated to harassing me in my own home at night I just thank God I have changed the locks and he has no access to get inside the house. I don't know how he found out that my brother went away but he has been coming here and knocking on my bedroom window at night demanding to see his kids. Which sane person comes to see his kids in the middle of the night?

He is behaving like a drunkard or a mad man, coming to my house and jumping walls to gain access so that he could shout and hurl insults outside my windows. I thank God for the buglers on all the windows because he could have broken a window just to gain access to the house. One night he came here screaming and shouting demanding that I open for him so he can see his kids. I told him to go away only to be accused of refusing to open because I was sleeping with a man inside the house, he demanded I open so that he can see I there was no man. Like I care what he thinks, I refused to open for him and told think whatever he wants.

I wish he could just sign the divorce papers and leave me alone. He is starting to bore the hell out of me, the harassment via night visits, the calling, SMS, WhatsApp text and Facebook tagging's are becoming too much. I have blocked all his sim cards from calling and sending me SMS but it seems he is changing numbers every day. Why can't he accept that it's really over and leave me the hell alone? I have applied for a protection order against him, hopefully he will stop coming to my house with a fear of doing time in jail.

He has cut me off financially post the protection order with the hope that my kids and I will starve and eventually run back to him. What he doesn't know is that I had some money stashed away enough to survive on until I can at least get a job. I have faith that something will come up soon before my funds run out. I am also happy with the support that I receive from my brother and mother, both financially and emotionally. I am lucky because I did not have any debt in my name because then my situation would be worse and the money I stashed away would probably not be enough to last longer.

I have made a vow to myself that no matter how difficult it gets I will never go back to Tshepo. I thank God for the strength I had to leave when I did. Most woman die at the hands of their

husbands or boyfriends thinking they will change. I was watching a show called Ufelani on Moja Love and the stories there tore me apart because I was once in that situation unfortunately Palesa like many others were not that lucky and left the relationship carried in body bags

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may God bless their souls. I believe we need to start teaching woman and young girls that it's okay to leave and the idea that we need to persevere doesn't mean putting up with abuse, cheating and being disrespected by a man. However all this needs to start with our society's way of thinking.

It's just unfortunate that we live in a society so cruel that choosing to leave makes you a laughing stock in the community. Apparently I have become a social talk show in Seshego and in church. People especially woman are making fun of my situation and the fact that I couldn't make my marriage work. It's funny how people find it easy to gossip and

laugh about another woman's pain and misfortune instead of trying to understand the reasons I have for taking the decisions that I did instead of condemning my decision.

I have received few calls from senior woman in GTG ministry enquiry about my absenteeism from church and the rumors that are going around. I don't even know why they even bother calling me because they have been passing nothing but judgment. Is it really that difficult for woman to stand together and support one another in life? Are we that damaged and brainwashed to believe that it's always the woman's fault when she get beaten by her husband? I am only saying this because several woman asked me what do I keep doing wrong to piss him off. Like really? Even if I did something am I his child to beat? Couldn't he have set me down and addressed whatever I did wrong like an adults and partners in a marriage?

Patriarchy is going to be death of us as woman in this country. Yes, I respect and acknowledge a man's role in a relationship, marriage and household in general. But statements like 'all men cheat Pheladi, does this mean you will remain single forever because men cheat' are going to be a death of us a country. I am well aware that my husband has been restless out there and in turn put me at risk of contracting sexually transmitted

infections such as HIV/AIDS. I have gone to see a Doctor last week to take the test and still waiting for the results. I need to know my health status because the number of children my husband has outside our marriage is a clear indication of his carelessness and non-use of condoms.

Tshepiso: “Mom, are you busy?” she says bringing me from my thoughts

Me: “Not for my favorite daughter”

Tshepiso: “Yeah right mom, I am your only daughter in case you forgot” She says rolling her eyes causing me to laugh.

Me: “How I liked you better when you were still in diapers”

Tshepiso: “Well, be thank full that I am not in my diapers anymore because I am here to find out if you would like a cup of tea?”

I smile at how caring my daughter has become especially towards me. It's like she can always sense when I am not in the right state of mind.

Me: "Yes please baby, rooibos black with....."

Tshepiso: "No sugar, I got this mom" she says flashing her beautiful smile before leaving the room.

How do I tell my kids that they have 5 more siblings out there? Am I even sure that this 5 are the only children he has fathered out there or there are still many more unknown?

How do I ask daughter to hold on to her virginity until she is someone's wife because sex before marriage is a sin when her father who ministers the gospel of God daily goes around leaving evidence of his infidelities? After my whole experience with Tshepo, I don't think I respect the notion of marriage and I fear my child would want to grow up and meet a man who would want to marry her only to abuse her like Tshepo turned on me. I think the damage that Tshepo did in my life is worse than I thought. Now my biggest fear is that, I might never trust another man in my life or find any of them worthy enough for my daughter.

10

Today's therapy session took an emotional toll on me. I had to reflect back on the first day Tshepo hit me. The heartache and pain I felt reliving that moment was more painful than the day it actually happened. I actually had a panic attack at some point and wanted to abandon the whole idea of therapy but I had to remind myself why I am doing this. I am not about to let Tshepo have a hold on my life. I am going to commit to this healing process till the end if I am going to live my life to the fullest.

The first step I took towards healing today was talking about the abuse that I endured and how it made me feel about myself. As difficult as it was I forced myself to speak truthfully and honestly about my feelings. I used to blame myself because I thought it's my faults or I deserved the treatment. If only I left sooner, if only I did not stay after he impregnated the first girl, after he hit me for the first time maybe he would have known what he was doing to me was wrong. Unfortunately most of us stay hoping the person would change and in most cases like mine they never do.

My therapist said I need to forgive myself and eventually learn to forgive Tshepo as well because give refuge to feelings of hate

for him does more harm to me than it does to him. I am not sure if I am ready to forgive him yet but I hope with time I will be able to do so because that would mean he has no hold on me. I believe that he put me through whatever he put me through because he was not strong enough to handle such a woman of valor. That's the only explanation I can think of because he used to make me feel small so as to make himself feel superior.

I have since learned how strong I am post my separation with him. To think he used to tell me I will never amount to anything without him and how I need him to be happy and successful in life. It's a pity really that people would rather oppress you than let you flourish so just you can feel like you need them in your life. I thank God for finally making me see the light because I believe that my life and future looks brighter than it ever did.

I drove home playing the song Conqueror by the cast of Empire on repeat because the session I had reminded me of my strength and removed all the doubts I had about the decision I took of walking away. I love my daughter so much right now for introducing me to such an amazing song. Indeed I'd rather stand tall than live on my knees cause I'm a conqueror and I won't accept defeat. Tshepo and his family can try telling me no

but one thing about me is that I am a conqueror. This is how today's therapy session got me feeling.

“Lord give me strength for I am about to be tested right now” I say as I drive through the yard as soon as I notice my mother in law and her brother seating in a car parked outside. I will let them in and hear what they have to say because they clearly need to be reminded that I am not going to change my mind

I really can't believe that they drove to my house without letting me know and waited for me by the gate for 3 whole hours so that they can plead Tshepo's case. Kegore this family is just a joke and they are allowing Tshepo to use them like puppets. How do they arrange a family meeting now 2 months after the divorce papers has been served? Clearly I have made my intensions known and their interventions are a little too late to be effective. I shake my head as I place the cups, spoons, sugar, milk and tea on a try before carrying them to the dining room.

Mma Mamabolo: “Re a leboga makoti (Thank you)” she says with the biggest smile as I place the tray on the table.

This woman is something else shame, she is smiling at me like she did not recently swear at me. I pour tea in cups and pass them around to everyone seated around the table before settling down. They better talk about what brings them here fast because I have things to do like reading the book recommended by my psychologist to help me through this healing process.

Uncle Sam: “Pheladi, let me start off by thanking you for making time to meet with us today. This meeting has been long overdue. I think we are to blame at times because we have not been proactive in dealing with the issues and problems that underlies your marriage to our son. Sekgowa sere better late than never. So ngwanaka we are here today and we want to discuss this issues with you and try to resolve them on your behalf. We will also talk to our son and reprimand him severely. As we speak we have decided as a family that he should step down from his position in church and focus on himself and your marriage. After this ngwanaka I give you my word, Tshepo will be a changed man, he will love and respect you the way you

deserve and I will take responsibility for all his actions as I give you my word that he has changed for the better”

Mma Mamabolo: “Makoti, we also want to apologise for all the things that our son has put you through. I know it’s too late to undo any of them but I can assure you that he is getting help and working on himself. Him nearly losing you and being apart from you this past 2 months has taken a toll on him and his happiness. He loves you very much and believe me when I say he will never do anything to undermine you, your love for him and your marriage”

All this time I am looking at them as they talk and I am just nodding. I want to give them a chance to say all that they need to say before I respond back. So I listen as they all go on and on about how they want to help me fix my marriage.

Unfortunately they are 14 years too late and like spilled milk my marriage to Tshepo cannot be salvaged.

Me: “If I may ask why now? I am asking this because I have always come to you crying that I am not happy and your son is not treating me well. In fact

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I came to you crying that your son is abusing me and he comes home in the middle of the night, he cheated on me with different woman and have kids with those woman and not even once was a meeting called to address my problems. So why now?" I say all this trying to remain as calm as possible.

Mma Mamabolo: "Pheladi, I acknowledge that I did you wrong by not calling a meeting with both you and my son. However, I can assure you this, I always reprimanded my son every time you came to me, and my biggest mistake was not calling you and the elders in all those meetings. I am a woman too and it doesn't make me happy to see another woman being ill-treated in her own marriage"

Malome Sam: "We are trying to fix our past mistakes, that's why we are here now. Pheladi allow us to help you but first you need to remove the protection order against your husband so that we can arrange a family meeting with both of you and try to resolve this and save your marriage. Ke ago kgopela hle ngwanaka"

Me: "No" I say keeping a straight face

Mma Mamabolo: “What do you mean no?”

Me: “I mean your family interventions are a little too late. This meeting here is not even a valid one that I can recognize because none of my family members is in attendance. If you thought you can gang up on me and while you represent your son’s interest without anyone representing mine you thought wrong. I have given your son more chances than he deserves, all I need now is all of you to accept my decision to walk out of your son’s life and marriage”

Mma Mamabolo: “Yah ne kegore Pheladi you have changed, I don’t even recognize you anymore” she says shaking her head with disappointment.

Me: “Thank you very much, I will take that as a complement because it means I did go through metamorphosis process and finally people like you and your son cannot take advantage of me anymore. I am no longer limited to the ground and it’s time to spread my wings and fly”

Mma Mamabolo: “Maybe Tshepo was right, you meet a new man and he is whispering nothing but lies to you”

Me: “I have passed a stage where I need to prove myself to any of you. I am not going to stand here and defend myself, kindly ask your son to go through those divorce papers and sign them because I will not be changing my mind”

Uncle Sam: “Yah, taba ye ke e kgolo (This is big). Kgaetsedi aresepele (My sister lets go) no one can say we did not try”

I watch as they get up and leave before taking a letting out a deep breath. This family is really trying to test me. How does my mother in-law and her brother let Tshepo use them like this? How does he fight to have me in his life when he is still busy with his whoring ways? They come here pleading his case when they know very well that he is staying with Mmabatho. Do they think I am that desperate to remain married to a man who is not prepared to acknowledge his wrongs and still disrespect me by spending most of his time at another woman’s house?

If only my mother in-law had a daughter or two maybe she would be sympathetic towards me and what I went through at the hands of her son. I have learned to accept that this family will never acknowledge my pain and it's no use expecting them to deal with the real problem which happens to be their son.

I am looking at her in disbelief, the nerve this girl has to come up to me and accuse me of the things? If only she knew I am the one who initiated the whole divorce and the very same man whom she is sharing a bed with is the one who is holding off signing the damn papers. If it were up to me Tshepo and I would be long divorced and his surname would not be attached to my name anymore. Does she even know this man that she claims to be in love with? Does she know the cruelty he is capable of? For what is worth my heart bleeds for her because all that she thinks she knows it's all lies. I shall pray she never gets to meet the monster that he normally transforms into when the world is not watching.

I am meeting with Mmabatho in a restaurant in town after she called demanding we meet and talk woman to woman and try to find common ground on this whole divorce issue. I was tempted to say no because I believe I have nothing to say to her but my own curiosity got the better of me. Imagine my shock when she told me that I must stop being selfish and sign the divorce papers since she and Tshepo wants to start a life together and I am currently standing in the way of them getting married. Here I was thinking that Tshepo is the one refusing to sign the papers kante he is actually painting me as the

desperate wife who doesn't want to let go of a loveless marriage. How typical of him, always trying to paint other people as being in the wrong while he is in the right. I feel sorry for Mmabatho but she will soon learn that on her own.

Me: "I am sorry for delaying this Mmabatho. To be honest with you, woman to woman I must confess it is not easy for me to let go. Tshepo was my first and when I walked down that isle I had hope that he would be my last. So you can imagine how difficult this is on me and I had hope that Tshepo would change his mind and come back home to me" I say lying through my teeth.

If being lied to, is all that she is comfortable with then I will feed on her weakness. I guess Tshepo taught me well after all use the situation at hand to your advantage. With her arrogance, I might as well use her naïve nature to reach an end goal that will be favorable to me and finally untangle myself from Tshepo's web of lies, abuse and cheating.

Mmabatho: "I am trying to understand where you are coming from Pheladi but you had enough time to come to terms with reality. It's over Pheladi, go FE-DI-LE. He is done with this

marriage and he wants out the least you can do is to do the right thing and walk away with the little dignity that you still have” she says with an attitude that says it’s my time now woman.

Watseba bo Mmabatho kedi hypocrites, she sits here telling me about dignity while she was the one fucking my husband at night and smiling at me the next day while singings the loudest in church. What bible are this people reading? Because clearly it is different from mine.

Me: “Ohk, I will sign them. Tell Tshepo that we can meet as soon as possible with both our lawyers and you present and I will sign the divorce papers” I say pretending to be hurt but deep down umaya wami uya vuma.

Mmabatho: “I hope you are not trying to waste my time Pheladi because I will not allow you to drag this thing than you already did. While you are at it stop hacking Tshepo’s Facebook account to post pictures of you two during happy times. Like I said that was then and this is now”

I nod in acknowledge of what she is saying. This girl is even more foolish than I thought. She honestly believes that I was the one posting pictures and messages of love about Tshepo and I on his Facebook account, how gullible is she really?

Tshepo can never cease to amaze me shame. When I think he can't do worse he goes and pull a stunt more shocking than the last. So all this time I have been fighting him for a divorce that he was refusing to sign and kept harassing me to take him back while and he was busy lying to his mistress that I am refusing to sign the papers. Some people are just pathological liars and shall never change. I am glad that he will soon become Mmabatho's problem to deal with because I have done enough unfortunately he choose not to change.

Me: "So what will happen to my children when I sign this divorce papers? I am asking because I need to make sure that they will always be taken care of and receive their father's love and support at all times. That is all I am asking

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nothing more"

Mmabatho: “You don’t have to worry about the Kids Pheladi, I will make sure they will always be taken good care of. They are the Mamabolos after all, we always take care of our own, always” she says it like she believes it herself.

I smile brightly and nod but deep down I am holding off a laughter that needs to be accompanied by tears. Did Mmabatho just say ‘We take care of OUR own’ like she is one of them? Hai no this girl is on another level of naïve. She will fit in that family perfectly since they all live in a realm of their own. It’s like when reality is going on side they always take an opposite direction.

Me: “Thank you, I would appreciate that. Just let me know of the date, time and place to come and sign the papers and I will be there” I say getting up before grabbing my bag.

She smiles back and nods before she calls the waiter to bring the bill. I shall leave her to it after all she is the next minister’s wife and Tshepo’s bank balance is bottomless as far as I know. I walk to the car and let out a loud laughter as soon as I get inside and close the door. Mmabatho and Tshepo are going to make the best couple ever and I thank God for bringing them

together because they deserve one another. They might as well remind each other to drink pills that will help them become one with reality.

Indeed today is the day the Lord has made, a day where one shall become two. You will be glad to know that my girl Mmabatho has come through for me. I can't believe that I am about to be free from this man's shackles. 14 long years of my walk to freedom and finally I can see the rainbow on the other side. I watch and smile as Tshepo writes his initials on each and every page with a frown on his face. The day I have been waiting for has finally arrived, and I am about to be free.

Tshepo: "For what is worth I did truly love you it's just a pity you were too blind to see it"

Me: "I trust that you did love me but sometimes love is not enough. We were both young when we decided to get married and we probably did not fully understand what we were signing

up for. But now that we are older I am sure we will both do better” I am being honest really.

I do believe Tshepo did love me in his own messed up way so much so that he became obsessed with me and that’s when the whole thing became deadly.

Tshepo: “You do know that there is no turning back from this right?” he says pausing on the last page.

Me: “believe me, I wouldn’t want to go back to any of it. And before you say I sound angry please know that I received proper counselling and I was very lucid when I took the decision. I can only hope you will respect it” I say and watch as he frowns and nod slowly.

To think we could have been a great couple he and I. Too bad it’s too late now I can only pray he learned from his mistakes in this marriage and only do better in the next one.

Mr Smith: “Now that we have both signatures, I will submit this papers for filing and we will let you know as soon as it’s been filed and the marriage is dissolved. My Pa will keep in touch with the two of you to setup a meeting so that we can discuss the division of properties” he says packing the papers in his suitcase.

Me: “Thank you very much for your assistance Mr Smith” I say offering him a handshake.

I smile and takes my hand before walking out of the room followed by his associates.

Tshepo: “Go out there Pheladi and let them play with your heart and use you for sex because you will never find a man who loves you like I did” he says as I stand up to leave.

There he is, the Tshepo that I know. As bitter as always, all nice when surrounded by people and spits venom like a bitter snake that he is when it’s just the two of us.

Me: Smiling “Let them use me and break my heart but one thing for sure I will not be looking for a love like yours. Bye Tshepo Mamabolo it’s just unfortunate I cannot say it was nice knowing you” I say grabbing my handbag and walking out.

Always walk out of toxic situations and toxic people in your life because they are not good for your health and happiness.

Eish, I should have switched off the bloody phone because it has been ringing nonstop. I placed a pillow on top of my head to block the sound from irritating me but it was just a fruitless exercise. I tried to open my eyes only to be hit by a headache from hell reminding me of last night's events. I must have had a glass too many because what I am feeling is definitely a hangover.

Cate and I meet up after my meeting with Tshepo and the lawyers. I was not aware how much I missed her until we sat down and started to reminisce over the good old days. For the first time in forever I opened up to her about what I went through in my marriage. She couldn't believe half the things that man put me through, and the fact that I kept quite all along. She was just pleased with the decision I took to leave.

To be honest, it was also great hearing from someone other than my mother and brother that I made the right choice of walking away. Not that I need validation but sometimes being constantly told that you made a wrong choice and you will regret one day can makes you question your decision a few times. My case is worse because Tshepo has so many people in

his corner (The congregation and the community at large, mostly being fellow woman while I only have my family and kids.

Phew silent at least, I guess whoever was calling decided to give up because the phone has been quite for some time now. Finally I can nurse my headache in peace. These are the results of drinking too much alcohol when your body is not even used to it. I blame Cate for suggesting we go out to mourn the death of my marriage in style and celebrate my new found freedom while she kept pumping me with red wine. I must admit though, I really enjoyed myself even though it's not something I plan on doing more often. Argh, there goes my phone again.

Me: "Hello"

Caller: "Hi, Pheladi its Mike. I hope I am not calling you at a bad time" says an unfamiliar baritone voice

Me: "Mike?" I ask puzzled

Mike: "Yes. Mike Matshela, you gave me your numbers last night at Cofi and agreed to meet with me for lunch today. Please don't tell me you forgot"

That's it no more wine for me, how did I give out my numbers, make lunch appointment and not even remember? I look at the clock on the wall and notice it's already 10:30 at least I still have enough time to prepare myself for the lunch what what with Mike. I also need to call and check up on my kids who are visiting my mother for the school holidays especially since I did not call them last night.

Me: "No, I did not forget" I lie obviously but I don't know why.

Mike: "I was calling to find out what time must I collect you?"

Me: "I think its best we meet at the venue

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I will drive myself thank you"

I am not about to have a stranger collect me at my place. Yes, I am meeting him for lunch but only because I need to start building a new life for myself and that includes starting the dating process.

Mike: "Can we meet at Grounded Container Café at half past 12?"

Me: "Where is it?"

I have had about the place but have never been there before. Tshepo and I stopped going out some years back and I wasn't allowed to go out since I was made to cut ties with friends. I have heard few people talk about this new place in church before and how the whole thing is made out of containers and how tasty their burgers are.

Mike: "It's located on the R101 towards Venda. You will skip 2 robots after passing Makro and you will see it on your left hand side. I can also send you a location when I get there just to make it easy for you"

Me: "I'd appreciate that thank you"

Mike: "Well I can't wait to see you"

We continue talking for few minutes before hanging up. I need to get up and start preparing myself. I have been out of this dating thing for many years now I don't even know what's appropriate to wear. From what I have had Grounded Café is a casual place so a pair of jeans sneakers and a stylish top will do just fine. I am trying to impress but at the same time not overdo it. To be honest with you I am very excited for about the lunch date and the prospect of starting something new with Mike.

Trust me, the first think I did after hanging up was to log on Facebook and search him. I needed to remind myself what he looks like since I don't remember last night's events very well. I am glad to let you know that the brother is very pleasing on the eye. I also did a little bit of stalking and went through his relationship status, statuses and comments and so far I don't think he is married but I make a mental note to ask him myself about his relationship status when I see him. I did not leave my

marriage to cause problems and become a thorn in other woman's relationships and lives.

Finally, I managed to drag myself out of bed and took some pills for the headache and prepared myself some greasy and spicy breakfast (cravings probably because of the hangover). I also spoke to both my kids and mother, at least she is doing better health wise while Tshepiso and Tshepang are enjoying themselves in Glen Cowie.

Mike sent me a location on WhatsApp as promised making it easier for me to find the venue. I must say I loved the whole concept of how shipping containers were used to house a restaurant. Some people are very creative. I park my car and walk in before suddenly feeling nervous upon spotting him sitting there looking all yummy. Gape I haven't had some for a while now and I am only human after all. I think this is the reason why I agreed to this whole lunch thing because as a human being I also crave emotional and physical contact with other human beings. Tshepo now has Mmabatho and I also

need to find myself my own person so that I don't get lonely which can soon lead to depression.

Lucky he spots me first and waives his hand at me for attention because it would have been awkward for me to just walk up to him. I smile and walk towards him with my heart beating faster than normal, it has been so long since I have been out of the game I don't even know how what to expect.

Mike being the gentleman that he is, gets up from his chair to meet me halfway.

Mike: "Hi, I was worried you will never pitch" he says hugging me.

Me: "I am a woman of my word. I would have called to cancel if I was not coming" I say with a smile as I break the hug.

Mike: "That's great to hear because I have met quite a few women in my life time and believe me when I say only a few has kept up to their words" he says pulling a chair for me.

We both settle down before he calls the waiter to bring the menu. I will have a glass of passion fruit and lemonade as I wait for my order while he indulges on a glass of Castle Lite. The conversation between Mike and I is flowing and I find myself feeling more and more relaxed than earlier. I don't know why but I suddenly feel comfortable around this guy.

Mike: "So tell me about yourself" he says cutting his ribs into smaller portions.

Ooh Fara gowd, I have always hated that question even in the interviews because you never really know how much you need to tell a person and how little is enough. I guess we had to start discussing serious things soon because we only spoke about general topics such as politics and weather since we sat here and we can't even say we know who is who.

Me: "Well there isn't much to tell except that I am a mother of two and a very recent divorcee" I say after swallowing my burger.

Mike: “How recent is recent?”

Me: Deep sigh “about 20 hours or so, irreconcilable differences” I say shrugging my shoulders.

Now that I said it out loud it makes me feel some type of way. What kinds of a woman does it say I am? The ink on my divorce papers has not even dried and I am out here entertaining another man. Wow Pheladi.

Mike: “Wow. Let’s toast to your divorce then because if it did not happen yesterday you and I would probably not be here today enjoying each other’s company” he says raising his glass.

I smile and nod as I raise my glass too. I like Mike’s perspective on things because someone else would probably be asking me 21 questions as to why my marriage did not work something I hate to be explaining over and over again.

Me: “And what about you?”

Mike: "Well, I have never been married and I recently just got out of a 1 year relationship with the soon to be mother of my first child, same as you irreconcilable differences"

Me: "I guess there is a lot of those going around 'irreconcilable differences' " I say using my index fingers to demonstrate inverted commas.

Causing both of us to burst into laughter. We spend the rest of the day talking and getting to know each other. I must say, I really had fun with Mike and maybe he is the destruction that I need in my life right now. I look forward to getting to know him better as I tell myself to just go with the flow.

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Cate: "What do you mean you went out?" she asked with her jaw dropped.

Me: "I mean I went on a date with a man" I says through my teeth trying gauge her reaction.

I know people can be judgmental sometimes. Going on and on about how soon it is for me to be dating again. It's not like my marriage only ended the day Tshepo signed on the dotted lines. It has long been dead, the only thing that we were holding on was the idea of being married to another. For a year we haven't been intimate with each other and we have been living separately for the past 2 months, how much more time do I still need?

Why is it that woman have to justify themselves when they try to move on and it's okay and expected for a man to do so? I mean Tshepo moved on while he was still married to me yet it is so wrong for me to try and do so post the marriage. I am not saying I am going to fall head over hills with any guy I meet now, be it Mike of someone else I am not that naive. But I need this, I need to start having fun and the best I can do is to safe

guard my heart and not expect anything from any of this guys. That way I will not be heart broken, I bet a little bit of fun is all I need right now. I look at her and all I see is the shock on her face.

Me: “And before you judge me. I do know it’s too soon to be moving on and I am going into this with both my eyes open. So you don’t need to worry about me trying to replace Tshepo because I am not” I say softly before letting a deep sigh.

Cate: “ooh Babe I will never judge you. But..... mmmmm”

Me: “Say it Cate, exactly how you feel about it. I want the honest truth and trust me when I say I will take it like a big girl because I know it’s coming from a right place” I say trying to remain calm

I watch as she takes a deep breath like she doesn’t know the right way to say whatever it is that she wants to say. I can easily tell that whatever she wants to say is not going to be good. But I need her to say it, I need to hear her honest opinion about this

because I already know that people are going to be blunt when they learn about this.

Cate: “Don’t you think you need time to heal first, I mean you have been through a lot. Heal first, emotionally, physically and mentally and then start dating” she says taking my hands in hers and looking me deep in the eyes.

Me: “As if there is a formula for healing. I know what I went through and it’s not exactly something I can forget. I will probably live with it all my life, what difference does it make if I start dating now or next year this time? If they are going to break my heart now they will still break it next year. I am definitely not going to stop living my life because of what happened to me, doing that only gives Tshepo a power over my life and happiness and I am done giving him power over my life. Cate you know that before Tshepo, I knew no man and I believed in no sex before marriage but where did that get me?”

Cate: “But that doesn’t mean you should give up on what you believe in my friend”

Me: “What exactly do I believe in my friend?”

Cate: “You believe in love. You believe in your body being a temple and falling in love first”

Me: “I still believe in all that my friend, but I need to do things differently this time. I will not travel the same road I traveled with Tshepo, I need to do things differently because that’s the only way I can hope for different results”

Cate: “I hear what you are saying and I should also put it out there that I am worried that this guy might be taking advantage of you and capitalizing on your broken heart just so he can just sleep with you”

Me: “And who says I will not be using for S.E.X huh? I mean I have nothing to lose there” I say before we both break into a laughter.

It may sound like a joke but I am dead serious. I am human too and I have need, sexual needs that has not been fulfilled in a

very long time and I am ready for Mike to use me because he won't be the only one getting sexual gratification.

Cate: "Wow

enough about adult games. So are you excited about your new Job?"

Me: "Do you even have to ask? This is a huge step towards my financial freedom and finding my feet again" I say with a huge smile.

Thanks to Cate, I now have a job. It may be a part time post for now but it's better than nothing and it pays well too. She had to pull some strings and request favors from friends to get me this post. It's only for 4 months while the occupant of the permanent post goes on maternity leave but 4 months a long time for me to get a something permanent and I am grateful for the opportunity.

Cate and I spend the rest of the day talking, laughing and crying over a movie called me before you that we watched on Showmax. It was a very sad movie but reaffirmed my belief that

we should sometimes be selfish and do what we believe is best for us. Our pain remains our no matter how much we share our stories with other people. I can laugh and have fun with Cate during the day but my loneliness catches up with me at night. The itch that I have down there also needs to be scratched and I am the only one who is feeling it no one else.

‘Hey beautiful, I hope to see you later today. I miss that beautiful smile of yours.’ I smile as I read the SMS from Mike. I like him shame, he sends random messages like this all the time. ‘Is my smile the only thing you miss?’ I reply the SMS. ‘Beautiful smile you mean. I miss the bearer of it more’ another SMS from Mike causing me to smile even wider. I bet people are even looking at me funny because I am sitting here alone, smiling at my phone.

Tshepo: “Wow, I would pay a lot just to know what makes my wife smile so broadly” he says pulling a chair in front of me.

Me: “Ex Wife Tshepo” I say with the emphasis on the word Ex.

Tshepo: “Well, I guess old habits do die hard” he says smiling broadly before signaling the waiter that he needs to order.

It’s funny how I am spending most of my time in restaurants this days, but what else can I do since I seem to be having lots of meeting with people I wouldn’t trust to set foot in my house. The other day it was Mmabatho and today it’s Tshepo. He and I had to meet to discuss the division of our assets and I suggested we meet here because I do not trust him enough to meet him alone in my house or his. So the best option for me was to meet with him at a restaurant. I watch as he takes a brown envelope from his briefcase and place it on the table before sliding it to me. He is still smiling at me like we are great friend but I am glad he is doing so because I couldn’t handle any awkwardness between us. Yes, there is some animosity between Tshepo and I but that doesn’t mean we can’t be civil towards one another.

Me: “Can I go through all of this at home and get back to you in a day or two?” I say perusing through the papers from the envelope.

Tshepo: "Sure, but do it fast because I want to finalize everything so that we can finally be out of each other's way"

Me: "I will but something is missing here" I say taking a look at the papers again one by one.

Tshepo: "They are all there Pheladi, nothing is missing" he says getting annoyed.

The only reason he would get annoyed right now is because he knows I am right about something missing. I have a feeling that Tshepo has moved some of the funds and hid them somewhere so that I don't get half of everything he owns. The thing is we were married in community of property and I basically own half everything he has including that church if I wanted it. Lucky for him I don't want to test God by dragging his house through this divorce battle with Tshepo.

Me: "Where are the papers for the Moving grounds property holdings?" I say looking at him dead in the eye.

Tshepo: "I don't know what you are talking about. I don't own anything in the moving ground property holdings and I can't share with you what I don't own"

Me: "Wow, Tshepo. You are unbelievable. You are cheating me and your kids out of something you know we deserve? Don't you think I deserve it all mara? Don't you think you at least owe me that much for all the years suffering you have put me through? This is just too low even for you, moving and hiding assets so that you can cheat me out in the divorce settlement" I say with tears falling down.

I am really hurt and worse of all angry at myself for not seeing this coming. How did that think that Tshepo will let go of all his things that easily and give me 50% of what is right fully mine? Is it too much for me to ask that he do right by me and his kids for the first time in a very long time?

Tshepo: "Stop crying because you are now attracting unnecessary attention to us. I am already giving more than you deserve. I worked my ass off, day and night while you chilled at home watching movies and eating. It was all my hard work that made all those companies a success that they are today just be

glad you are getting something out of them because you did not even lift a finger to get them where they are. If I were you I would take what is offered and enjoy it because you will not be getting anything more than that”

Me: “Do you even care about your kids mara? Huh? Their future, what they eat at night or what they even wear? All this things I want is so that I can secure the future of my children why are you failing to see that mara Tshepo”

Tshepo: “Because you are busy entertaining man Pheladi. You come here telling me about my kids this and my kids that yet you shipped them off to your mother so that you can busy whore around Polokwane with man kobo di grounded Café”

The last part is what caught my attention. How did he know I was meeting with someone at grounded Café?

Me: “Are you having me followed Tshepo?” I says with my voice raised.

He laughs and shakes his head. He goes on and on like I am some mad woman. Why can't Tshepo give me break mara?

Tshepo: "Do not flatter yourself, a business associate of mine saw you there and told me about it. I couldn't care less what you get up to and who you sleep with. They will soon learn how cold you are in bed and finally dumb you like trash that you are. Those papers in your hands are all the assets in my name. Hire a private investigator to check for you but that's all you will find in my name. If I were you I would take what is still in my name while you still can because you might soon find there is nothing in my name to take from. Think about it Pheladi and act fast." He says before standing up and throwing 400 rands on the table for the bill and walking off.

Tshepo is a dog and I hope his day will come soon. I wipe my tears and place the papers back in the envelope before placing them in my hand back. My mood has gone from 100 to 0 in a split second thanks to Tshepo.

'When you are free comes to my house. Below is my location. Tell the security at the door you are coming to estate number

121. I can't wait to see you. NB: I am cooking my special meal'
an SMS from Mike.

Just what I need. I will not drive home and wallow in my sorrows. I will go to Mike's place and indulge myself in his good company who knows I might as well get some sexual healing.

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I smile as I drive through Mike's yard and find him waiting for me outside the house. I thought he was joking when he said he was cooking but by the look things and the apron he has on, he was definitely not joking. I am suddenly hit by an aroma infused with different spices in the air as soon as I step out of the car making me hungry instantly.

Mike: "I am glad you came, I hope you did not have difficulties finding the place" he says pulling me in his embrace.

I found myself holding on to the hug longer than intended, I guess I really needed one after my encounter with Tshepo earlier. Luckily Mike lets me enjoy the hug a little longer.

Me: "Thanks, I really needed one" I say exhaling deeply as I break from the hug.

Mike: "Well I needed one too" he says with a smile on his face.

I guess he is trying to make me feel better and if that's the case I am glad. I smile and follow him inside as he leads the way into the kitchen and then the sitting room.

Mike: "Would you like something to drink while I finish up cooking?" he asks as I settle down on a couch.

Me: "Anything but hot beverages and alcohol"

Mike: "Wow, here I was thinking you would like some red wine or was I mistaken the other day at Cofi?" he says jokingly as he walks to the kitchen.

Causing me to laugh out loud. I will probably never hear the end of it because the day we went out to Grounded café I had to confess that I don't actually drink alcohol when I found he ordered a bottle of red wine for me. Apparently he assumed it was my stuff and ordered the same bottle he saw me drinking the previous night.

Me: “Thank you” I say smiling as he place a glass of grapefruit juice on a table before me.

This guy really pays attention to details. I know he has grapefruit juice in his house only because I once said it’s my favorite juice which he found very weird.

Mike: “So how was your day?” he asks as he takes a seat next to me on the two seater couch.

Me: Deep sigh “Well, my day could have been better, unfortunately I had to meet with the ex and as usual hurtful things were said, to me specifically. Hurting my feeling in the process. So yah, based on the last hour alone, my day was not so great” I say softly, shaking my head slowly because Tshepo’s words are still ringing in my mind and hurting me.

I told myself that I don’t need to discuss in details the nature of my failed marriage, divorce and everything else that Tshepo is throwing at me with any man that I meet and develop some type of relationship with. The only people I trust to go into such great details, are my mother, brother and Cate only because I

trust them enough to know that they always have my best interest at heart. Unfortunately I can't say the same about other people, no matter how sweet they may appear to be and how widely they smile at me. I guess I am scared of my past being used against me when we don't agree on certain things or in the midst of an argument. As a result, I usually describe the mood of things in general without divulging much of the actual details. I am glad because Mike is not one of those people who probes and ask endless questions such as why and how, he can see I don't want to get into it and he just let's be.

Mike: "Okay, from what I gather, your ex is an ass hole forgive my French but he still is an ass hole. We can't take back whatever it is that he said that hurt your feelings but you allowing it to define how the rest of your day was is giving him exactly what he is trying to achieve. I say, let's forget about the past hour and what transpired and use the remaining hours of this day to make today a great day. Tell me what you need me to do to make it all better and I will do it, it doesn't have to be anything hectic. You can ask me to tell you a joke and I can attempt that so that your day can just be better. Just know I am not Kervin Hurt or Trevor Noah but I can still try" he says the last part trying to hold off his laughter causing me to laugh at

how dismally he is failing to sound serious about the whole telling of joke thing.

Me: “Well, something smells great in the kitchen and I am famished

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how about we start there” I say with huge smile on my face like a child who is excited for new clothes.

Mike: “Your wish is my command” he says getting up and making his way to the kitchen.

I have never eaten a meal cooked by a man before, other than my brother because there was a time when I was too young to cook and he was old enough to do so and assist out mother who was at work during the day. So this whole thing of being feed by a man, especially food that he prepared himself got me a bit excited.

I smile when I see him coming back with two plates before handing me mine. I hear him chuckle as I close my eyes and

take a deep breath inhaling the tantalizing aroma from the plate in my hands. I know I should be feeling a bit embarrassed about the whole thing because it's just comical but I am not.

Me: "Wow, this taste amazing" I say moaning as I dig my fork back into my dish.

I wish I was exaggerating about how great the food taste, but I am not. The dish is just doing something in my mouth and I am loving it.

Mike: "Thanks, I try to do my best in the kitchen" he says as he digs in his own plate

Me: "What is the dish called?"

Mike: "It's called a Spinach Tomato Tortellini pasta dish" he says with a huge smile on his face.

I can tell he is looking pleased with himself and the reaction on my face is just making things worse. I guess he has found my

weak point, food. Especially food that has been prepared with so much love for the dish that all the flavors balance perfectly and complement one another. I will definitely ask for the recipe when I leave her.

(The next day)

For the first time in a very long time I did not sleep in my own house or own bed. Disappointingly, Mike and I shared a bed but nothing happened beyond just kissing and cuddling. After the amazing dinner that we had, we washed dishes together and cuddled on a sofa watching a rom-com. By the time we were done watching the movie I was already to sleep and lazy to drive back to my lonely house. I really can't wait for my kids to come back home because I really miss them a lot and the house is just too quite without them.

I was really hoping that Mike will initiate for coitus but he disappointed me in that department. The worse part, was when I took it upon myself to drive the mood towards that direction

and he gently let me down by saying he doesn't believe I am ready. You can imagine my embarrassment when he told me there is no need to rush into it as he would like to have me but only when I am ready to bring in my emotions because he likes me that much. I thought guys are always ready to fornicate, emotions or no emotions. But I still enjoyed the kisses and spending the night with my head on his chest. As disappointed as I was, I slept like very peaceful and all I can say is that, based on the time I spend with Mike yesterday was a great day.

I woke up early and drove home as Mike had to drive to a funeral in Giyani. He tried to persuade me to accompany him but I had to decline as I hate funerals. I only attend those that I am forced to attend, for example funerals of close relatives or devoted church members when I was still the minister's wife. Speaking about no longer being married to the minister, my brother advised me to take everything that Tshepo has offered me. Fighting for more can only lead me to end up with none. 1.2 million is a lot of money to start afresh. I guess it's true what they say, half a loaf is better than none. I am saying 1.2 million because that's what all the shared in the companies offered to me worth once I sell them off. There is absolutely no point in holding on to them because I am trying to cut all ties with Tshepo and everything that is attached to him.

I even packed all the clothes that I owned which matched with his outfits in a refuse plastic bag ready to be delivered to a shelter in Turfloop for the needy to wear. I hope karma can make him choose to wear an outfit that matches with what a stranger chooses to wear that day from what I have donated and for them to meet at the mall as if they are a couple and picked matching outfits. Wow, that would be a great day ever, especially because he likes being unique from other people unless he was matching with me, are ofakela batho moya (Saying he is showing people flames).

Yah ne, we do know how to choose them shame. Kegore, how did I end up with an obnoxious and selfish man like Tshepo who was just full of himself like that? Going on about hehe, I don't buy clothes at Truworths or Edgars because kedi shopo tsa badidi (only people buy there) and people might assume he bought them on credit. Ya ne, love is indeed blind, but I am glad that I can now see.

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Me: Singing “I'm starting with the man in the mirror, uuuuhu. I'm asking him to change his wayyyyyyyys, and no message could have been any clearer. If you want to make the world a better place. Take a look at yourself, and then make a change. Yeeeeey. Na na na, na na na, na na, na nah

I've been a victim of..... a selfish kind of love it's time that I realize..... that there are some with no home, not a nickel to loan. Could it be really me, pretending that they're not alone? A willow deeply scarred, somebody's broken heart and a washed-out dream. They follow the pattern of the wind ya' see. 'Cause they got no place to be that's why I'm starting with me. (Starting with me!)”

I sing at the top of my voice and shake my body while I pick an outfit from my closet before getting dressed. The message in this song resonates so much with me and everything that I have been through. So much so that I have taken a decision to forget about the past and everything that has happened to me, focus on my bright future and my children. It could have been worse, but because of God's love for me it's now all in the past. I am glad that I started with the man in the mirror and changed my

whole situation. You just got to love Michael Jackson yoh, he is such a legend and his music is just timeless. I look at myself in the mirror and smile at what I see, damn I look hot.

I settled for a black high waist skirt with a detail of buttons on both sides and a short slit at the back, a beige blouse with a black suit jacket and beige high hills. It's true what they say 'when you look good you feel good and when you are happy it also reflect on the outside'. I feel that I am at the happiest I have ever been in a very long time. I guess I have so many reasons to be this happy. It's a new day, a new month and I have a whole new perspective on life.

Today I am starting a new chapter in my life, I am starting a new job. To say I am excited is an understatement because I am ecstatic. I place a pillow on the floor next to my bed and kneel before saying a prayer to invite God in this new chapter and new journey. As ready as I am to face the new work challenges I am not going to lie and say I am not nervous because I am. It's been long since I stood in front of students and gave lessons but I am not going to let that deter me. I am well prepared for my lectures as I made time to go through my notes over and over again. One can say I am over prepared but, I don't want to

look like I don't know what I am teaching when I stand in front of students.

Tshepang: "Woouooooooooow mom, you look very beautiful" he says star struck as soon as I enter the kitchen.

Tshepiso: "Slay wena mama, wa baba bjanong (You are very hot)" she say all dramatic

Me: "Thank you my munchkins" I say before kissing each one of them on their cheeks.

We keep talking and laughing as I pack 3 lunch boxes and fruits for each one of us before I join them for breakfast. Bread, bacon and eggs, my favorite prepared with love by Tshepiso exactly how I like them

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soft and crispy. I must not forget to pass by the mall on my way home and buy few things for the kitchen. Since I let go out our house help I keep adding certain things on the grocery list.

Dr Mogale: “So how was your first day, especially your classes?” he says with a smile as he steps into the elevator and holds the door after I stepped out.

Me: “Hectic, I was a bit intimidated, which is something I think my students might have picked up” I say biting my lower lip out of embarrassment.

Dr Mogale: “Well, we all get intimidated every now and then but eventually we all get onto the whole groove of things. I bet tomorrow will be much better. ” he says with a warm smile.

Me: “I hope so too”

He nods and smile before letting go of the door so that it can close. I make my way to my office to try and come up with a perfect research topic. I have to say that I was received well in this department and I am enjoying the whole idea of working for this institution. The staff members in the department are

very friendly and accommodative. I meet all of them during a departmental meeting which apparently takes place every first Monday of the month. I can't believe that the University of Limpopo is so huge and has so much to offer.

I know I am only contracted here for 4 months but I can already see my future beyond the 4 months period. Be it as a lecturer or a student or even both. I had a sit down with my HOD, Prof. Sefolo in the morning after the staff meeting and she told me how impressed she was with my CV and academic record. Not to brag but I was a genius in school, I could have been anything I wanted to but my passion was teaching hence the academic choice. So Prof. decided that she wants to supervise my master's dissertation and handed me forms to fill in on the spot and register for the qualification.

I tried making up excuses and saying I will do it next year but she ended up convincing me to do it. Apparently Prof. Sefolo is all about woman development and empowerment, and I may need a mentor like her if I am going to better my life. Both academically and career in general. I smile at the piece of paper before me with 3 possible research topics, I hope Prof will at least approve one of them. I look at my phone and there is still nothing from Mike. We had an appointment to meet for Lunch

at Paledi mall but he never pitched or even called, how rude. I tried calling him countless times but his phone keeps sending me straight to voicemail. I put my phone back and start researching on how to put together a research proposal, Mike will just call me when he calls me.

Tshepo's POV

Me: "Do we have an understanding" I ask giving him a very intensive look.

Mike: "Yes we do" he says clearly in pain

I smile and shake my head, is this what Pheladi wanted to replace me with? If she think she could replace me that easy she has another thing coming, especially with a weak man like this one. I really expected him to put up a fight and throw in some mean punches but he was just a disappointment. Not

even worthy to be sleeping with the same woman I was married to.

Mike: "Can you please let me go, please I am begging you?"

I look at him once before spitting on the ground. I was prepared to do more damage to him than what I did. But then again he couldn't stop begging like a dog, telling me how he has a baby on the way and promising me that he never slept with my wife. I pick his phone up from the table and hand it over to him to unlock as soon as it switches on. I watch as voicemail notifications comes flooding in from Pheladi. I delete all of them before sending her an SMS from his phone that she should stay away from him because he has decided to work things out with his baby mama. I watch as the message get marked as sent before blocking her number and deleting it everywhere in his phone.

Me: "I am sure you don't want to be meeting with me again because then I will make sure I kill you. Stay away and trust me I will know if you get in contact with her, even if it's just an SMS" I say before throwing his phone back at him.

I don't think he will be messing with me ever again or Pheladi ever again. I can't believe how easy it was to trap him here. I found out that he was working as an architecture and called him posing as a potential client. Like a fool that he was he came running like a mice to a trap of cheese. I roughed him up a bit and gave him few scares to remember me by. I washed my hands at the tap outside and wiped them off before walking to the car driving home to the sounds of Dr. Tumi 'Nothing without you'.

Pheladi

Me: "Nje ngo Davide e Iwa no Goliade waye nga sabi, wa ye nga sabi. Though I walk through the valley and shadow I am a winner through Christ the Loard, for He knows the plans He has for me, plans to prosper, a better future, no weapon formed against me that shall prosper in Jesus Name and the devil is defeated, I am a winner through Christ the Lord. I am a winner through the blood of the lamb. I am a winner through the blood of the lamb and the devil is defeated, I am a winner through

Christ the Lord” I sing at the top of my voice as I drive back home.

I am a winner by Mpho Regalo (May his beautiful soul rest in peace) is my go to song when things seem to be going against my plans. I shall leave it all in God’s hands because his plans are always better than our own.

I won’t lie and say Mike’s SMS did not catch me off guard because it did. I tried calling him as soon as I read the SMS without any success. It’s as if he blocked my numbers. As sad as I am about the whole thing I am also glad that he was honest with me instead of stringing me along only for me to get hurt in the process. I have decided to redirect my energy to my research proposal and fine tuning my topic.

Me: "Come in" I say looking up from the script in front of me.

I watch as the door open slowly and smile as Dr. Mogale steps in. He is one person I have grown fond of since I started working here, he is the most friendliest and accommodative person in the department. I must say, I am learning quite a lot from him on a daily basis. From academic writing to political views in the world, he is well informed and very intelligent. He even helped me to fine tune my research topic to what it is today and continues giving me few pointers on how to do my research proposal, of which I appreciate a lot as I am the most clueless.

I was shocked to find out that he actually graduated for his PhD with Cum Laude at the age of 28. Imagine becoming a Doctor of Philosophy at such a young age. Unfortunately for me I was busy playing house with an abusive husband at that age, praying to God daily that he would change and become a better husband. If only I could change the hands of time and chose to focus more on my studies and career, perhaps I would be very far in life. But then again I would not be having Tshepiso and Tshepang whom I cannot imagine my life without. I guess I had

to walk that journey in order to have those two in my life and if I had to choose a different path which did not include having them in the picture I would definitely not take that option.

Dr. Mogale: “Hi are you busy” he says resting both his hands on a visitor’s chair in front of my table.

Me: “Marking scripts, Prof said she wants the marks by the end of business day” I say stretching my necks to the left and then right.

Dr. Mogale: “Well it’s lunch time and a few of us are going to the staff cafeteria, do you care to join us?”

I take a look at my watch on my wrist just to confirm the time. It’s indeed 13:00, and I was just too busy to even notice. I have had my face buried in scripts marking a test since 10:00 in the morning because I am chasing a deadline, it’s a good thing that I don’t have any classes today.

Dr Mogale: “So are you going to join us or.....” he opening both his arms in a questioning manner.

I take in a deep breath and let it all out slowly because as hungry as I am, I have to let him down. I need to finish marking all this scripts, enter the marks and submit the mark sheet by at least 15:00 if I need to make it in town for my 16:00 board meeting.

Me: “Unfortunately, I can’t. Maybe I will join you guys tomorrow” I say giving him a reassuring smile.

Dr. Mogale: “Okay then but don’t over work yourself because you will burn out. Okay?”

Me: “Yes, Doctor. I will take it easy” I say with an emphasis on the word doctor.

Dr. Mogale: “Mxm, you are not funny” he says shaking his head before walking out causing me to laugh.

I enjoy teasing him a lot shame. Apparently the most difficult thing about holding a PhD is constantly having to explain yourself to people that you are not a medical doctor and therefore can't be giving them medical advices. I catch my breath after laughing at Dr. Mogale and pay attention back to the script in front of me.

I am really not looking forward to the board meeting that I am going to attend. Mainly because Tshepo will be there. If it was up to me, I would never see him again in my life, unfortunately we share two kids and we have to co-parent for their sake. I tried selling all my shares of the companies that I received as my divorce settlement only to be told I couldn't. Unfortunately

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Tshepo being the conniving person that he is, placed a clause in the share transfer papers. According to the clause, I will have to wait 24 months before I will be eligible to sell any of my share. I am even convinced that he has made it his life mission to be a thorn in my life, I just wish to know why.

I wish he can change that cologne of his because I hate it with passion. I hate the fact that I can smell him before I know he is in the midst of my presence. I can literally smell him from a distance and each time his scent hit my nostrils I feel like puking. That smell that I used to love so much now holds memories of events I wish I can erase from my mind and permanently forget about. I remember very well the day I started hating the smell of his cologne. We were having a silly argument as usual and this time was over me smiling innocently at a guy who was greeting me at the mall. I did not know it was an issue until we stepped into the bedroom and he used the jersey that he was wearing to suffocate me. I remember struggling to get oxygen into my lungs while the smell of his cologne was just filling my nostrils. I thought I was going to die that die as I tried gasping for air only to pass out because of lack thereof.

Tshepo: “Wow you look great” he says from behind bringing me back from my thoughts.

Me: “Thank you Tshepo and please stop doing that” I say removing his hands from my shoulder.

If he thinks he will use this board meetings to rekindle what we used to have, he better think again. I will never go back to Tshepo Mamabolo, even if he was the last man on earth.

Tshepo: "I am sorry, I guess old habits do die hard after all. How have you been mara?" He says taking a chair next to me.

I wish he can move and sit as far away from me as possible. I will make it a mental note to start arriving at this meeting later than everyone so that I can chose to sit away from him.

Me: "I am doing very well, as you can see"

Tshepo: "That is good to hear. I was thinking that maybe we can take the kids to Durban next week for Tshepang's birthday as we have planned last year. I am sure they will both love that very much"

What is Tshepo really playing at? How could he be thinking family vacations as if we are still together because we are not?

Me: “As much as I would like to do that, some of us money is tight so I will have to pass. You and Mmabatho are welcome to take my kids and play happy family with them in Durban until you have your own children to that with” I say with smile on my face which is only received a face of shock from his side.

He must know that I know he is with Mmabatho and I have no feeling of jealousy towards them. In fact, I am glad they found one another because they sure deserve each other. I take out my diary and a pen as he stands up to take his rightful place as a chairperson of the board. He might have succeeded in blocking me from selling my shares in his companies but he has not killed my spirit. I told myself that I will be a very active member of the board and contribute tirelessly to the growth of the company. With the little power that I have I will make my presence known and influence positive decision making where I can.

I pay attention to what is being said in the meeting and take notes of what I can. Sekgowa sere ‘When life gives you lemons, you make lemonade’, Tshepo has blocked off my sale of the shares I might as well make that work for me in this company. The 35% of the shares that I hold should be able to open more doors for me, after all this company is my children’s legacy.

Me: "I have a motion that I would like to have added on the agenda" I say after I have been acknowledged to speak by Tshepo who is the chairperson.

They all look at me expecting me to go on with what I want to propose.

Me: "The elections for the next chairperson of the board will be held in the next 2 months. Seeing that the current Chairperson has been running for ever and each time the elections comes he runs unopposed. I will not try to speculate of the reasons why that happen but I need to remind everyone here that this is not a family business and neither should it be run like one. We are listed on the Johannesburg stock exchange which clearly means we are not a monarchy. I suggest we introduce an anonymous nomination and voting systems, that way we become democratic and everything is fair and provides equal opportunities"

I watch as everyone mumbles and share their thoughts with a person next to them. I smile as I turn and look at Tshepo who is giving me a straight face, I guess he is not used to being

challenged. But all that is about to change I also find myself on the board by his doing and I might as well make it worth my while.

Tshepo: “Okay, let’s come down everyone” he says causing everyone to keep quiet “Pheladi, I understand you are new on the board but we have been doing things this way since the inception of this company and no one has ever complained because the current system works best for everyone. Why fix what is not broken?”

Me: “Maybe me being new helps me see the cracks that everyone here is failing to see. Maybe it’s because you have all seen them so much that they seem to be normal but they are not. Let’s put to a vote, an anonymous one at that I see how many people would agree with me”

Mrs Molepo: “I say there is no harm in trying new things. Maybe she is right, times has changed but we have remained the same. What harm with trying something new bring us?”

I watch and smile as everyone nods and mumble words of agreement. I am here now Tshepo and things are about to change and I bet you did not see any of this coming. Finally a decision was taken that we are going to have an anonymous nomination and voting process and I will be visiting some of this board members to lobby for support since I plan to nominate myself. Watch and learn Tshepo because I am here to challenge you and there is nothing you can do to stop me.

17

Today I decided to unwind and take things easy. With all that has been going on in my life, I haven't really taken a moment and indulged myself on old hobbies. As such I took myself out to the mall for a fun filled day one a date for one. I would have loved to take my kids with but they had to attend a cousin's birthday party at one of Tshepo's relatives.

I am sitting here at Mugg & Bean enjoying their sweet spicy wings and BBQ rump with a glass of passion fruit and lemonade when I noticed a figure standing in front of me. I looked up and smiled faintly at her, I know her well from GTG ministry. I have been ignoring her and her friend all along as they were gossiping about me and how I couldn't save my marriage behind me.

Her: "Hi" she said with some attitude.

Me: "Hi" I said smiling back at her

Her: "May I seat?" she says pulling back the chair.

There is no point in saying no because she is already preparing herself to sit down so I nod yes.

Her: "I have not seen you at church in a while, how have you been"

Me: "I have been blessed thanks for asking, how are you?"

Her: "Well I have been great. So where is the wedding ring?" she asks looking at my left hand on the table

Me: "I took it off" I said with a smile

I now enjoy the freedom my finger has, people may not know this but that ring was like a handcuffs and taking it off gave me a sense of relief.

Her: "So, it's true vele?"

Me: "Is what true?"

She is going to need to be more specific if she wants answers from me. I am not about to guess what is it that she wants to ask. Surely her friend told her all about the divorce and how she has won and I have lost. But I am not fazed by all that because I know walking out of that marriage was actually a victory for me despite what other people may think.

Her: "That the minister divorced you"

Wow, he divorced me. I guess that's how it's told out there, but the real question is what reason is given.

Me: "Well I may not be sure about who divorcing who but I guess it's the same different right" I watch as she nods "well, yes it is true. Why do you ask?"

Her: "I just need to understand more why. I mean you guys looked so happy together, you were my couple goals one minute and out of the blue boom divorce" she says being all dramatic.

If only we were not in a public space I would have rolled down and laughed hard at how dramatic she was.

Me: “Well there are deeper reasons that we decided to get a divorce and I can’t get into them right now because I don’t know you that well. All I can say is I was not happy and I decided it’s time I called it quite. The honest truth is that it’s something that was building up gradually and did not really happen overnight like ‘boom’ ” I say using my hands less dramatic than her.

Her: “Hai, nna I would never. I mean you stayed for 12 years in a marriage with this person, bore 2 kids for him in the process only to get divorced at the end. Hai never. Why didn’t you leave before or after the first child? I don’t mean to judge you but 2, 2 kids Pheladi and you left because you were not happy. Hai ngeke”

Me: “Well different strokes for different folks. As my kids, I don’t regret having them. If I had to stay with Tshepo 12 years to have those 2 exact kids that I have then I achieved God’s plans” I say with a smile

Her: “Nna yena I wouldn’t shame I don’t want to lie. Gape you wasted his time” she says with a condescending tone while shaking her head.

I think I have given her enough time to judge me and I don’t really need her negativity in my life right now. She has not walked in my shoes so I will not expect her to understand my decision.

Me: “Good thing you are not me then. Probably, you would be dead by now” I say getting up and leaving some money on the table for the bill.

Her: “He is moving on and he seems to be very happy. I hope you will not want to ruin things for them in the future”

Me: “I actually wish them all the best” I say before walking away.

Mxm, that was really uncalled for. Coming up to me and telling me how I should have left earlier instead of wasting Tshepo's time. What about my time?

Tshepo's POV

I couldn't sleep last night, I kept turning and tossing. To say I am angry is an understatement because I am fuming. How dare Pheladi challenge my position like that as if I am not the one who gave her those shares? She seems to be forgetting her place, busy throwing her weight around the boardroom. She hasn't even been a shareholder for long and she is already talking about the 'cracks in the system'. I mean if it's not broken why fix it? I even regret selling over those shares to her, so much so that I called my lawyer last night to reverse them back into my name. You can imagine my frustration when he told me that it's too late for me to do that because they are already in her name. Incompetent and lazy, that's what he is Mxm.

Me: “Don’t, I am not in the mood for that” I say removing her hand off me.

Mmabatho: “Did I do something wrong?” she says getting up.

Me: “Not everything is about you Mmabatho. I am dealing with some stuff, so back off” I half shout.

Mmabatho: “But, you said the same thing last night. Why did you even come here if you are not in the mood, are you getting it from someone else Tshepo?” She says raising my voice.

Arg

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doesn’t she ever get tired. I am not in the mood and she should just let me be. It’s too early for me to be dealing with her whining and insecurities. The problem with Mmabatho is that she cannot take a hint, she has the tendency keep pushing and pushing and I hate it.

Mmabatho: “I am talking to you Tshepo. If you don’t want to talk you might as well leave..... areye tsamaya (Get out)” she says pulling off the blanket.

This woman is pushing me and I am not going to allow her to tick me off. I don’t need such a setback in my life especially with all the progress I am making in therapy. She keeps going on and on but I choose to block her off before she gets on my last nerve. Haaaaaaaaa, breath in and out, in and out I keep doing this exercise over and over again with my eyes closed, until she start hitting me. Never in my life has a woman who is not my mother laid a hand on me, not even Pheladi has done that in the 12 years that I have been married to her.

Mmabatho: “I wonder how Pheladi survived all this years of being starved and only receiving one round per session. Clearly the poor woman was sexually frustrated because...”

She did not even finish her sentence, I must have lost it because the next thing I know she was holding her hand to her right cheek. I don’t know when or how, but suddenly I was on top of her as she laid on her back on the bed, locking her in with both my knees making sure she doesn’t escape from her

punishment. I kept throwing one punch after the other as she kept trying to protect her face with both hands. Lucky for me, I will never punch a woman on the face, maybe a slap but never a punch. As she covered her face I kept hitting her stomach, one punch on the left hand side and another on the right hand side.

Me: “How....dare.....you...lay.....your.....hands.....on.....me?Huh?how.....dare...you...Mmabatho?” I say with each word accompanied by a punch.

Mmabatho: “Ke kgopela tshwarelo, oska mpolaya, please. I won't do it again I am sorry. (Forgive me, please don't kill me)” she says crying out as she tries to protect her face and her body.

Finally I stopped and stood up from the bed setting her free from my hold, I stood there looking down at her furiously while breathing heavily.

Me: “Look what you made me do. Huh, couldn't you just let me be mara? When I say I am not in the mood I mean it. All I

expect from you is some space. Is that so difficult to understand?”

I watch as she lays on the bed still protecting her face. She pushed me into beating her like this. How can she disrespect me like that? Lay her hands on me? Me! Tshepo Mamabolo, a 36 year old being hit by a woman like I am her child. Never, ake gafe (I am not mad).

Me: “I am talking to you Mmabatho not a wall. So when I talk to you, you respond back because you are not a wall” I say as I take a seat next to her on the bed.

Mmabatho: “I am sorry Tshepo, it will never happen again” she says through her tears and sniffing.

I chuckle and shake my head. How did I end up with a weakling like this one? She kept screaming at the top of her lungs as I threw those punches, unlike Pheladi who knew how to take them in silently.

Me: “Do you know I left my wife and kids for you mara Mmabatho” I say softly

Mmabatho: “Yes, I know”

Me: “Did I make a mistake by leaving my wife for you?” I say with my voice raised a bit

Mmabatho: “No, you did not”

Me: “Then don’t make me regret divorcing a good woman for a disrespectful one. Re a kwana? (Do we understand each other?)”

Mmabatho: “Yes we do”

Me: “Good, I am going to prepare bath water for you” I say getting up and going to the bathroom to prepare bath water.

I hope she has those essential oils and bath salt to soothe her bruises.

I am lying in bed struggling to sleep because I am thinking about everything I have been through. It must be triggered by 'Till death do us apart', this is the movie that I watched earlier today and it was still stuck in my mind. I found myself crying through the whole movie because it hit so close to home. One would think that she is the only woman going through some sort of abuse with her husband or partner because we rarely talk about such openly. Only to find that most of us are going through one way of abuse or another at the hands of the ones we have given our hearts to. I would really like to know what leads man to such behavior and what makes them think it's okay to abuse a woman. Be it emotionally, sexually, psychologically, mentally, financially or even physically.

The sad part is that abuse is normally so well hidden that people around us tend to think we are having perfect lives. On lookers would be so envious of our lives and relationship along with the vacations and gifts we receive unaware that those are normally bribes to ask for forgiveness after being attacked. I am glad the woman in that movie also managed to get out of that toxic marriage even though she had to fake her own death in order to get away from him. Why can't we have a break, maybe I am lucky because Tshepo soon entangled himself in

Mmabatho's world probably helping him leave me alone. Although it was not always easy but he is not bothering me anymore.

I had to do a little research and ask google how many woman are living with abuse. The numbers are very scary because it makes this issue a pandemic. A dangerous one at that because it is usually swept under carpet or covered up by cultural practices that promote sexism. According to professor google, an average of 137 women across the world are killed by a partner or family member every day this is based on new data released by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Meaning that the home is the most likely place for a woman to be killed, very scary if you ask me. More than half of the 87,000 women killed in 2017 were reported as dying at the hands of those closest to them. Of that figure, approximately 30,000 women were killed by an intimate partner.

Sjava was right in his song Impilo. Kumele sibize abadala bashise impepho emsamu, sibize nabafundisi bathandaze. Ngoba makunge njalo bazophela omama bethu, bazophela odade wethu, zophel' ingane. Sekwanele. (Let's call the elders to burn incense (traditional herbs), let's call priest to come and

pray. Or else our mothers, sisters and children will continues dying. Enough is enough)

(The following weekend)

Today is supposed to be one of the happiest days in my son's life but he woke up very grumpy for a birthday boy. I tried everything in my power to cheer him up without any success. At first I suggested we have a party because there was still time to plan everything and he said he doesn't want one. Then I said we could all go out to the mall and have lunch before watching a movie, still he said he doesn't want that. I also suggested taking a drive to Kruger National Park or Forever Resort in Bela Bela for a fun filled day, maybe come back the next day but he still said he doesn't want to do any of that, leaving me frustrated and helpless. He says he doesn't want to do anything to celebrate his birthday

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instead he want to play games on his phone, just chill in the house and be left alone.

I am out of my wit right now because he seem adamant about not being interested in celebrating his day, while shooting every idea I come up with. Tshepang has always loved celebrating his birthdays, so this is just out of character for him. He is one person who would start counting down to his birthday from the first day of his birth month but this year things have been different. I did not really notice at first until a week ago, when I suggested a birthday party at Mike's Kitchen and he said no. At first I thought the problem was the venue, so I suggested him choosing one that he likes better. Only to be told he doesn't want a birthday party at all this year.

Tshepiso: "So we are really not celebrating his birthday this year?" she asks settling on a chair next to me.

I shake my head no while letting out a deep sigh of frustration. I feel like my son is slowly losing interest in things that normally made him happy and I don't know how to help him. I just hate seeing any of my children sad because their health and

happiness is all that matters to me right now. After all they are all I have.

Tshepiso: “Don’t worry mom, he will come around” she say giving me a warm smile and sliding her hand under mine on the table.

Me: “I hope so because I don’t know what to do anymore. Do you know he did not even do the list this year?”

Tshepiso: “I know. I can’t believe I used to hate that list and this year I was the one begging him to give me one because it used to make my life easy. Funny how we never appreciate what we have until it’s no longer there” she says frowning.

Me: “That is a great life lesson nana and I hope you will never forget it. Always appreciate what you have no matter how small or insignificant you may think it is” I say squeezing her hand.

She nods and smiles shyly because she knows how I always preach about being appreciative of even the smallest things. It's true, Tshepang used to give all of us a list of 10 items he wished to have and we would pick from that list what we buy for him as a birthday present. We all hated that list because we felt like a birthday gift is something that should come from a person's heart and not be expected let alone demanded. The honest truth is that list used to make things easy for use because there is nothing as stressful as trying to get someone a birthday gift that they will appreciate and make use of. Alas, there was no list for us this year and when we asked we were told anything we buy for him will be fine.

Me: "Let me go talk to him one more time, maybe we can drive up to Phalaborwa and get a room for the night so that we can do Kruger in the morning, okay" I say getting up from the chair.

Tshepiso: "Aowa, not Phalaborwa mama. Maybe Aventura ko Bela Bela because there are 14 lions on the loose ko Phalaborwa at the moment, apparently they escaped from Kruger. So no, I am too young to die, let alone be eaten by lions. haha" she say shaking her head all dramatic causing me to laugh as I walk off to Tshepang's room.

I stop on my track when I hear him talking to someone on the phone. I know it's rude to eavesdrop but I found myself with my ear on the door that was slightly opened, listening to his conversation out of curiosity.

Tshepang: "So is that why you did not call to wish me a happy birthday Skeem?" he says in a sad tone.

The only skeem I know in my son's life is his father because that what they called each other at times. So I assume he is talking to Tshepo. Could it be that the reason he has been moody all along was because he thought if we had a birthday party his father would not be there? It breaks my heart to know that Tshepang is still negatively affected by the divorce. I have to do better and make both of them see that both Tshepo and I will try harder to be present for them in all their life's major events such as birthday parties, graduations and so on.

Tshepang: “But last year you made a promised to take me to Durban on my birthday and now you left me behind. Don’t you love me anymore” he says with his voice breaking making me pay closer attention to what he is saying.

I can’t take this anymore. I knocked once and walked in his room, my son is not well and he was clearly crying. He looked at me once and tried to fake a smile before telling his father that he needs to go and hanging up.

Me: “Ahh baby, I am sorry you are hurting right now. If you want us to invite your father to the birthday outing we can do that and have him and Mmabatho join us” I say sitting next to him on the bed and pulling him in for a comfort hug.

Tshepang: “They won’t come mom” he says breaking down and crying.

Me: “Ofcourse they will come. I will call your father and talk to him and even ask to speak to Mmabatho if necessary”

I would do anything to see my children happy. Even if it means me spending a day with Tshepo and his woman I would do it for the sake of my kids.

Tshepang: "He took her to Durban mom. He forgot it's my birthday weekend and took his new girlfriend to Durban because she wanted to go away for the weekend while he promised to take me there for my birthday. What have I ever done to him? I thought he love me" she says not being able to stop himself from crying.

Me: "I am sorry baby. It must have slipped his mind because he is dealing with a lot. He loves you very much and I am sure he will make it up to you when he gets back from his trip" I say trying to calm him down.

Tshepang: "Vacation mom, not trip vacation. He took her on a vacation and forgot about my birthday. I wish this whole divorce never happened. I wish dad was still here living with us because then he would not be doing things to make her happy while breaking our hearts"

My son's words just cut me deep in my heart. I was hoping therapy is helping him deal and cope with this whole divorce situation. I need to talk to his therapist to try other things because he is really not taking it well. I wouldn't want any of them to feel like the whole divorce is their fault or we don't love them anymore since we are no longer together. I found myself crying silently with him because I don't know how to make it all better for him.

I am lying face down on my bed crying my eyes out with my head buried on the pillow. Somethings are just too much to take in. I used to think I am strong enough to take everything that is thrown at me, but now I am starting to doubt all that. How do I deal with all this? Haven't I had enough trials and tribulations in my life for one human being? Who have I wronged so bad that everything in my life must just fall apart? Don't I deserve some form of happiness even if it's just for a short period of time? Where is God in all this when I cry calling his name everyday but my situation doesn't seem to change but only seems to get worse and worse?

'Be strong for your kids Pheladi', 'Time is the best healer Pheladi', 'Don't lose your faith Pheladi' 'God will never abandon you Pheladi', 'Be glad you got out alive Pheladi' I have heard it all and quite frankly I am tired of all this pep talk. I am just tired of everything, it's too much for me to handle. There I said, I am not strong enough, I need a break too. My life has not been easy, it has been an uphill battle, dealing with one problem after another. I don't even have strength anymore and maybe it's all my fault. If I have never divorced Tshepo all this would not be happening. Yes, it's my fault because I was selfish and

only took a decision that benefited me and not my children. Now, because of my selfishness my son is suffering.

I think I am capable of handling any sort of pain inflicted on me because it something I lived with for years. But to watch my children suffer from a pain that I cannot carry on their behalf is just too much to handle. Especially when I am the reason why they are suffering, because I made a choice that was not good for them at all. I wish I could turn back the hands of time and I would undo the whole divorce and Tshepang would be his usually bubbly self. How, I would give anything, to have him annoy me, asking for this and that just because he saw it being advertised on TV or one of his friend has it. I would actually take Tshepo's abuse and infidelities, all of it, if it means my son being normal again.

Tshepiso: "Mama, Malome is here and he is asking for you" she says softly on the other side of the door.

Me: "I am coming baby" I say trying to sound as normal as possible.

I cannot let her see me falling apart, so I need to put on a brave face for her. I get up and make my way to the ensuite to wash off my face and try to conceal any sign of tears and worry from my face. I take a series of deep breath before letting it all out

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slowly in and out. I take one last look at myself on the mirror before heading out. I smile warmly at her as soon as I step out of the bedroom and her beautiful smile gives me all the strength I need to face another day.

Tshepiso: "He will be fine mom, you will see. I have been praying for him all night and God will never forsake us" she says.

I smile and place my arm on her shoulders before squeezing gently. I want to tell her that I believe her, God will see us through but words are just failing me. I am glad she still have her faith because she needs it for both of us. I have lost mine the moment I found my son, who has recently turned 09 years of age choking in his own saliva lying on the floor with an empty container of pills next to him.

I saw my whole world crumbling down and felt as though I was running out of air and suffocating. I had to pick him up and pump his stomach in an attempt to save him while I waited for the ambulance to arrive. Lucky for me, I kept pumping and pumping until he throw up some of the pills before passing out. I actually thought he was dead as I held him in my arms and he was not waking up. I have never wept so much in my life, the pain I felt in my heart was just too much to bear.

I found myself cursing at God for allowing my precious baby to go through all that pain. For allowing the devil to whisper such thoughts in the mind of an innocent child and not intervening when he took all those pills and swallowed them one by one. I knew he was not happy, especially after his father forgot his birthday and took his current girlfriend on a vacation instead. But for him to try and take his own life was extreme and how he leaned about overdosing on pills is beyond me.

I thought I would be strong enough and put on a brave face for Tshepiso, but I couldn't. I broke down the moment I laid my eyes on my brother, my pillar and anchor, my greatest support system. Why can't all man be like him, loving, reliable and dependable? I wouldn't be in this mess if Tshepo was even half the man my brother was. My child would not even be in that

hospital fighting for his life hooked on to different machines to help breath.

I cry bitterly against his chest as he pull me in his embrace and wraps his arms around me. I want to be strong and pretend for Tshepiso but I am failing her dismally. I am sure she needs to see a strong woman right now but I can't give her that. I am hurting and scared, scared for my son because he might not make it out alive and I am tired of pretending to be strong when I am not.

Kgaugelo: "let it all out. Don't bottle it in. No one expects you to put on a brave face right now. You are allowed to cry and no one is going to judge you" he says bushing my back.

We stay like that for a few minutes until my crying subsides. He gently let's go of me and wipe tears off my face. I smile faintly at Tshepiso who is standing there with a glass of water mixed with sugar before taking it from her. She smiles back at me while brushing my back.

Me: "Thank you nana" I say faintly as I hand her back the glass.

She smiles warmly before walking away to the kitchen

Kgaugelo: "Did Tshepo come back?"

Me: "He is only coming back tomorrow. He said he couldn't find a flight for today" I said shaking my head no.

Kgaugelo: "And driving back was not an option?"

Me: "I honestly don't care I about him. I need to use all the energy I have to deal with all this" I say letting out a deep sigh

Kgaugelo: "You will get through this. He will wake up and we will get him all the help that he needs and he will be fine again. All this shall pass" he says leading me to take a seat.

Me: "If only I knew of the repercussions of my decision. I think I would have done things differently"

Kgaugelo: “you don’t mean any of that”

Me: “I do, trust me. I would take Tshepo’s beatings and emotional abuse over this pain that I am feeling right now. I can’t believe that my son is lying in that hospital bed all because of me”

Kgaugelo: “I am not going to allow you to beat yourself up. None of this is your fault. You did what was best for you and your kids. Tshapang will get better and with treatment he will be fine. What he needs is a mother who is alive and doing better, both emotionally and mentally. It’s a good thing you walked out because it would have been worse if your kids were going to wake up one day to your corpse lying in a pool of blood. They would have no mother or father. They would become orphans and then you would not even be here to protect them from this world’s evil. It may not seem like that now but you made a right choice. As part of his healing process we are going to need to tell Tshepang why you had to leave his father and he will love you dearly for that and see the strong remarkable woman that you are”

Me: “What if it’s too late. What if he doesn’t make it?”

Kgaugelo: “He will make it. God did not bring you this far just to abandon you. He did not build you up again just to break you all over. He is not like that”

Me: “I am even starting to doubt his existence. As faithful I have been to him, devoted and all he still made me experience the worse life possible. Marry a man who will abuse me and when I finally free myself from him, he punish me through my child” I says with a breaking voice.

Kgaugelo: “All this things you are going through are not meant to break you. They are meant to build you and make you strong. What doesn’t kill you will definitely make you stronger and I see your strength because you weathered the worse kind of storms and survived. Trust me when I say, you are an epitome of what a strong woman ouch to be. You are a strong woman was just married to a weak man. He saw your strength and tried to bring you down. Don’t beat yourself for his mistakes and selfish ways”

I hear my phone ringing as I am about to answer him. I try to get up when I notice Tshepiso walking into the room with my

phone in her hand. I frown when I see the caller ID with my heart beating fast against my chest.

Kgaugelo: "Are you going to answer it?"

Me: "It's the hospital, I am scared. Please answer it for me" I say handing him the phone.

I am scared and tears are just falling down as my whole body shake in fear.

Kgaugelo: "Hello" he listens "This is her brother. She can't come to the phone right now. Is everything okay with Tshepang?" He listens "I see, thank you for letting us know"

I am trying to read his face but all he has on is his poker face on making it hard for me to read his face. I shake my head no as I watch him listen and nod.

Kgaugelo: "Thank you for letting us know. We will be there in a few minutes"

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Prof Sefolo: “Just know that we are keeping the little one in our prayers. Just take the rest of the week off and be there for your child”

Me: “Thank you very much Prof. You have been very understanding of my situation”

Prof Sefolo: “Stay blessed Pheladi and take care of yourself. Your son needs a strong woman right now and make sure you get him all the help he needs. I will call again tomorrow just to check on you”

Me: “Thank you” I say before hanging up.

I stand against the wall on my back, close my eyes and take in a deep breath before letting it all out. It has been a long day and I feel drained, both physically and emotionally. Okare lefase leka ema ka fologa (I wish the world can stop moving so that I can get off). I know it’s going to get worse when Tshepo arrives in an hours’ time or so. I am not even looking forward to seeing him because he will definitely use this opportunity to highlight

what a bad mother I have been to my kids as if he is doing anything better. If there is one thing Tshepo excels in, is kicking a person while they are down. It's just unfortunate that he is the father of my kids and has to be in their life one way or the other.

Cate: "Are you sure you don't want to go home and sleep a bit. You look like you could use some rest"

She says bringing me back to reality. I smile and shake my head no. It's no use going home to rest because I am struggling to fall asleep. She nods and take my hand in hers after joining me in standing against the wall. We stay like that in silence and I am glad because I have no energy to talk about how I am feeling or listening to how I need to be strong. I am truly thankful to God for the love and support that I have been receiving from family, friends and colleagues because it has really kept me going.

Mrs Mamabolo: "We are about to pray are you not joining us Pheladi" she says standing on the passage.

Me: "I am coming"

Cate: "Go ahead, I will pass" she says letting go of my hand.

I laugh and walk away to join Mrs Mamabolo's prayer session. That woman and her entourage of elderly woman from church has been here for the most part of the day driving me crazy. I truly understand why Cate is refusing to join us in there because if I had a choice I would also stay away. Some people are so obsessed with the bible or truly in denial because they blame everything that goes wrong on the devil. My son has been diagnosed with depression and all the doctor recommended was just therapy and some pills for treatment but the grandmother is refusing to acknowledge any of that. 'No Mamabolo descendent has ever been attached by a mental illness' so she keeps preaching. Well, I beg to differ because I truly believe there is something mentally wrong with her son and he just never got the right treatment because there was never an opportunity for him to be diagnosed.

I walk in and take a sit next to my son who looks bored and uninterested in everything that is going on in his room. I am sure he is even tired because his granny here has been hosting a prayers session and bible reading in his room since morning. I

take his small warm hands in mine and kiss them with a smile on my face. My heart breaks into a million pieces as I watch my son failing to even fake a smile. My once bubbly and active child is now socially withdrawn and struggles to even smile at me.

We all close our eyes as instructed by God's number 1, Mrs Mamabolo to do so as she leads us in prayer.

Mr Mamabolo: "Heavenly father, we come to you seeking healing for our beloved Son Tshepang who is being tormented by the devil and his worshipers. We place his life in your hands and pray for his protection. Give us strength Lord in this trying times because we need you now more than ever. I know the doctors are mistaken in their diagnosis because they are not aware of the spiritual fight we find ourselves in on daily basis. I also pray for his mother father because she has become weak in her faith allowing the devil to play with her emotions and rule her. I pray she find her way to you soon father because she is slowly losing out on life. First it was her marriage and now her child lie on this bed. Forgive her father for she is blind and shall soon see the light....."

She keeps going on and on about how I need deliverance because I have lost my way and gave up on my faith. At this point I have my eyes opened and using both my hands to cover my son's ears. I don't think he needs to hear any of this and clearly they blame me for my son's attempted suicide. I have since given up on trying to understand the kind of woman she is and how she would say all those things about me in her prayers because I have accepted that she is a monster in law and everything I do will never be good enough for her.

Mrs Mamabolo: "In the name of the father, the son and the holy spirit amen"

Woman from Church: "Amen" they all say in unison

Mrs Mamabolo: "Boy boy

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I will come and see you tomorrow akere and when you are discharged you will come and stay with me in Seshego. Nothing will happen to you ever again because....."

Me: “There is no way my son is moving to Seshego. He is perfectly fine in my care” I say cutting her off.

If they think they are going to use this incidence to take my kids away from me they better think again because that will never happen. Hell will have to freeze over first before I will allow them to raise my kids.

Mrs Mamabolo: “No one is disputing that, but right now he needs to be in a home of a prayer worrier because the devil will try again and since you no longer come to church he is more likely to succeed” she says with her wicked smile plastered on her face before getting.

I shake my head and choose to ignore what she just said, I am not going to waste my breath on her. I watch as she gather her things and break into a worship song with the other woman joining in as they all kiss my son on the forehead one by one before walking off. Phew, peace at least.

Me: "I am going to the tuck shop do you need anything?" I say to Tshepang who is busy talking to his father.

He shakes his head and I smile back and get up from where I am seated. I don't really have to go to the tuck shop, I just wanted to give him and his father some privacy. Maybe he will open up to him since he seems to be a bit talkative now that Tshepo is here. I am surprised by Tshepo's attitude since he got here. I expected him to use this opportunity to pull me down and lay the blame on me like his mother has been doing. But he hasn't done any of that.

We actually chatted while Tshepang was sleeping and he kept assuring me that our son will be fine and all this shall pass. Maybe Mmabatho is having a positive influence on him because this is definitely not the Tshepo that I know.

Mmabatho: "How is he doing?" she says to me as soon as I step outside.

Me: "He is getting better and the Doctor assured me that with treatment he will be back to his normal self" I say.

Mmabatho: nodding “That’s good to hear. We were really worried and it must have been difficult for you on your own here. Believe me when I say we tried getting an earlier flight but they were just full”

Me: “What matters is that you are here now. By the way why are you sitting outside?” I asked confused because she has not been inside to see Tshepang since she got here.

Mmabatho: “I don’t really like hospital wards, they have some pretty bad memories for me” she says sadly.

Me: “Oh okay. I am sorry you had to cancel your trip short because of this”

I don’t know what I said wrong because Mmabatho suddenly broke down and cried. I guess it’s really difficult for her knowing that Tshepo has kids and he might often have to cancel their plans to rush to be with them. She is crying too hard, I don’t even know if I should hug her or not. This doesn’t even look good for me, as wife talking to the current girlfriend

and she suddenly cries. One would think I was being harsh to her because she is with my ex-husband.

Me: "I am really sorry Mmabatho. I did not mean to upset you" I say hugging her in an attempt to get her to stop crying.

But I guess I should not have done that because her body is clearly sore and me touching her is inflicting some pain. For the first time since I have been standing here I notice the long sleeve and scarf that she has on. I hope it's not what I think it is. He can't be beating her up already, so soon.

Mmabatho: "No, it's okay. It's not you. I just really hate hospitals, they hold painful memories for me" she says taking in a deep breath trying to calm herself down before running off toward the exit of the building.

I nod slowly because I don't even know what to say. I guess most of us has a painful memory of losing a loved one in hospital and for some it's not easy to get over those memories. I really hope she heals from whatever is troubling her about hospitals because she might soon find herself here having to give birth to Tshepo's 100th child.

The waiting is the most difficult part. I am sitting outside as instructed by the panel, waiting for them to deliberate on whether or not my study is feasible. I am hoping for a positive feedback because I have worked too damn hard on this research proposal. 'Dear Lord, I come to you at this hour praying for a positive feedback. I know I have not been the most faithful and trusting of your servants as I have doubted you a few times, but I need you now. I could use some good news in my life and I believe you did not bring me this far just to abandon me. I believe your word in Isaiah 41:10 when you said I should fear not, for you are with me; be not dismayed, for you are my God; you will strengthen me, you will help me, you will uphold me with my righteous right hand and for that I call upon you to be with me at this crucial hour. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit amen' I say a prayer in my heart.

To be honest I have a lot riding on this. I need some growth and personal development in my life and getting this qualification is going to be the right step in that direction. If someone could have told me just 4 months ago that I will be going back to school to study and spend most of my time reading academic books again I would have probably laughed in their face. Not

even in my wildest dreams did I see myself seating here defending a research proposal and praying for the positive outcome. This opportunity came when I least expected it to and for that I believe God's hand is at play.

I hold my breath and watch as the boardroom door open and the secretariat of the school's committee steps out.

Her: "You can come back in Miss Molopa, the committee members are done deliberating on your proposal" she says before going back in.

Ooh by the way, I went back to using my maiden surname. I did not see any use of holding on to the Mamabolo surname when it has brought nothing but pain, misery and tears in my life. I take in a deep breath before getting up and wiping my sweaty palms against my suit pants, I am very nervous and knowing the kind of luck I have been having in my life is not making me feel any better or confident about what might take place in there.

Why are they all so serious? I ask myself as I step inside and take a sit next to my supervisor as instructed. She is not smiling

which can only mean one thing, my research proposal was not approved. Maybe I am not cut out for this academic life, I mean the last time I did any academic writing was more than 13 years ago in my fourth year. I don't even think writing a mini dissertation makes me knowledgeable about conducting a research and documenting it down into 5 chapters that are supposed to count toward a qualification as big of a deal as a Master of Arts.

Prof Molebatsi: "How are you feeling Miss Molopa?" She asks as the chairperson of the committee.

Me: "Nervous and scared"

Dr Mogale: "Do we make you nervous Miss Molopa?" he says with a smirk on his face.

I guess he is enjoying torturing me because he even took off his reading glasses just so he can look at me dead in the eye.

Me: “Not really doctor. I am just scared that I might not receive positive results as I had hoped for”

Prof Molebatsi: “I don’t think you have anything to worry about because your research topic is very interesting and relevant. We really can’t ignore that technology is taking over and somehow affect how teachers interact with learners at school. The panel is very pleased at the fact that you choose to focus on the digital divide and how it can be bridged in order to insure that both learners from rural areas and urban areas can equally benefit from the use of internet....”

I smile as she goes on and on about how relevant and important my study is. I am glad to receive such as positive feedback because I know how hard I have worked on the proposal. I take note of the minor areas that I need to work on such as using current literature and finding a theory to support my study as well as clearly stating my research methodology as I have confused the use of qualitative research versus quantitative research.

Prof Molebatsi: “The corrections should be done and once your supervisor has approved the amended proposal should be sent

to the Ethical committee of clearance. Is there anything you would like to ask us?" she says in conclusion.

Me: "Thank you. I have no questions"

Prof Molebatsi: "That's would be all from us. We wish you all the best in your academic journey. All I can tell you is that you are in capable hands. Prof Sefolo is a great supervisor and you should learn as much as possible from her and the stars will be yours for the reaching. You may be excused" she says with a warm smile.

Me: "Thank you" I say standing up with a huge smile on my face as I walk out of the boardroom.

I am happy because God is starting to show off in my life. My son is doing better and slowly getting back to his normal self. Tshepo is not being an ass like always, work is amazing and research proposal has just been given a green light. God, this is definitely you doing wonders in my life and for that I am grateful.

Mmabatho's POV

I have never in my wildest dreams pictured myself in such a situation. It's true what they say 'Sebone thola boreledi teng go yona go a baba' I wish I can translate it into English but it's equivalent to the saying 'all is not gold that glitters'. Except it sounds so much deeper in Sepedi as its emphasis is on the fact that 'as much as it's smooth outside the inside of it is very bitter'. I regret the day I started dating a married man, especially Pastor Tshepo Mamabolo.

I used to watch how happy he was with his wife. Always holding hands and being affectionate with one another

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sharing their love stories and beautiful pictures on social media. I ended up falling in love with the idea of being with in love with him. I wanted to experience the type of love that his wife was receiving, so much so that I saw myself becoming the Minister's wife. I know he was not satisfied in his marriage

because he had a reputation of cheating on his wife, little did I know that she wasn't the source of the problem.

I told myself that I will make him fall in love with me by giving it to him in ways that his wife was failing to do. I assumed her self-skills might have been disappointing since most woman who are married to the pastor as too conventional to explore other sex positions. I mean why else would her husband be busy with other woman outside. So, I made myself a promise to woo him in bed, give it to him so good that he would even scream my name when sleeping with his wife. I achieved that because soon after he started dating me, he stopped being intimate with her, and I became the only woman he dipped his man stick inside of. As wrong as it was, I started developing feelings for him and made it my mission to have him all to myself.

Get rid of Pheladi and become the new wife, that was my everyday motto. I did it all, the anal sex, the rimming and all that weird shit I thought would make him leave her and be mine and mine alone. You can imagine my excitement when he told me that he has served her with divorce papers as soon as we got back from our Cape Town trip. I was over the moon because it meant I was finally getting my chance at becoming

Mrs Tshepo Mmamabolo, the Minister's wife at Glory to God ministries.

As things were falling into place piece by piece, Tshepo moved out of his matrimonial home and part time into mine, Pheladi signed the divorced papers and I was loved by his mother. She used to tell me that she prefers me over Pheladi and wishes her son was never married to her in the first place. In fact she still tells me how she loves having me as her future daughter in law and Tshepo must just marry me so that I can soon give them a legitimate Mmamabolo heir.

What she doesn't know is that I will not be giving anyone an heir in this life time and maybe even in the next one. I recently lost a child you see, I lost my child in the most painful way before I even knew I was pregnant. I don't know what happened but Tshepo and I were having fun in Durban and the next thing I was being dragged out of a club accused of being too friendly with the guys in there.

I tried to defend myself and explain that the guy I was talking to wanted to find out if he and his boyfriend can come join our table since we looked a little bored. But Tshepo felt that was a

lie because the guy did not look gay to him and I just wanted to cover up my whoring ways. Unfortunately for me, his beating resulted in me waking up in an emergency room of the hospital with the news of a lost child and a damaged womb. Yes, my womb is damaged and I will never be able to carry a child full term.

The most painful part about it is that I have never received counselling for my loss because I had to be checked out of a hospital so that we can come rushing over since his son was admitted in hospital. Yes, his son. I lost my precious baby and I will never have one to call my own while he has kids of his own. I am miserable because all this started with me envying another woman's life. I repeat 'se bone thola bo reledi teng go yona go a baba' 'All is not gold that glitters'.

I take in a deep breath before letting it all out. I have been postponing this for too long now, unfortunately for me not saying anything to them is doing more harm than good. I had to learn from Tshepang's attempted suicide and do right by them. As difficult as it is for me, I am determined to go through with it.

I have always been a tortoise and a teddy bear combination when it comes to dealing with problems and conflicts. Avoid and accommodate, that has always been me, because I yearn only for peace and harmony in my life. Too bad trouble seems to follow me around, attracting sharks like Tshepo, people who believe in 'I win and you lose' nothing more and nothing less. Leaving my life in shambles like right now.

How am I supposed to look my kids in the eyes and tell them that I have been abused by their father countless times? How am I supposed to convince them that the man they love and look up to has been nothing but a monster to me? Breaking my soul piece by piece until I stood up and said enough is enough. How do I look them in the eyes and tell them that my 13 years of marriage to their father was one hell hole for

me? Unfortunately for me right now, it has to be done because we are here now, definitely too late to turning back now.

Dr: "Are you ready for me to let them in Pheladi?"

I nod while doing the breathing exercise, slowly in and slowly out. I watch as she steps outside to call the kids in. It has always been my life mission to protect my kids from the truth about their father and now, now I have to tell them everything. I get up on my feet and hug then one by one as they walk into the room.

Tshepang: "Is everything okay mom?" he asks against my chest as I hold on to him tighter.

I smile and nod as I break off the hug, my fragile child, I worry about him more because he looks up to his father and in his eyes he is nothing but an angel. But here I am now, about to make him doubt everything he thought he knew.

We all settle down on our respective seats with me and the therapist facing the two of them.

Dr: “Tshepang and Tshepiso, I know you must be wondering why we are here today. Your mother has something that she needs to share with you. I need you to do her just one favor okay. Just let her talk, what she is about to say to you is not easy for her to do just keep that in mind. None of what she is about to say is any of your fault and she is not telling you so that you can hate somebody. She is only doing so, so that you can understand certain things and why certain decisions had to be taken. I need you to be open minded and let her talk. Can you do that for her?”

Tshepiso and Tshepang: “Yes” they both say.

Dr: “Ready when you are dear” she says giving me a nod.

Silent. We all fall into an uncomfortable silent as they all wait for me to say something. But words, words are just failing me, I don't know where to start or what to say. I did say I have always been a tortoise right, burying my head at the sight of

trouble but now I am forced to face my fears head on and talk to my kids about one thing that I have always avoided talking about.

I feel a wave of strength coming over me as I take a look at their cute faces plastered with nothing but warm smiles. I enjoy seeing warm smiles on their cute faces, they give me strength to go on when I am getting weaker and losing faith.

Me: deep sigh "I have always made it my life mission to shield you both from the truth. Only because I thought it's what was best for the two of you or me. Yes, it was best for me too because I did not want you to look at me pitiful or feel sorry for me. But all that is in the past now and I don't need you feeling sorry for me because I have conquered it all.

I am only telling you this now so that you can understand why I had to divorce your father. None of it was your fault

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our marriage was doomed from the beginning but I stayed hoping things will get better but it only got worse. The truth is

your father did things to me that I couldn't take anymore and I
saw it fit to divorce him.”

I wipe off my falling tears and take in a deep breath before
letting it all out. It really is not easy for me to talk about this.

Me: “Your father used to abuse me, both physically, mentally
and emotionally. I was his punching bag for the longest of times
but I had to put on a brave face to the world because I had
hoped he will stop but he never did. As if the beating was not
enough he had other woman outside our marriage with whom
he has kids with and it eventually got too much for me. Too
much so that I had to get out of that marriage. I hope you can
both forgive me for breaking the family that you know but I had
to because he would have ended up killing me. Please forgive
me.

I am sorry that I did not leave sooner because I would hate for
the two of you to grow up thinking it's okay to stay where you
are not loved. Please forgive me for the selfish decision that I
took of walking away but I pray that you would one day see
that what I did was necessary and had to be done. I am sorry
that's I broke the family apart and as a results your father

doesn't live with us anymore. I am sorry Tshepang that you had to spend your 9th birthday crying over your father because he forgot your day. Please forgive me" at this point I was crying.

Tshepiso: "You are brave mom and we don't blame you. I am happy you left because what was happening to you was killing me too"

I look at her in shock.

Tshepiso: "Yes mom, I knew what he was doing to you and I prayed to God to set you free and he answered my prayers when he gave you strength to leave him. I love you so much mom and you are my here. Never forget that" she says giving me a tight hug.

Dr: "Tshepang are you okay?" she asks kneeling in front of him.

He has been sitting there motionless. He hasn't said a word and he is not even moving. I get up from where I am sitting and take a sit next to him before taking his hand in mine.

Tshepang: "I am sorry mom" he says before breaking down repeating the same words over and over again.

Me: "It's okay baby, none of this is your fault. You don't have to be sorry baby" I say rubbing his back"

Tshepang: "I can't believe I blamed you and I was selfish and tried to kill myself on my birthday. I am sorry, I never saw the pain in your eyes and I blamed you mom. I am sorry"

Me: "It's okay baby, it's okay. I don't blame you for anything and I need you to stop blaming yourself"

He nods as he rest his head on my chest crying. Tshepiso joins us as we share a group hug.

We spend the next 2 hours having a session with the therapist sharing how we all feel about today's revelations. I am glad because at the end of it all we have all addressed our feeling, fears and laid our emotions on the table.

We are now driving back home, the two of them are sitting at the back talking about this and that. While I keep stealing glances from my review mirror, I can't help but smile truth be told I feel very relieved. It's like 100 tons of weight have been lifted off my shoulders. As difficult as it was, my therapist assured me that it was the right thing to do, I am glad she was there with me every step of the way (my therapist I mean). We have more group sessions planned with her until she feels we are doing okay.

Tshepiso's POV

I walk into my room and close the door behind me before taking my diary from where I keep it locked away. I need to write down few things in it, this has always been how I coped with what has been happening around me. Pouring my heart and feelings in my little diary.

DEAR DIARY: MY MOTHER IS MY HERO

I have come to learn that heroes don't always come off like they portray them in movies, with costumes and cloaks. Sometimes heroes comes off as mothers who have to take difficult decisions that may seem selfish to a number of people.

Today I had to watch my mother wear her heart on her sleeves. I had to watch her talk about one subject she has always avoided for as long as it has been happening to her. I still remember the first time I found out. I was only 9 years old, same age as Tshepang now. I couldn't sleep that night and I wanted to get a glass of milk from the kitchen but I stopped on my track when I saw my father beating up my mother at the bottom of those stairs. He kept kicking her like a dog and he kept holding he mouth so that she doesn't make noise to wake us up.

Unfortunately, I was not brave enough to help her. As I stood there frozen, I couldn't even scream at my father to stop what he was doing. I just stood there as he kicked her over and over again until he was done. I watched as he picked her up and walked up stairs with her in her arms and that's when I ran back to my room. I went to sleep with a heavy heart that day and I

prayed to God to free my mother but God did not answer me sooner.

I woke up with a heavy heart dreading to get out of bed. I did not know how I will react seeing my mother or my father. Surprisingly, I was welcomed to the room by my mother's beautiful laughter as if nothing happened the previous night. My father was as loving to her as always and my mother was laughing and loving him back. I was very confused I won't lie, I even thought I was dreaming. But I started noticing things and hearing sounds every other night when my father was beating my mother up and I knew it was really happening.

I finally gathered up strength and spoke to my grandmother about what her son was doing and she called me a liar to my face. She accused me of wanting to stir trouble and break my family apart, she made me swear never to utter those words to anyone ever again because I will only be allowing the devil to use me in tearing my parents apart. That was the last time I spoke about what was happening to my mother to anyone because I was sure no one would believe me. I did not want to be called a liar and who would believe a 9 year old when my mother was not saying anything or had no bruises. My mother's abuse became a norm and I couldn't do anything about it.

Deep down hated my father but I had to smile and pretend on the outside. I used to pray to God to let him die from an accident in one of his business trips. I would listen to him preach in church and I would feel like screaming what a hypocrite he was. People would talk about what a wonderful man my father is and I would want to argue otherwise but I couldn't.

Instead I devoted myself to church and singing in the church choir, hoping my praises and devotion to God will be enough to set my mother free. I was very happy when my mom told us she is getting a divorce because it means my prayers were finally answered. I don't have a relationship with my father and it never even bothered him why I was never close to him.

My mother is a hero and I pray to God to give me at least half the strength she possess when I am older. She conquered all the things she went through at the hands of our father and did everything in her power to protect us from it all. She found comfort in the Lord when most people would have opted to numb their pain with drugs and alcohol. My mother is a hero because she survived years of abuse and still smile to the world.

As harsh as her life has been, my mother still remains the kindest person I have ever meet.

Tshepang: "Mom says dinner is ready" he says walking into my room without knocking.

Me: "Okay, I am coming now now"

I wait for him to go out before placing my diary back in it's safe place. I have a feeling we are going to be fine and I know God has come through for us and my prayers to him has not been wasted.

I am at Savannah mall enjoying my lunch at CoFi when I noticed Mike busy smooching with some woman. It did not bother me at first because I assumed she was the pregnant girlfriend he broke up with me to be with. The truth is, our break up came very sudden and I never found proper closer because most of my questions were left answered. I mean we were happy one minute and the next thing I received an SMS informing me of a breakup.

I sat there digging into my food until I noticed the girl getting up to leave. She was obviously not coming back because she took her handbag with before kissing him and rushing off. For the first few minutes I sat there and contemplating whether or not to get up and walk up to him just to talk. It's not that I wanted him back, I just wanted to understand what really changed because clearly that girl is not the pregnant woman he supposedly left me for.

Me: "Hi Mike" I say grabbing a chair in front of him.

Mike: "Hi" he says looking around like he is scared of being seen with me or something.

I clearly I caught him off guard.

Me: “Relax Mike, your girlfriend has nothing to worry about. I am not here to ruin your relationship. I just wanted to come over and say hi, since you blocked me”

Mike: “Look, I don’t want trouble okay. My nose has not properly healed and I won’t be able to take any more abuse from your husband”

Me: “My husband? What are you talking about Mike?”

Mike: “Like I said Pheladi, I don’t want any trouble. I promised him I will not have any form of communication with you and I have kept my end of the deal. Please leave because he did promise to kill me and I know he was not joking” he says with his voice masked with fear.

Me: “It’s okay Mike. I really did not mean to put your life in danger. Forgive me” I say getting up from the chair.

Mike: "For what is worth, I truly loved you and I am sorry we couldn't be"

Me: "I am sorry too Mike. Clearly we were not meant to be or else you could have fought harder"

I watch as he keep his head down struggling to look at me.
What a shame.

Me: "Please find the money and your tip on the table" I say to the waitress on my way out.

Tshepo is really unbelievable. How dare he interfere in my love life like that? Don't I deserve some sort of happiness? He has Mmabatho and I don't interfere with their relationship, is asking him to do the same that difficult for him to oblige? And just like that my perfectly good day has been ruined. As somber as my mood is, I am going to attend that board meeting and hope for the best when it comes off to those votes.

Tshepo's POV

I hold my breath as we all listen to the votes being counted out loud. I can't believe that so many board members have voted against me. Truth be told, I did not expect such a competition from Pheladi, I mean this is only her second attendance as a board member and she already has so many people believing in her.

Mrs Molepo: "And that concludes our votes. Congratulations Mr. Mamabolo, you still remain the chairperson of the board with 56% of the votes for you" she says, followed by a round of applause in the room.

I can't help but smile wider as I receive the good news. I have to be honest though that was too close for comfort, Pheladi might have lost now but she is going to be a great threat in the future. For that

I should not let my guard down.

Me: “Thank you very much. I promise I will not let you down” I say looking at everyone seated around the table even those who clearly voted against me.

Mr Molepo: “Mma Molopa, you should be really proud of yourself my child. You have run a great race, unfortunately the time is not yet right. Don’t look at this a defeat because sometimes God delays certain things in our lives so that we can have space to focus on other things that require our immediate attention. I for one, I am proud of you” she says with a huge smile

Pheladi: “Thank you for your beautiful words Mma. The timing was really off as I have a lot on my plate currently. Let me take this time and thank everyone who has voted for me, your faith is very much appreciated”

Me: “Well that’s conclude today’s business. My PA will be sending invitations regarding the next board meeting until then please take care” I say gathering my papers on the table with other following suit before heading out.

I wish I could say this has made my day and I am going to celebrate this victory. Unfortunately, I can't celebrate a position that has always been mine while I am about to lose so much more. To be honest my day was ruined the moment I woke up and received a call from a friend informing me of an unfortunate situation in his life that is likely to affect me negatively.

Pheladi: "Can I please have few minutes of your time?" she says bringing me from my thoughts.

Me: "Ofcouse my love, I always have time for you"

Pheladi: "From here onwards, stay the hell away from my life and stop involving yourself in my love life. It's none of your business who I sleep with as it's none of my business who you sleep with, Okay?" she says with a hint of anger in a voice.

I must confess, I am confused right now because I don't know what she is on about.

Me: “What are you talking about?”

Pheladi: “I am talking about Mike and how you threatened his life unless he left me alone. Grow up Tshepo and focus on Mmabatho and starting a family with her because my kids and I are definitely fine without you in our lives”

Me: “Wow. You are really worked up over a guy Pheladi. I was only doing you a favor, that man was clearly taking advantage of you as we were still getting out of a relationship. Normal people don't jump from one relationship to another. They heal first and take their time before jumping into the next interested dick”

Pheladi: “Do you even hear yourself mara Tshepo. You were already with Mmabatho before I even presented you with divorce papers and yet you want to stand there and judge me for trying to move on just because I am a woman. You are obviously not well upstairs and you need to be checked out”

Me: “You know what, I am dealing with a lot and I don’t have time for you and your shit. I am sorry I warned that guy to stay away from me but trust me when I say, I will not be interfering in your life anymore. Now you need to excuse me because I have a pressing issue that I need to deal with”

Pheladi: “Mxm” she says before grabbing her bag and walking off.

I take out my phone and search for my Jimmy’s numbers before calling him. Jimmy is a lawyer and he is exactly what most people would call the fixer. Just what I need right now.

Jimmy: “Mr Mamabolo”

Me: “Please tell me that you are winning”

Jimmy: “Unfortunately not sir. Your friend is going to have to face the music and this time around the government has evidence to lock him up for a long time”

Me: “What does it mean for his assets?”

Jimmy: “Unfortunately, everything of his has been frozen and the state is going to auction everything that they can sell just to try and recover their money. I am sorry but there is absolutely nothing me or anyone can do. I know you don’t what to hear

this but just forget about your things because you are never getting them back unless you buy them back at the auction.....”

I hand up on him as he still talking. He isn't saying anything that is worth my time because he is saying the opposite of what I need to hear right now. I can't believe God is punishing me like this I now wish I could turn back the hand of time and I would do everything differently.

The problem started when I transferred some of my assets into a friend's name while I was going through the divorce process in an attempt to hide them from Pheladi and her lawyers. Unfortunately, now they are gone forever because the person whom I temporarily transferred them too has been arrested for embezzling funds from the department of treasury and all his assets has been frozen. I feel like my whole world just came crushing down, if only I was not being greedy I could have only lost half but now I have lost 10 million worth of assets in houses and shares.

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(Few weeks later)

I am at Zwashu meeting Cate for lunch, apparently this is one of her favorite go to places when she is craving for an African dish. I can't believe I have lived in Polokwane for the past 15 years or so but this is my first time here. It really goes to show how stuck-up my life has been as the minister's wife.

Me: "What?" I say taking a bite from my delicious mogodu

Cate: "You are glowing babe. If I did not better I would swear you are getting it every minute and every hour" she says with a huge smile on her face.

Me: "Well, fortunately you and I know better. Akere it has been a dry season in the Kalahari Desert" I say before we both burst into laughter.

Cate: "Dry season or not my friend you are really glowing. It's like your happiness is reflecting on your skin and it's just wow"

Me: "Well happiness does live here friend. I have never felt this content in my whole life. I mean for the first time in a very long time I feel genuinely happy and it's not because of anyone but myself"

Cate: "I am happy for you myself. Gape you were once miserable and it used to scare the hell out of me. That's why at some point I stopped coming to your house so often plus, I hated Mr holier than thou with every fiber of my being" she says before we burst into laughter.

Me: "Don't remind me. Okare neba njesitse (It's like I was feed a love portion)"

Cate: "I can't put it past that family shame" she says laughing.

Me: "I once was lost but now am found. I was blind but now I see" I sing with amusement.

Cate: "Hallelujah amazing grace"

The truth is I am happy and this is the happiest I have been in a very long time. My only regret is not walking out of that marriage a long time ago. I can't believe I denied myself so much happiness and joy while holding on to a dead marriage that stopped producing any form of sunshine in my life a long time ago. Unfortunately, life is like that, keeping us imprisoned in hopeless situations because of the fear of the unknown.

I mean how many of us are stuck in places where we are not happy because we are afraid of letting go? Be it a relationship, work or partnership. We have become so afraid of the unknown that we even make excuses of why we can't let go. 'He will change' 'things will get better' 'I can't do better than this' 'what if I let go and never find anything better' these are the lies we keep feeding ourselves as we keep holding to dead relationships. I once saw a picture that told a beautiful story about holding on where it hurts. It was a picture of a hand that turned red from holding on the rope that clearly inflicted pain on the hand and immediately turned normal when the hand let go of the rope. Just like in most of our relationships sometimes holding on does more damage than good and we will never know how happy we can be unless we take that chance.

Him: "Hi....Pheladi, I thought that was you" he says hugging me before taking a chair next to me.

Me: "Hi...." I say trying to remember his name.

Him: "Wow you forgot my name didn't you"

Cate: "Forgive her

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she has never been good with names" she says coming to my rescue.

Him: "Ooh I see plus it's been long since we last saw each other. Ke Rofhiwa Muravha" he says extending Cate and then me.

Cate: "Cate Mabitsela"

Him: "Nice to meet you Cate"

Me: “So Rofhiwa how have you been? Are you still in politics?”

Rofhiwa: “Wow at least she remembers who I am. But to answer your questions, no I am no longer into politics. I outgrew all that”

Cate: “Politics? How do you guys even know each other?” she ask curiously.

Me: “We went to the same University and he was actually the SRC president”

Rofhiwa: “And she broke my heart. Apparently she did not date politicians. Imagine” he says laughing.

We sat there talking and laughing until Cate had to leave because she had to rush somewhere out of the blue leaving me to finish my lunch with Rofhiwa.

Rofhiwa: "Where is your wedding ring?" he says holding my hand to inspect my wedding finger.

Me: "I took it off"

Rofhiwa: "Why?"

Me: "Because I am divorced"

Rofhiwa: "Well Divorce happens to the best of us and its life unfortunately. But how are you and the kids coping?"

Me: "We are doing better than we have ever been. Taking each day as it comes"

Rofhiwa: "That's all we can do right? Take each day as it comes" he says giving me his alluring smile.

We spend the rest of the afternoon talking about his business ventures and what lead him to let go of politics and so on. All in

all, it's safe to say I had a beautiful day, the food and company was just exceptional. Rofhiwa and I exchanged numbers before we had to go our separate ways since it was getting late and he had to drive to Venda that evening to attend a wedding the next day morning.

I received a disturbing call on my way home and I can tell my day is about to turn from great to sour. Apparently one of Tshepo's baby mamas has dropped off her child at my house. I don't even understand why because nothing like this has ever happened before. I see Tshepiso waiting for me at the end of the drive way for her arms folded while shaking her head. When will my kids and I have a break mara? Even in divorce Tshepo is still making our lives a living hell.

Tshepiso: "He is so rude mom" she says as soon as I step out of the car.

Me: "Where is his mother?"

Tshepiso: “She left. She just dropped him here and left” she says following me into the house.

I walked in the sitting room and found him sitting on a sofa, watching TV. The first thing I noticed is how much alike he looks like Tshepo despite his skin color being a shade darker.

Me: “Hello Karabo. Where is your mother?”

Karabo: “She went home”

Tshepiso: “Gee mom, you know him?”

Me: “Bring me my phone from the car. I need to call Gloria” I say handing her my car keys and totally ignoring her question.

Ofcouse I know him. Karabo is the same age as Tshepiso and his mother is the one who once attacked me in the Mamabolo household while I was still pregnant with Tshepiso. What I don't understand is why his mother dropped him off here because we have always had an agreement with her. Tshepo will take

care of the child financially and be there for him like a father is supposed and in return the mother would never disrespect me or bother me at all.

Me: "Give me Gloria's numbers" I say to Karabo who doesn't even seem to be bothered that he has been dumped with total strangers.

Karabo: "072 751..." he calls out as I dial the number from my phone.

Gloria: "Hello"

Me: "Mara Gloria what is wrong?" I say walking away to my bedroom leaving the kids in the sitting room.

Gloria: "Aowa lerena le gona. Ke bo lela le mang? (I am fine thanks and you? Who am I talking to)"

Me: "Ke Pheladi. Gloria you left your son in my house"

Gloria: “Wow, it must be a very cold day in hell. You calling me. I guess you have found your package”

Me: “Gloria why is your son in my house. I thought we had an understanding”

Gloria: “ooh yes, we did have an understanding. But it’s been two months since I received any money. So wena le monna wagago bonang plan gore ledira eng ka yena (You and your husband will see what you do with him) she says before hanging up.

I try calling her back and she just let it ring to voicemail. I don’t understand any of this. What does she mean she hasn’t received any money from Tshepo for the past two months? My anger is only escalated when I try to call Tshepo only to be welcomed by a voicemail on the other end of the line.

Me: “Get your things Karabo. I am taking you home” I say walking back into the dining room.

Karabo: "I can't go home. My mom said I should not come back unless my father gives me 2 months' worth of my maintenance money" he says not even looking at me.

Me: "Come then. I will take you to your father"

She shakes his head no and continues watching TV. I need to call Tshepo's mother since her son's phone is off. I can't be dealing with Tshepo's problems when he and I are no longer husband and wife. Even worse he phone rings and there is just no answer on the other end. I bet she can hear the phone and chooses not to answer since she can see I am the one calling. I will just send her an SMS and threaten to involve the police because I know how much she would like to keep this under wraps.

'Please let Tshepo know that his son Karabo is here in my house because his mother damped him here. I expect him to be collected within the next hour or I will call the police and the social workers to come and take him since both his parents have abandon him. Thank you in advance' I type furiously before sending the SMS to her and Mmabatho, hopefully one of them will have more luck in getting hold of Tshepo than I have been for the past 10 minutes or so.

Chapter 24 bonus

It's really sad how we are contributing towards a broken generation as parents. We are busy breaking our kids and their beautiful spirits into sharp dangerous pieces and we are not even aware. I went to bed with a broken heart last night. At first I was pissed because neither Tshepo nor Gloria came for their child but after my encounter with Karabo I was no longer angry but sad. The initial plan was to let him spend the night and then drag him to his grandmother's house screaming and kicking first thing in the morning.

But that won't be the case anymore, not after the heart breaking conversation I had with him before going to bed. I know I have too much on my plate right now and Karabo is not my problem but my motherly instincts does not allow me to make him go through another form of rejection. The truth is, Karabo already feels rejected by both his mother and father, so me dragging him out of my house will damage him even further.

It's sad how much pain we inflict on our children while we are busy proving point to each other as adults. African wise men

saw it all when they said 'when two elephants fight the grass is the one that suffers'.

The truth is I was not even planning to entertain Karabo let alone waste my time talking to him. So I just prepared a guest room for him and dismissed them all to go and sleep after supper while I remained behind catching up on my research proposal and an abstract for the paper I am working on. This was until his soft sobs caught my attention when I was passing the guest room around midnight.

At first I ignored him and went to my room pretending I did not hear anything. But I couldn't fall asleep because the mother in me was too worried about him, an innocent child who did not ask for any of this. So I went back to check if he was okay, and what I walked into tore my heart into millions pieces.

I found the poor child sitting on the cold floor with his back against the wall and knees up on his chest, arms around his knees and face buried. Without thinking twice my motherly instinct kicked in as I found myself rushing to his side and pulling him into my embrace. At this point, he was not the child of a mother who attacked me placing my unborn child in danger. He was not the child who happened to be the first

living evidence of my husband's infertility. At that point, he was just a child. A child who needed who needed some love and protection, I did not even care if his mother and father were not even in my good books because he had nothing to do with all that.

I kept brushing his back, telling him that everything is going to be okay. He held on to me and cried bitterly on my chest. As if his cries were not enough to break my heart, his words were a final nail. "Why can't anyone love me?" "Am I that unlovable?" these are the words he kept saying over and over again through his loud sobs. I wanted to assure him that both his parents surely loved him without any doubt, but he saw through my lies and how unconvincing my voice was. Karabo is broken and the sad part is that Gloria and Tshepo are too busy living their lives to see that or even do anything about it.

I smile when I look through the kitchen window and see the kids playing and laughing together in the back yard. It warms my heart how accommodating they are to him and the fact that they are getting along as siblings. At the end of the day they are siblings and they might end up needing each other later in life, like they say blood is thicker than water.

Me: "You need to do better with your Kids Tshepo, all of them. Spend some time with them please, Karabo like others needs a father not just a SASSA parent. I am pleading with you please be there for them or else they are going to grow up so broken that no amount of love from their partners would fix them up"

Tshepo: "I heard everything you have been saying and I promise you I will do better from here on. I was just not aware of certain things but you now opened my eyes to them. Thank you for taking care of him for me this weekend" He says all humble.

If I didn't know better I would say, he is a sweet man. A true man of God, but I will not allow myself to be fooled by Tshepo's charming nature. Once bitten twice shy. I must admit though that we have come a long way and there was a time I never thought Tshepo and I could sit down together and have a meaningful conversation without him belittling or insulting me.

I have been sitting here with Tshepo for the past 30 minutes and I have given him a mouthful regarding his parenting skills using Karabo's situation as a motivation factor. To my surprise he agrees with me that he has not been a great father to most of his kids and he promised to do better and build some relationships with all of them. I hope Mmabatho will be understanding and accepting enough to encourage him to do all that.

Tshepo: "You are a great woman Pheladi and I am sorry I was not the husband you needed all along. I see my mistakes now and I know it's too late for us"

Me: "Just do better with Mmabatho and you will be fine. I hope one day when I have the courage to sit down with you and ask why you did all those things to me, you will be open enough with me to tell me the honest truth"

He looks down and nod slowly with embarrassment plastered on his face. He is ashamed of himself and thats somehow makes me happy because it means he won't be doing the same mistakes with Mmabatho.

Tshepo: "We should get going please call Karabo for me" he says getting up from the couch.

Me: "He is already waiting for you outside with his little sister n brother" I say getting up from where I was seated and walking out side

Karabo: "Mma, can I come back and visit again?" he says holding on to me too tight.

Me: “If it’s okay with your mother, I would love to have you visit us again” I say reciprocating the hug.

He nods against my chest before letting go and moving to hug Tshepang.

Karabo: “I will be back soon, remember to keep practicing those soccer skills and you will be okay”

It warms my heart to see the kind of bond the kids have created within such a small space of time.

Tshepang: “Definitely. Maybe mom can bring me to Turfloop sometimes so that I can practice with your team” he says excitedly looking at me pleadingly.

You see Tshapang is now putting me on a very tight corner because I don’t think Gloria will be as welcoming to them as I have been to her son. That woman is very bitter.

Karabo: “I would love to have you come to my house too, but my mom is not as nice as yours so I don’t know” he says shrugging his shoulders and biting his bottom lip.

Eish that part just made me sad. I am sure that the kids would now like to keep in touch and visit one another as siblings but they are going to have us making it all difficult.

Me: "I think it's best if Karabo comes here baby, we wouldn't want to burden his mother I am sure she has plenty to do than baby sit a bunch of naughty boys" I say trying to sound playful.

Karabo smiles and nods at me in agreement before moving to hug Tshepiso.

Karabo: "I have always wanted a little sister and I am happy that I have one as sweet and clever as you. I wouldn't have asked for anyone else" he says brushing her back

I think Tshepiso and Karabo formed a much stronger bond because they are of the same age. You wouldn't even think she is the same person who thought he was rude when he first arrived here on Friday. I guess all our feelings towards Karabo has changed since the time he first arrived here.

Tshepiso: "I am happy I have a big brother too. Please come back soon I know I am going to miss you"

This is a bitter sweet moment indeed. I know I have no legal right to Karabo and he needs to get back to his parent but I somehow feel he is better off with us than any of them. I feel like he needs me and my protection but then again I have no leg to stand on. All I can do is welcome him back with open arms whenever he feels like visiting my house and for me to make sure he knows that he is always welcome here.

Karabo: "Thank you very much Mma, may God bless you" he says with a breaking voice before picking up his bag and walking to the car.

Me: "May God bless you too my child" I say with a warm smile

My heart aches as I watch him walk away to join his father in the car with tears falling down his cheeks. I say a little prayer in my heart asking God to protect him as I walk back to the house with my kids hand in hand

Tshepo's POV

I am driving back from Gloria's house in Turfloop, as I had to drop off Karabo and have a chat with her. The truth is will no longer be able to finance her expensive lifestyle with money disguised as maintenance money for Karabo as she refuses to go and work like normal people. Gloria was getting more money than she deserved but now the gravy train stops here. I can't give her what I don't afford, she will have to make due for the time being until such time that my finances are back to normal.

Not even once in my wildest dreams did I ever foresee myself in such a dire financial situation. The financial hardships I am going through have also revealed who my true allies are. Most of my trusted friends have since disappeared from my life or

coming up with different reasons why they can't borrow me money. The truth is I am going through some financial hardships since I have recently lost a huge chunk of revenue when my trusted friend's assets got frozen by the government.

I now know I shouldn't have been greedy and gave Pheladi exactly what was due to her. I now see the error of my ways because the truth is she deserved every cent and more. That woman did not just put up with my years of abuse and humiliation but she also played a huge role in how I acquired my wealth. I don't even think I deserved her, let alone to have been married to her for so many years.

With everything that I am going through, I can't help but think back to where it all started. Pheladi was with me when I was all my business were mere ideas. She did not just believe in me, but she also supported. Motivated me when all hope was lost and gave me a head start as a startup capital. That woman took her chances and gabled with me but I was too greedy to acknowledge all that when the time came for her get her well-deserved shares.

Maybe God is punishing me for forgetting that Pheladi's dream had to die for mine to become a reality. What I mean is that Pheladi had to quit her job as a teacher and invest her pension payout into my business. Only because she understood how much my dreams meant to me her being generous placed mine

above hers. I found myself shaking my head as I am thinking about all this and all that I have put her through. God knows she did not even deserve any of it. I must be the most ungrateful person on earth.

With all this on my mind I decided to drive home instead of Mmabatho's house. I think I need to take a break from her and dealing with my things and focus on becoming a better father to my kids. I park the car in the garage before walking in it sure smells great in here and I know my mother is working her magic in the kitchen.

Me: "Hi, Mma. It sure smells good in here I can't wait to eat" I say kissing her cheeks.

Mma: "Heeee. I did not think you were coming back. So I did not count you"

Me: "What do you mean you did not know I am coming back? I stay here mos" I say surprised at her statement.

I may be spending some of my time at Mmabatho's house but I live here now and she knows that I don't even understand why she is acting all brand new.

Mma: "Don't you think you are too old to be staying at home with your mothers? I mean I am used to my own space ever since you and your brother moved out and now I have to deal

with you coming in and out of my house like you pay rent” she says wiping her hands with her apron that she has on.

Me: “So you would like for me to start paying rent in my father’s house?”

Mma: “No, I would like for you to move out and find a place of your own. If you haven’t noticed, this is no longer your father’s house because dead people holds no title deeds so it’s mine and mine alone. Next thing you will be collecting your million kids and overcrowding me. I can’t have that, my blood pressure will not survive that” she says leaving my jaws dropped.

I never thought I will see a day where my mother turns against me. She of all people knows my financial predicaments, I cannot afford to buy rent a place let alone buy a house.

Me: “My financial situation is dire right now mother. I will move out as soon as I am back on my feet, I promise”

Mma: “Not good enough. How long will that be?..... you don’t know either so I won’t be taking my chances. Just move in with Mmabatho in the meantime, after all she is also the reason why your wife divorced you” she says before turning her back on me and focused on her pots like she did not just deal me a low blow.

It's true what they say, when it rains it pours and unfortunately for me this is a hail storm. I walked away confused by my mother's sharp words that cut through me like a sword. I would not care if they were coming from my bother because we have never really been closed, but my mother was always on my corner and her sudden change of attitude towards me is worrying. I switched on the TV and switched through the channels to find something to watch until I settled on a soccer channel.

Mma: "You are sitting down watching my TV using my electricity? I really thought you were packing up your bags and calling Mmabatho to let her know you are moving in" she says standing in front of the TV, blocking my view.

Me: "Mma, What is your real problem. I feel like you want to talk to me about something and you are just being mean to me to get some point across"

Mma: "Okay let me tell you what this is about ngwanaka (My child). This is about the debit order that you cancelled on me. I depend on that money Tshepo and now that you have things to cut off you are cutting off my money. Why don't you cut off the money you send to Pheladi monthly for the Kids? It's not like she is not working so she doesn't need the money. Me on the other hand raised you from birth and when you start cutting of

people, I am the first to get cut off. So ya, I am not happy with you right now”

All this time I am nodding slowly as she talks. I can't believe my mother would prefer my kids suffer while I keep sending her money she doesn't even need. I am hurt and disappointed in her, my mother is selfish and really care about no one but herself.

Me: “Okay mom, I will make a plan to send you money tomorrow. Okay, I am sorry that I assumed you of all people would be understanding of my situation”

I watch as she smile and walk away to the Kitchen. Money really is the root of all evil, it knows no family or friendship.

I listen as she laughs out loud at how I had a wet dream last night. I am glad she finds my starvation situation funny because I don't. I mean everything is going well in my life except for my love life. For one I am enjoying my work, not struggling with my studies, my kids are happy, Tshepo and I behave like reasonable adults with each other but love life dololo.

Cate: "Hello, Pheladi?" she says bringing me back from my thoughts

Me: "Mmmm?" I say realizing that I just zoned off forgetting I am talking to someone on the phone.

Cate: "Where did you drift off too my friend" she says concerned.

Me: "Please hold on for a sec"

I say stopping by the car and searching for my keys in the hand bag before moving to place my lunch back in the back of the car, moving to the driver's side and settling in before connecting the phone to the car Bluetooth.

Me: "Done" I say reversing the car from the parking lot.

Cate: "So where did you drift off to earlier?" she ask with a hint of concern in her voice.

Me: "I was just thinking about my non-existent love life. I mean it was not difficult for Tshepo to move on and now I hear he moved in with Mmabatho and me on the other hand it's been a dry season"

Cate: "I am sorry you feel this way my friend but all I can say is go with the flow and don't rush into anything with your emotions. Tshepo might have moved on in a blink of an eye but that is going to be problematic in a long time because he has not properly dealt with the divorce and that is just a recipe for disaster. I am not saying don't entertain the likes of Rofhiwa, but do it with reservations and don't expect anything more than just having fun. That's way you will be safe guarding your heart and should it turn to something more then it's a bonus"

I always enjoy my chat with Cate because she gives good advices and she is never judgmental. I don't have to pretend with her and I appreciate that about the type of friendship I have with her. I am lucky that even after such a long time of losing contact we reconnected to the type of friendship that we always had all those years ago.

Me: "I hear you my friend but I get lonely sometimes you know and I just wish God can bless me with a good man who will love me and love my kids whole heartedly"

Cate: "And you will find such a man, in the mean time I suggest you date without expecting anything from those man. Take

your time coz you just got out of a marriage, a hectic one at that so I feel you still need to rediscover yourself and want Pheladi likes and doesn't like. Trust me you are probably not yet ready to become someone's wife because you have played that role for the past 13 years and you need a break"

Me: "So what do you suggest I do in the meantime, die from hunger?" I say whining like a school teenager.

I don't know what it is about vitamin D that normally makes grown woman behave like teenagers. Some of you may be judging me right now but the truth of the matter is no one of you will survive the period that I have survived.

Cate: "I suggest you have fun. As long as you don't dive in too deep and don't catch feeling unless they are reciprocated"

I giggle at the thought of having sex with a man with no strings attached. I have never thought in my wildest dreams that I would be considering such in my life. I mean I am the woman who has only slept with one man in her entire life and only lost her virginity after she has been marriage. So this is definitely not me, but then again who am I? Maybe I need to stop being uptight in order to uncover who I am.

Me: "With all this talk, I think I found myself driving to Rofhiwa's hotel" I say with a hint of embarrassment

I don't know what happened but I found myself off ramping on to the N1 driving towards Meropa Casino where Rofhiwa is booked in for the next few days for an event hosted by their department that he is attending in Polokwane.

Cate: "Bjang chomi (How friend) you don't even have an overnight bag mos?" she says laughing

Me: "An overnight bag ya eng? (For what?). I won't be sleeping over phela I have kids" I say busy packing up my things in the office.

Cate: "Akere you might be getting some some who knows if you will have the energy to walk after that. Plus I hear once you go Venda there is no going back" she says before bursting into laughter.

Yah friends we keep neh, Cate has always been the voive of reason but instead of talking me out she if busy encouraging me even to sleep over. I couldn't help but join in the laughter because I can't believe I am really doing this. It has been two weeks since I meet Rofhiwa at Zwashu and we have been communication every day and went out to lunch once since he came to Polokwane since he is based in Venda full time. So he invited me over to his hotel room after work and I haven't given him the answer whether or not I will be coming. I told him I will think about it and that was 2 hours ago.

Me: “Nah, I am sure that’s not what they say my friend. It’s black not Venda, once you got black there is no going back” I say trying to catch my breath.

Cate: “Whatever friend. All I know is that the Venda vitamin D is just what the doctor ordered and trust me when I say you are about to lose your virginity all over again”

Me: “Hai, my friend don’t play like that. Phela I might as well drive straight home” I says panicking and excited at the same time.

Yes, the prospect of receiving the vitamin D tonight is exciting for the little girl in me who has been starved for such a long time. I wonder what is it about the D that makes grown woman excited like little teenagers.

Me: “But I am nervous my friend. I mean it has been loooooonnnnnnnnnng since.....you know” I say with a hint of embarrassment.

Cate: “Don’t worry wena, just go with the flow and remember no strings attached dear”

Me: “yes, no strings attached”

I stand by the door all nervous before finally gathering up the strength to knock on the door. I hear him shouting ‘I am

coming' from the other side of the door. For a second I feel like running away before the door open because I did not make any promises of coming. Ooh no

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suddenly it hit me that I did not get back to him about coming over since we spoke like 2 hours ago. He sure is taking time. What if he made other plans when I did not get back to him? Or made plans to meet with someone else?

Rofhiwa: "Wow, are you really walking away?" he calls out to me before I reach the elevator at the end of the corridor.

I close my eyes embarrassed before turning to look where he is standing. I swallow my saliva when I turn only to find him standing on the corridor next to his door half naked with only a white towel wrapped around his waist. My eyes move from his bulge appearing below his waist to his face only to be meet by a mischievous smile and a chuckle, he must have noticed where I had my eyes focused

Me: "I thought you are not in since I did not call to let you know I was coming" I say rather embarrassed and taking the long back to where he was standing by the door.

The walk back sure felt like a distance as each step I took seemed to be making no difference. It must be how he was looking at me and just standing there looking all yummy. Okay

Rofhiwa is one hot brother, tall and muscular with rich black skin color that's would remind you how beautiful black is.

Rofhiwa: "I am glad you came" he says hugging me making me instantly wet but just making contact with his warm strong body.

I can smell the fresh lavender shower gel meaning he just stepped out of the shower seconds ago. I guess that's why he took longer to open the door, he was probably busy showering while I assumes he was with someone else. I smile and secretly take in a deep breath before breaking the hug that lasted longer.

Me: "Did I catch you at the bad time?" I ask innocently as he ushers me inside.

I smile as I settle down on a chair

Rofhiwa: "No, actually your timing is just perfect. I was just taking a shower and going down stairs to order dinner. Would you like to join me or should we just order in?" he says taking off the towel and moving to the dressing table to take the body lotion.

I felt my panty getting wet instantly at his now exposed big and long anaconda. I found myself staring unintentionally so. I used to think Tshepo was gifted but this man in front of me is a true Venda man. Trust me when I say some man can make

everything you've know all your life seem useless and a waste of your time. If you think I am exaggerating think again, because whatever you have heard about Venda man was not just a myth.

Me: clearing my throat "Order in, Please" I say with a hint of embarrassment in my voice as I look on the floor and stealing glances at his anaconda.

Rofhiwa: "Am I making you uncomfortable" he asks moving closer to where I am sitting.

I shake my head no because at this point words are just failing me and the saliva in my mouth is just too much. My heart is beating fast and the my nirvana is just crying a river as he makes things worse and lift up my chin so that I can look at him. His eyes are soft and drawing my soul in, speaking a story of lust and desire.

Before I know it I was up on my feet and his tongue was dancing in my mouth. My body temperature was raising higher and higher with my arms moving all over his well-toned body. Warm and soft like a baby, that's how his skin felt in my hands.

Rofhiwa: "Tell me stop anytime you don't feel comfortable and I will" he says softly against my lips.

I nod and take control of the kiss, more hurriedly as hunger and anticipation drives me crazy. He must be mad thinking I will tell him to stop with the Victoria waterfall going on in my pants. He takes my hand and place on his forever growing anaconda and I must say I am both scared and excited at the same time. Before I know it my clothes were on the floor as I stood there stark naked with our bodies exchanging electricity. I laid on the bed as I watched him tear the condom and roll it on. I am not sure if it's going to cover up the whole thing. I tell you, this man right here deserves the XXXL.

He gently lays on top of me without placing all his weight on me and started to kiss me while his hand moved to nirvana.

Rofhiwa: "Oooh baby, I love how you are ready for me right now" he says rubbing my clit causing me to arc my back so that he can have an easy access

He started rubbing his anaconda on the entrance of my nirvana making me yearn for him to just slam in. at this point in time our breathing patterns were hitched and the sound of John Legend filling the room. I nod yes at him as he looks at me one more time as if he is asking if I am sure about this. Slowly and gentle he pushed his anaconda in causing me to scream out of few times. Oooo It's been so long, it does feel like I am losing my virginity, painful and yet so nice.

Rofhiwa: “Are you okay” he ask with his mouth on my neck and all I can do is nod.

He goes in and out, in and out, deeper and deeper and the pleasure that came after the pain had me screaming his name loud followed my screams of pleasure. Next thing I know it my right leg was up in the air balanced on his shoulder as he kept banging my brains out.

I swear the anaconda was hitting all the right walls as I kept stretching my leg wider and wider in a way that I never knew I was flexible enough. Thank my lucky star for the beautiful sound of John Legend swallowing all the moans and groans in the room of the people next door were going to complain. He keep going on and on with me opening wider and wider until I could feel myself release a huge wave that he kept pushing through until he too reached his height before flopping on the bed next to me. I laid there smiling at him as I struggled to hold my breath and I must say I have no ounce of regret in me in fact I want more and more.

Rofhiwa: “Wow, baby you were amazingly delicious and I hope I did not disappoint” he says trying to catch his breath

Me: “Noooo, It took a lot for me to keep up trust me” I says blushing like a school kid.

Rofhiwa: "I can't get enough of you, let's go for round two in the shower" he says with raised eyebrows.

I smile and nod shyly because I am embarrassed at my sudden need of vitamin D. I giggle as he pick me up and walk with me to the shower for round 2.

I smile and shake my head slowly while biting my bottom lip as if I am trying to shake off the images of last night from my mind. I don't even know what is it about sex that rejuvenates the soul because I feel like a brand new person. I feel so alive, something I haven't felt in a very long time. Yah, I salute the stamina that some men possess because they will take you from here and take you all the way to cloud nine.

Dr Mogale: "Okay now I am curious" he says in a happy tone taking a sit next to me.

I giggle covering my face with both hands trying to hide from the embarrassment. I can't believe I am sitting in a public space and day dreaming about vitamin D.

Me: "About what?" I say laughing when I find him waiting in anticipation for me to spill the beans.

Dr Mogale: "About whatever it is that got you so happy on a hectic Wednesday like today when Prof Sefolo is barking orders left right and center chasing deadlines" he says obviously amused.

Hai this man is noisy shame but I am sure he doesn't need to know about the vendaconda that got me grinning like teenager.

Me: "Believe me you don't want to know" I say blushing uncontrollably.

Dr Mogale: Laughing out loud “And she blushes, wow this I definitely don’t want to know”

Me: “Thank you. It would really make things awkward if you were to probe deeper than this”

Dr Mogale: “So……. do I know him?”

Me: “What? Who said it’s a him?” I says laughing

Dr. Mogale: “When a woman is glowing and happy on a hectic day, it can only mean one thing”

Me: “Hai nna ntlogele (Hai leave me alone)” I says playfully.

He says mockingly causing me to laugh. I love they type of relationship I have with this colleague of mine. I truly appreciate him because he is one man who has never tried to hit on me, making me feel comfortable around him at all times. I am surely going to miss him more when my contract ends in like two weeks’ time. To be honest I am not even ready to go back to that life of staying at home while applying for a job.

Me: “I am going to miss you most when I leave this place” I say out of the blue.

Dr Mogale: “Bjang? (How?). I will be here meeting with you on regular basis discussing your academic work and progress so you don’t have to worry about missing me” he says giving me a warm smile and squeezing my hand on the table.

Me: “Talking about academic work are you done with that paper? I need to polish it for that conference happening at the University of Venda next week”

We go on and on talking about academic work. Plus I enjoy drinking from a fountain of this man’s knowledge.

Mmabatho POV

I wipe off my tears before pushing away the plate of food before me. I suddenly lost my appetite. I don’t even know how I got here. Vat and setting with a man who doesn’t appreciate anything I do for him. I mean I cook, clean and do laundry while he contributes zero cent to the bills in the house but has the audacity to tell me how useless of a woman I am for bringing takeaways on my was from work since I felt too tired to cook. I can’t believe I am living with a bully of this magnitude.

I look up as he walk back and settle on the couch next to mine. I chuckle as he takes the remote and change the channel to watch a soccer match while I am busy watching.

Tshepo: “You have a bad attitude Mmabatho and no man is going to marry you unless you start showing some respect” he says not even turning to look at me.

What kind of a monster is this? Kicking a person while they are down and worse of all the very same person feeding your broke

ass and providing you with a roof over your head? I am not going to waste my breath on him because he clearly wants me to say something back so that he can have a reason to beat me up. It's funny we quickly learn and apply caution at the sight of danger. I get up from the couch and decide to walk away only to stop by the door and turn to face Tshepo.

Me: "Why are you so bitter? What happened to you that is so bad you have to bully and be mean to me?" silent.

Wow this guy is testing my patience. He seems to have forgotten that this is my place and not his.

Me: "Were you always like this to Pheladi or it's me that is bringing the monster in you?"

I guess I hit the nerve because he paused the TV and turned to look at me chuckling

Tshepo: "You leave Pheladi out of this Mmabatho. She is more of a woman than you could ever wish to be. She is a home builder and a great mother something you will never be to anyone. I regret the day I let you seduce me because I have now lost everything" he says shouting.

Wow

did Tshepo just remind me that I could never be a mother. How could he remind me something like that when he knows I am still struggling to deal with the loss and the idea that I will never

mother a child in my life? I turn and walk away to the bedroom, I think I have heard enough from this man. The plan was to drink some sleeping pills and go to sleep but now the hurt and anger in me is compelling me to pack Tshepo's bag and get rid of his ungrateful ass.

Me: "Get the hell out of my house Tshepo before I call the police on you" I say throwing the bag next to him.

I step back and fold my arms and he get up and picks his bag before walking out of the house. I walk to the door and lock it before throwing myself on the couch and letting all my tears out.

Pheladi

'Tell me you are joking' I type before pressing send and moving to the window to check if he is indeed outside.

'Come out and see for yourself' a text from him

I smile as I read the WhatsApp text. 'I am coming' I reply while busy putting on my morning sleepers and a jersey before walking out.

Tshepang: "Where are you off to mother?" he calls out as I pass the TV room heading for the door.

Me: "I am coming baby and please don't stay up past your bed time"

Tshepang: "Eeh you will be gone that long?" he asked shocked

Me: "I am not going anywhere I will just be outside" I say before heading out.

Wow, there is a full moon tonight, making it a perfect night to gaze at the stars except it's too chilly. I press the remote to open the gate before walking out toward the car. I smile as soon I as I see him leaning the car reminding me of the good times we had last night.

Rofhiwa: "I am sorry for just rocking up this late. I just needed to come and see you before going to sleep" he says giving me a hug.

Me: "I am glad you came, but I wish you could have given me heads up first"

He nods before breaking the hug and opening the door for me to get in before moving to the driver's side of car. I get in and scoot over so that he can also get in and lock lips his lips with mine catching me off guard. I reciprocate the kiss because he is such a good kisser.

I panic as we get disturbed the knock on the car window. My first thought rushes to Tshepang because he is the one who was asking me questions when I stepped out. I laugh as Rofhiwa

curse under his breath as soon as I break the kiss so that he can respond to the knock on the window. He takes out his car keys and open the window of the car and to my shock Tshepo is standing there looking at us furious.

Me: “What are you doing here Tshepo this late?” I say shocked and scared at the same time.

I really thought Tshepo and I have moved past this stage of him stalking me and now he is here this exact moment when I am finally starting to enjoy my life.

Rofhiwa: “You know him?”

Tshepo: “I need a place to stay for the night please” he says ignoring Rofhiwa.

Me: “He is my ex-husband” I say to Rofhiwa who poop his eyes out at my respond.

I don't blame him because I would too.

Tshepo: “Ke a go kgopela (I am begging you) Pheladi I have nowhere else to go”

Rofhiwa: Chuckling “Really? How many hotels and BnB are in town? Are you trying to tell me that they are all fully booked?”

Tshepo: “I was not talking to you my bra, so keep your two cent opinion to yourself” he says sounding annoyed.

Me: "I am sorry but I can't help you Tshepo. Maybe you should book into a hotel or just go home"

Tshepo: "Just for tonight please" he says pleadingly.

Me: Deep sigh "Just tonight. You will use the backroom and leave first thing in the morning please Tshepo I don't even want to make noise with you about it tomorrow"

Tshepo: "Thank you" he says before moving to his car so that he can drive in.

Rofhiwa: "Really. This is a grown ass man and not your responsibility. Don't do this because once he move in there is no guarantee that he will move out" he says rather disappointed at the fact that I decided to help Tshepo.

But he is the father of my kids and if something happens to him when I chose to chase him away my kids will never forgive me.

Me: "I am doing it for my kids" I say

Rofhiwa: "Niya penga (You are crazy)" he says angrily before starting the car and driving off.

Me: "Take me back home Rofhiwa, my kids are alone" I say annoyed.

Who does he think he is?

Rofhiwa: “Your kids are not alone, bana Khotsi avho (they are with their father). You will not sleep in the same house with that man. I will sleep on the couch if you are too angry to share a bed with me”

I fold my arms and look outside the window as we drive to Meropa in silence.

Rofhiwa: “Are you still angry at me?” he says walking back from the bathroom with a towel wrapped around his waist.

The way I am pissed at him I don't even see his hotness right now, he can keep his tongue skills and Vendaconda for all I care. What he did last night was just out of order and overstepping his boundaries. I take out my phone ignoring him and continuing reading Carry Me Home of Facebook. Gape he had no right to do what he did last night. He is only in my life for 2 seconds and already think he can make decisions for me. Who the hell does he think he is because he is obviously not the boss of me or my life? I will not be dictated to again at least not by another man. My biggest mistake was to share with him the details of my previous marriage and the kind of person Tshepo was to me.

Rofhiwa: “Just for the record. I have no regret over what I did last night. If given the chance I would do the same and I would not even hesitate” he says with a smug on his face.

Me: “You are very arrogant aren't you?” I say annoyed.

Rofhiwa: “And you are too nice. Unfortunately nice people don't survive in this world. They become victims of because of being nice. There is a reason why they say ‘no good deed goes unpunished’”

I go back to my phone drift to the perfect world of Rorisang and her Zulu king while he lotions his body before getting dressed. I opted not to bath, I will do that at the comfort of my own house because I don't want to end up dishing it up for him. It's not like he deserves it any way, hence he spend the night on a couch.

Rofhiwa: "I am ready when you are" he says bringing me back from my perfect world of fiction.

I get up and grab my remote from the gate as that is the only thing other than my phone that I came here with. He leads the way and opens the door for me. He is really a gentleman when he is not being his arrogant self. The walk to the car is a very silent and the only sound to be heard is our footsteps. He must have finally learned there is no use talking since I don't respond back to him. He opens the car door for and steps aside for me to get in, shakes his head before closing the door and walking to the driver's side. We listen to the sound of Metro FM as we drive out of Meropa.

Me: "You are taking the wrong way" I snap at him upon realizing he missed a turn.

Rofhiwa: "Ooh now you to me" he says amused.

I don't even know what he finds funny in this whole situation when I did not sleep at home with my kids. I shake my head and

ignore him, he has been to my house before so I trust he will eventually find his way there. He drives into McDonalds next to Savanna mall and orders breakfast meals for 3 people. I am not even going to ask because I know how much man eat. He drives out and head back to the direction of my house using the correct route.

Rofhiwa: "I know you are giving me a silent treatment because you believe what I did last night was wrong. Maybe I went about it the wrong way but I couldn't allow you to sleep in that house while that ex-husband of yours was in the yard....."

Me: "But it was okay for my kids to spend the night with him in the yards. Do you know how many kids have died at the hands of their father?" I snap at him cutting him off.

Rofhiwa: "I knew your kids were safe because he has never abused them in any sort of way. He worked very hard to be look perfect in their eyes while he was a different creature with you all together. But you were not safe there with him mainly because he knows you too well. He came to your house at that time of the night knowing you will not chase him away, do you know why?"

I shake my head no as he glance at me briefly before focusing back on the road.

Rofhiwa: "Are you familiar with the Camel's nose metaphor?"

Me: “No”

Rofhiwa: “Well there is an Arab proverb that goes 'Beware of the camel's nose.'”

Me: “And what is wrong with a camel’s nose?” I ask curiously.

He laughs and shakes his head before narrating the story.

Rofhiwa: “Well the story goes that one cold night a when an Arab traveler and his camel were camping in the desert to for the night the camel asked his master if it could just put its nose in the tent since it was freezing. The master being nice like you agreed. Few minutes later the camel asked to put his whole head, the master agreed because he was being nice. But the camel did not stop there, he asked to put his front legs in, then his back. Before the master knew it, the whole camel was in the tent and since it was not big enough for both of them the master was now left outside in the cold”

Me: “So Tshepo is the camel in this whole story?” I say alarmed.

Rofhiwa: “Yes and once the camel gets his nose in the tent, his body will soon follow” he says parking his car just outside my yard.

Me: “Wow, I did not see it like that”

Rofhiwa: “Your ex knows you like the back of his hand. He knows all your weaknesses and soft spots. He knows your heart and how generous you are. Trust me he has not changed

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he is still the same manipulative abuser that you divorced. Like a snake he is going to lie low by humbling himself until you let your guard down and once you do he is going to strike you hard. Unfortunately this time he will be quick you will not even get a chance to get out alive”

Me: “Wow” I say lost for words.

God know how much I needed to hear this because I was getting too relaxed where Tshepo was concerned. I wanted to believe that he was changing and that is all I saw, him being humble and as always missed overlooked certain things or really thought things through. I mean why did Mmabatho kick him out because the last time I checked he had moved in with her?

Rofhiwa: “He believes he knows you and that’s his whole game plan. So you need to use that against him by ceasing to be so predictable. Show him a side of you that he doesn’t know. Be hard and firm no matter how sorry you feel for him. And most importantly be selfish, make decisions that are best for you and don’t worry about him. He is a grown ass man and he is not

your responsibly, he ceased the day he signed the divorce papers”

Me: “Thank you very much. I think I needed to hear all that. I am sorry I was so hard on you last night and this morning”

Rofhiwa: “If I were you I would say it’s okay but it’s not. You made me sleep on a couch the whole night without hearing my reasons for doing what I did and it was very uncomfortable” he says all serious before bursting into a laughter.

Phew, I am glad he finds it funny and he is not mad at me.

Me: “I am sorry about that”

Rofhiwa: “Now go in there and shock the devil out of that guy. Show him you are no longer the pushover that he used to know and his days of walking all over you are over” he says handing me the 3 breakfast meals from McD.

Me: “And these?” I says asking about the meals.

Rofhiwa: “Breakfast for you and the kids. Something to make it up to them for leaving them overnight”

Me: “Thank you very much Mr Muravha” I say leaning over to give him a kiss.

Tshepo’s POV

I watch through the window as she does the walk of shame coming back home in the morning wearing morning sleepers. I can't believe she slept out leaving my kids all alone. I couldn't sleep last night, as I waited for her to come back but she never did. I am standing in the kitchen boiling a kettle of water so that I can make a cup of tea.

Me: "So is this what normally happens when I am not around. Gallivanting with man all night when my kids are left here all alone?" I say as soon as she walks in.

Pheladi: "You are still here?" she says ignoring my question.

Me: "Excuse me?" I say surprised at her attitude.

Pheladi: "I thought I made it clear that you need to be out of here first thing in the morning. Not be busy in my kitchen and asking me questions that do not concern you"

I watch as she place the 3 packets from McDonald on the kitchen counter leaving me with my jaw dropped.

Me: "Yah neh, you have really changed, I bet you don't even recognize your reflection in the mirror" I say shaking my head slowly in disbelief.

She turns to look at me before laughing at me like I am fool.

Pheladi: “Great, not that you know I have changed and no longer your door mat. Go pack up your belongings and leave my house plus you are contravening the protection order”

I look at her and shake my head before placing the cup down on the kitchen counter and head out. I am more shocked than hurt at her attitude because I did not expect her to do a 360 degrees turn on me just like that. I mean things were getting better between us and she took care of my child for me one weekend, she even gave me parenting advice. But now she is like that, I guess that man from last night is the one causing problems between us. I take all my belongings from the back room, even the clothes that I comfortably packed in the closet as I was settling in nicely. I pack everything in the car and drive out before hooting for her to open the gate.

I found myself driving back to Mmabatho’s house in Seshego because going home to my mother’s house is not an option. I will just have to smooth talk her and blame everything on the stress that I am having over my current financial situation. Maybe even propose marriage because I know how desperate she is to become Mrs Tshepo Mamabolo, after all which man would marry her when she can’t even bear him kids.

Mmabatho's POV

I slowly opened my eyes and smiles at this charming man who is looking at me with a smile on his face holding a try of breakfast.

Me: "Thank you, hubby" I say sitting up to receive the try.

Tshepo: "You are most welcome wifey" he says before placing a kiss on my chicks before settling down next to me.

Yep, this is definitely the life. Waking up to a full English breakfast in bed after a hot steamy night. Tshepo and I kissed and made out and the makeup sex was just out of this world. I don't expect any of you to judge me right now because we all know that no relationship is perfect. We have our ups and downs just like most people out there.

Me: "Wow these eggs taste so nice and soft. What else did you add?"

Tshepo: "Just a dose of love sweetheart, akere they were cooked with love" he says wiggling his eyebrows.

Isn't he the sweetest?

Me: "You such as charmer Mr. Mamabolo, I can't wait to officially become Mrs. Mamabolo"

I watch as he drops his face and sadness overpowers the happiness that he was showcasing.

Tshepo: "I am just sorry that I can't afford to buy you the ring that you want and we will have to wait a bit longer before I can send my uncles to your home. But I promise, as soon as my financials are back to what they used to I will give you the wedding of your dreams" he says looking at me with sadness on his face.

Me: "You don't need to beat yourself up, I know your situation and I promise to be patient with you" I says squeezing his hand.

Tshepo: "I love you very much and thank you for being such an understanding woman. I have no doubt you were made for me and I for you" he says before kissing me deeply.

I know you are confused about what just happened because the last time you heard from me Tshepo and I were fighting. He had said some hurtful things causing me to pack up all his belongings and kick him out. I was really sure that I was done with him and would never get back to him. I cried myself to sleep that night seeing how he did not even try to beg me not to chase him out. I was sure I did not want anything to do with him until his mother called to tell me that his son is heartbroken over what he did to me due to financial stress and how he was not coping with our separation. She begged me to call him since he was too embarrassed to call me.

I did not want to call him at first but I ended up giving in to the heart. The truth of the matter is I love Tshepo very much and I have always seen a long term future with him. So, I ended up giving in to the heart and calling him. He was so happy to hear from me and apologized for his behavior the other night. I told him to come over so that we could speak face to face. We spoke about how the whole thing made me feel and he took full responsibility for his actions, apologized for being an ass and in the middle of it all asked me to marry him. I thought my ears were deceiving me at first, but he wasn't because he got down on one knee and asked me again if I could make him the happiest man alive. Without hesitation I said yes, too bad he did not have a ring but promised to buy me one as soon.

Tshepo: "I love you very much Mrs. Mamabolo" he says against my lips.

Me: "I love you more" I say smiling against his lips.

Tshepo: "Let me go run you a bath. I will drive you to work today" He says getting up and walking to the bathroom.

I can't help but smile at how loving he has been since he came back. He is romantic and spoils me by insisting on driving me to work.

Pheladi

I pack up my last remaining items in a box before stopping to take a look at this place one last time. I can't help but reminisce over memories made in this place

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laughter shared and friend made. This has been the best 4 months of my life and I am grateful for the opportunity that I was granted. I feel like the job came at the time when I needed it most, not just for financial reasons but to offer me a place of escape. Having this job somehow helped me by keeping me busy and not sitting at home and feeling sorry for myself.

Dr. Mogale: "You not planning to go without saying good bye are you?" he says opening his arms for as hug.

Me: "Never" I say walking into his embrace.

I soak in his love through the warmth of his hug. My doctor friend, intelligent and knowledgeable, yet so humble. Like I said before I am going to miss him the most. He has been so good to me and helpful with my studies.

Dr: "So what's next for you miss Molopa?" he says breaking the hug.

Me: Deep sigh "I don't know. I guess I will focus on my school work for now and hope something comes up soon enough" I say shrugging my shoulders and picking up the box from the table.

Dr: "I am confident that something will come up soon. Let me help you with that" he says taking the box from me.

Me: "I am going to miss this place yoo" say letting out a deep sigh while looking around for one last time.

Dr.: "Ooh no, are those tears?" he says teasing me.

Me: "ha ha ha. Very funny" I says walking out.

He laughs and shake his head as he follows me out. I close the door and follow him to the lift as he accompanies me to the HOD's office to drop the keys before walking to the car.

Dr. Mogale: "Isn't that your car?" he says pointing at my car being loaded on a trailer.

Out of panic, I found myself running toward the direction of my car shouting at the two man to stop what they are doing with Mogale on my heels.

Me: "Excuse me gentleman, that's my car"

Man 1: "I am sorry mam, but the bank has sent us to collect their property since you have defaulted on your payments" he says handing me a piece of paper.

Dr.: "Can't we work something out instead of towing her car away like this gentleman?" he asks calmly as I scan through the paper.

Apparently Tshepo has missed the installment of the car for the past 3 months. I knew he was having financial difficulties but I did not know things were this bad, because some of his companies are still operational.

Man 2: “The only way is for the past 3 month’s installments to be paid and full. You only have 30 days in which the car will be parked at the sheriff of court and after that it will be taken to auction” he says before getting back to his work.

I really don’t care about the car being repossessed right now, it was never mine to begin with but the embarrassment is too much. The look in Dr. Mogale’s eyes scream nothing but pity for me and I hate being pitied.

Me: “Can I at least take out my things from the car?” I ask pleadingly.

Man 2: “Sure. Hurry through because we are on a clock” he says stepping aside.

My heart aches as Dr. Mogale and I take out my belongings from the car and place them on the sidewalk. It’s taking a lot in me to hold back my tears because I am hurt and frustrated and usually when that happens I just want to cry my eyes out.

Dr. Mogale: “God gives and God take. Now you garage has space for something bigger and better” he says as we watch my car being towed away.

I nod giving him a faint smile. I know he is trying to make me feel better but he is not helping the situation. I need to get home and call Tshepo so that he can tell me how he is planning to fix all this. That car was part of my divorce settlement but he still remain responsible for the payments.

Dr. Mogale: "Come, I will drive you home" he says picking up two boxes from the ground.

I pick the remaining items and follow him to his car. The drive to my house seems rather long than usual and the mood in the car is rather awkward with Mogale not knowing what to say to make me feel better. I am just glad that the house was build cash or else my kids and I were soon going to find ourselves homeless. I give giving Mogale directions to my house as he has never been here before. I open the gate with the remote and drive in.

Dr. Mogale: "Wow. Your house is beautiful" he says pulling up in the drive way.

Me: "Thank you"

Dr. "You are most welcome. Don't let what happened today get you down trust me I say it has happened to the best of us. I have been where you are today and I understand what you must be going through. It's not a nice feeling but you will get through it and be victorious in the end"

Me: "To be honest with you, I am heartbroken and embarrassed at the same time"

Dr: "There is no need to feel embarrassed. Unfortunately life is has its ups and down and this is just one of these downs. Find out how much is needed and will see if I can assist plus I could always use a research assistant in one of my projects"

Me: "Thanks but I will pass. I don't want you to be feeling sorry for me and doing me any favors"

Dr. "Trust me this is not a favor because you will be working for the money by assisting with data collection on my current project plus you could do with the knowledge and skills for your studies"

Me: "Thank you"

Dr "No need to thank me"

I smile and nod before getting out of the car with him following to help me with the boxes. I really don't know how I would have traveled home today

I am outside waiting for Koko Tlou to approach the gate so that I can open it for her. I really can't believe that I have agreed for her to come over to my house. I was just shocked to receive a call from her yesterday asking if I could come to her house and see her. I said I can't at first making an excuse about not having a mode of transport because I did not want to come across as being rude. Eventually she said she can drive up to my house so that we could sit and talk. I wasn't really feeling the need to meet with her because she has always been one of those people who were vocally against my decision to leave Tshepo, but then my curiosity got the better of me.

I suddenly regret my decision when I see her car approaching. Against my better judgment I continue pressing the remote for the gate to open. Like a statue, I stand there and watch her drive in until she parks her car under a shade. She steps out of the car looking as elegant as always, if you must know Koko Tlou is one of those grannies who once lived in Jozi and possess some class. I even feel underdressed for this meeting because she is in a two piece wearing hills.

Koko Tlou: "Ooh Pheladi, look at you my child. Glowing and beautiful as always" she says approaching me with open arms.

Me: “Ke a leboga (Thank you) Koko. I must say you look beautiful as always and i love your two peace suite” I says sharing a hug with her.

Koko: “Ahh you mean this old thing” she says breaking the hug. I smile and lead her inside.

Koko: “You have a very beautiful home indeed” she says settling down.

Me: “Thank you”

That’s all I can say, it’s not like she has never been here before and nothing really changed after Tshepo left except for picture that he was featured in being removed on the wall. I walk to the kitchen leaving her alone to prepare tea. I did not take long because the water was already boiling and everything was set on a tray.

Koko: “Thank you” she says with a warm smile as I place the tray with tea and biscuit on the table.

I pour both of us the tea and hand Koko her cup before settling down.

Koko: Deep breath “I know you must be asking yourself why I asked to see you” she says in a sad tone.

I nod and place the cup of the tea back on the table because I am really curious and I need to give her my undivided attention.

Koko: “First of all I would like to apologize for the way I have treated you and all the hurtful words I said to you upon finding out that you are getting a divorce instead of supporting you from one church woman to another”

She says catching me off guard because of all the things I expected her to come here for an apology is not one of them.

Me: “why the sudden change of tune mma?”

Koko: “Watseba (You know) Pheladi sometimes it’s easy to judge and have an opinion about other people’s decisions in life unless what is happening to them start happening to someone close to you” she says with a voice masked in pain.

I nod and wait for her to continue, I have a feeling that there is more to this visit than just an apology.

Koko: “I have recently found myself thinking a lot about you Pheladi and what you said you went through. I am ashamed to call myself a praying woman who owns one of the highest regarded uniforms in church when I failed you when you needed me most. I had to right to judge or condemn your decision because you were the one bearing the heat and not me. It’s not like we were blind to certain things that the pastor

was doing that were not right and yet we kept quiet. We had stories about his kids out of wedlock and we noticed the bruises sometimes even though you tried your best to conceal them and we just turned a blind eye”

I could feel my tears falling down my cheeks at her revelation. Her words made me feel so naked because I know how hard I used to work to hide my bruises and pain from the world. Does this mean people knew what I was going through?

Me: “How many people knew these in church?” I say wiping off my tears.

Koko: “I am sorry my child because we have failed you as the elders. Most of us knew and we pretended as if we did not see anything. The worst part is we did not just turn a blind eye but we denied the truth when you finally decided to take a stand and stood against you knowing very well that you were a victim. We encouraged you to reconsider your decision and yet we know you were having it bad” she says with a hint of embarrassment.

Me: “I think I am over that part of my life and I am sure everything that happened to me was just preparing me for greater things up ahead” I say trying to convince myself more than her.

She nods and wipes off her falling tears that I was not even aware were falling.

Me: "It's really okay. I don't blame any of you what happened to me and I hold nothing against you for not believing me at that time"

Koko: "I am glad that you don't hold it against me or any of the woman, because I could really use your help Pheladi. I know you don't owe me anything and you don't even have to agree but I would appreciate it if you could just consider it please"

Me: "I am listening"

Koko: "May you please come to my house when you have time. I need you to speak to my granddaughter for me because I don't know how to help her anymore"

Me: "What is wrong with her?"

Koko: "She is going through what you went through in your marriage and refuses to leave the husband. I did not know until I was called she came home with bruises on her face and deep knife cuts. I tried to get her to open a case against him but she refused and I thought that maybe you could talk some sense into her"

Me: Deep breath "Hai, I don't think I will know what to say to her. I mean she doesn't even know me and I don't want to impose"

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she is the only person who can make a decision to leave and you must just support her”

Koko: “I understand that we can’t decide for her but I am hoping you could maybe talk to her because of your own experience and maybe she can learn something from you and draw from your strength I don’t know” she says sounding defeated.

Me: “Okay, I will think about it and will call and let you know tomorrow”

Koko: “thank you that’s all I ask”

Dr Mogale’s POV

I am having a meeting with my research partner, Prof Chiloane. He and I are working together on a number of research project and we have managed to secure funding from China and Germany as they are interested in our types of study. We have managed to hire about 5 Masters and PhD students as research assistants and pays them monthly salaries. I need to convince him to hire Pheladi on one of our Projects even though it’s unorthodox. I look at him pleadingly to take another look at the books and see what we can create as a post for her and how we

can move some funds within the project to secure her a monthly salary.

Prof Chiloane: “I am sorry Mogale, as much as I like you I can’t help you at the moment”

Me: “I am begging you here and you know I wouldn’t be if it was not important to me” I say pleadingly

Prof Chiloane: Deep sigh “The only placement I can offer is on the Phalaborwa project that is coming up in 2 weeks and it will only run for 3 months or so maybe I can get her a space there”

Me: “No, that won’t work. She has kids and Phalaborwa is far and 3 months is not enough”

Prof Chiloane: laughing sarcastically “I really don’t know how to help you because we have already drown the budget for this year and we have enough hands on that project as it is. Maybe we can look into hiring her next year and it’s not guaranteed unless we get more funding”

Me: “What if I pay her from my own pocket and she doesn’t have to know about it. I mean that we you budget remains unaltered and you get an extra hand on the job free of charge”

Prof Chiloane: “Wow, you would do that for her?” he ask shocked.

Me: “Yes I would. I mean R15000 a month off my research dividends is nothing compared to helping a friend in need”

Prof Chiloane: “If that’s the case then it’s fine. We can always use an extra hand and if we can do that without me losing anything then its okay. I will ask my secretary to draw me a contract, just make sure she drops me a CV tomorrow first thin in the morning”

Me: “thank you” I says getting up to leave.

Prof Chiloane: “So, is she the one?”

Me: “She is only a friend Victor” I say walking out leaving him in stitches.

The truth is I have been avoiding to acknowledge what I feel for Pheladi. From the first day I laid my eyes on her I was taken. Talking to her and getting to know her made things even worse because she is beautiful inside and out. I wonder what her ex-husband was smoking allowing himself to lose out on a woman like that. In Sjava’s words I ex yakhe inebhadi (Her ex has bad luck) how could he let her go wayphuzeni ngampela? (What was he high on?) Islima ngempela (He is a fool).

But as much as I was taken by hear beauty, humor, kind heart and innocence I did not want to seem insensitive and taking advantage of my position in the department by making moves on her. So I befriended her instead and hid my feelings for her. I

am glad I never did because I also got a feeling that she is not ready to receive the kind of love that I am ready to offer her. She has been through a lot and until she is fully healed from all that she is not ready to love anyone. I am willing to be patient with her as she goes through the healing process and the process of self-discovery. The hard part is witnessing all these man that are coming and going in her life while I wait for her to heal.

Me: 'please come in tomorrow morning and bring in your CV and documents. I spoke to my research partner and he said we might have an opening for you' I type an SMS and press send after putting in Pheladi's numbers. I couldn't wait to get to my office and a make a phone call to her but I just chickened out and settled on the SMS.

That's a wrap, thankfully today is Friday and I am a very happy somebody. You should see my heart doing the happy dance right now out of excitement because after a very long hectic week I am going to see my boyfriend. Yes, I said boyfriend since Rofhiwa and I made our relationship official about 2 weeks ago. He makes me happy and cares a lot about me and my wellbeing. I am not going to lie and say I wasn't scared at first because I was. I was really afraid to attach feeling to our mutually beneficial relationship, which for me was all about sex. Please don't judge me, I am only human and I have needs, one of those needs being sexual gratification.

However, I gave in into his request of trying out a relationship. Apparently he was not comfortable with the whole friends with benefits idea. He used to complain that he was no longer enjoying sex because he felt used after every sexual encounter as I was not willing to invest into him or the idea of us being together. I also thought to myself that I had nothing to lose, so why not give it a try. I mean after everything I have been through, I don't think anyone can do worse than what Tshepo has already done to me.

How long was I even willing to live in fear of searching for love?
How long will I continue to live deny myself a chance at experiencing love that I deserve if I am afraid to try again? I

mean love and belonging, which includes friendship, intimacy, family and a sense of connection is right there in the middle of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. I soon finish the email I was typing and attached this week's results before sending them to prof.

Me: "All done, now the weekend can begin" I say to myself out loud.

Only to be reminded that I am not alone in here by Makgale's chuckle. It must be at the fact that I just spoke to myself. He is still young, he will understand once he reach my age that such things happen.

Makgale: "Finally, I am also done sister P and I am out of here" he says packing up his things in his laptop bag.

Me: "Enjoy your weekend then" I say with a warm smile

Makgale: "Thanks, Enjoy yours too Sister P" he says throwing his laptop back on his shoulders.

Me: "Please don't forget my achar on Monday please" I call out as he is about to close the door behind him.

I am not even sure if he had me but I will just send him a text on Sunday so that he doesn't forget. I decide to keep myself busy by searching for employment on the net while waiting for a call from Rofhiwa to tell me he has arrived. I like my new job and it is not bad on the pay either considering that we only

collect and analyze data which is really not much. But, I need a permanent job since Tshepo's financial crisis are badly affecting me too as I had to take over some of his financial responsibilities like paying for my kid's school fees as he was failing.

I feel his presence before he can even say anything, causing me to look up from my laptop. I smile when I find him standing there with his hands in his pocket while he leans against the wall.

Dr. Mogale: "Hi"

Me: "Hi Doc"

Dr. Mogale: "I wanted to check if you need a lift because I am about to leave"

Me: "Thank you very much for the offer, but I am sorted" I say with a warm smile.

He reciprocate my smile and nod.

Dr. "By the way, I am going to a friend's party tomorrow so you can join me if you don't have any plans" he says nervously.

I don't even understand why he is nervous because he is one person who has always been comfortable with me.

Me: “Unfortunately my boyfriend is around this week so maybe next time” I says giving him a warm smile.

Dr. “Next time then and please enjoy your weekend”

Me: “Thank you, enjoy your weekend too doc” I say as he walks off.

I check my phone for any text or missed calls from Rofhiwa only to receive a text as I am about to put my phone down.

I pack up my things in a hurry when I receive a text from Rofhiwa telling me that he is passing Solomondale T-junction heading toward Gate 1. I know he is still far but knowing his driving speed he would be here any moment now. I am happy that it’s not really cold today because we are doing an outside event at Café Pavilion where Rofhiwa’s cousin and band will be performing live.

I am being all cozy with Roro as we wait for the band to start performing. The mood has already been set for a great night and I am enjoying the company of this great man before me. I smile as he kisses the top of my head and wraps my body with his strong arms. Comfortable and safe, that’s how I feel in his presence. My phone rings flashing Tshepiso’s name. I get up and let Rofhiwa know that I need to answer the phone by moving away from the noise.

Me: “Yes baby”

Tshepiso: “I got your text mom. Were you serious?” she ask all excited

Me: “Yes baby

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please help your brother pack”

Tshepiso: “Don’t worry mom, have fun with your colleagues, I have everything under control” she says all excited before hanging up.

So Roro has to drive back to Venda first thing in the morning tomorrow. So, to make it up to me for not being here the whole weekend, he booked a family get away for my kids and I to Zebula golf estate in Bela Bela. Isn’t he the sweetest? He even went as far as hiring me a car from Avis so that we can use it for this trip. After everything that my kids and I have gone through, this is a much deserved get away. I watch curiously as a group of ladies from GTG church walk in an out the pavilion going upstairs wearing themed outfit. I was about to walk away when one of the spotted me and run towards me.

Joy: “Hi, gape I almost had a heart attack when I sow you walking towards this direction earlier” she says all hyperactive.

Me: “And why is that?” I ask confused.

Joy: "I thought maybe you wanted to trash Mmabatho's bridal shower, I don't know"

I can't help but laugh at her thought. Mabatho and Tshepo can get married, have million kids and own the whole of South Africa I would not give a damn.

Me: "I am happy for Mmabatho and Tshepo. I would never do anything to sabotage them, in fact I am their biggest supporter" I say smiling and try to walk away.

Mmabatho: "Hi, Pheladi I did not know you were also invited. Why aren't you wearing the theme?" she says getting down from the steps and walking towards us.

I turn to look at her with a huge smile on my face. I really don't know if she is trying to be funny in her question or what.

Me: "No, I wasn't invited and I did not know you were having a baby shower here. I just came in here to answer my phone" I say trying to explain myself, I don't even know why.

Joy: "She is telling the truth, I found her here talking on the phone"

Mmabatho gives me a smile of relieve and nods.

Me: "congratulations on you upcoming marriage Mmabatho. I am routing for the two of you as I wish you both joy and happiness"

Mmabatho: “Ohh Pheladi, thank you very much” she says placing her hand on her chest.

My eyes widen when they land on her ring. Or should I say my ring, the one that I used to wear all those years when I was married to Tshepo. Surprisingly I was not even hurt, I soon got over my shock.

Me: “I like your ring, it’s very beautiful” I says smiling wider

Mmabatho: “Thank you”

Joy: “Doesn’t it look like yours”

I move closer to inspect it and I see it doesn’t look like mine because it is the exact one. I turn to look at joy and shake my head no to answer her question much to Mmabatho’s relief.

Roro: “Here you are love. I was wondering where you are, come my brother is about to get on stage” he says hugging me from the back.

I watch Joy and Mmabatho’s face as the fix their eyes on Rofhiwa who doesn’t even seem to acknowledge their existence. I smile and tilt my head to kiss Roro in his cheek before we could both walk away leaving Mmabatho and Joy standing there with their chins on the floor.

Me: “Thank you for saving me in there” I say as soon as we settle down

Rofhiwa: “I think you handled the whole situation great dear. I was watching you all along and I am proud at how you always manage to smile even in the midst of your enemies. You are a great woman Pheladi and you deserve all the great things life has to offer” he says wrapping his arms around me so that we can watch the live band performance.

Rofhiwa is right, I could have lost my cool in there over my ring. Yes, my ring because I was attached to it for so many years and now it has been placed on another woman’s fingers. But I am not angry or hurt, maybe because my therapist advised me to work on forgiving myself and Tshepo for all the things he has put me through and all the things I tolerated. I snuggle closer to Roro to take in and enjoy this moment in time without worrying about what happened in my past. This is definitely a great night, watching a live performance under the stars in such a great company.

I am lying on my stomach enjoying the massage, so much so I feel myself drifting off to sleep. This has been the best weekend of my life in the past 14 years or so and if possible I would keep this time in a loop so that I could live this moment forever. My heart just can't except that today is the last day and I will be driving back to my boring life in few hours' times. Rofhiwa really came through for me and my kids. He went as far as paying for every activity offered in this place regardless of whether or not there would be enough to attend all of them.

My Kids really had a time of their lives, the smiles and complements they keep dishing are evidence of that. I observed my kid's reaction yesterday when we were partaking in every activity and I must say, my heart is at ease. Especially because this was a great opportunity for us to bond as a family of 3 that used to be 4. We got to learn more about each other's strengths and weaknesses as a family over most activities, such as treasure hunting, mountain biking which I now know I suck at, paintball which was Tshapang's favorite activity by far, the game drive which is Tshepiso's favorite as I found out about my daughter's love for wild animals and horse riding.

How did I deprive myself and my kids of such a beautiful stress free life all those years is beyond me. I mean, what did I hope to achieve by staying in an obviously dead marriage for years

while my peers were making something of their lives and living to the best of their abilities is beyond me. But, it's no use crying over spilled milk because I am definitely where I need to be and I am happy.

Rofhiwa makes me very happy, I can't say I am in love with him yet but I am happy regardless. Gape the guy tries his level best to be there for me, emotionally and financially. I am not going to lie and say Tshepo's financial problems have not affected me either because they have. I mean apart from the car being repossessed, he is failing to pay our kid's school fees meaning I had to take over because I couldn't just sit back and watch them suffer for their father's sins.

So in the midst of all this, I am thankful that Rofhiwa is in my life. Not only because he assist me financially but he makes me happy and keeps my mind occupied with happy thought. This may sound farfetched but our conversation is just flowing and we enjoy each other's company. Don't even get me started on his vitamin D game because the brother is tapping all the right corners even areas I never knew could be reached deep inside me. He and I are like two love struck teenagers and we can never get enough of each other, and I am just loving this phase of our relationship.

Even with the distance between us we try to talk as much as we can, he even got both of us Telkom network contracts phones

so that we don't have airtime issues. Like last night we were on the phone for 2 hours straight until I couldn't keep my eyes open anymore. I can't help but smile when I think about, him. My knight and shining armor, I just love how he keeps reminding me of my strength and the fact that I don't need to be apologetic with the decision that I took.

I open my eyes and look around just to familiarize myself with the environment that I am in. I look at the clock on the wall and notice that it's now 12:30. I must have fallen asleep during the massage because I don't even know what time she finished and walked away. I get up feeling as light as a feather and pick my clothes from the hanger before putting them on. I must say the massage was much needed, It's as if the weight that I was carrying on my shoulders have been lifted. Damn Pheladi 'welcome to the good life', I smile at my own beautiful thoughts.

The walk back to the chalet feels like I am walking on cloud nine

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happiness galore. I change direction when I hear my Tshepiso and Tshepang's voices coming from the pool. You should see my smile right now as I stop by the pool area entrance just to watch my two favorite humans in the world have fun. The way Tshepang is laughing reminds me that eventually all things fall

into place. I mean he is one child who was greatly affected by the divorce and attempted suicide at some point.

Tshepang: “Mom, come and join us” he screams the moment he see me standing there.

Me: “No, thank you. You both need to get out because we need to go for lunch and start packing for the road”

Both: “Ahhhh” they both complain.

I can't help but laugh as I walk to our chalet so that I can start packing since tomorrow is Monday. We all know what that means, back to reality no matter how much as we are enjoying it here we still need to go back and face life head on. But for now let me continue living the dream, as I flop on the bed to make a call to my Roro.

Mogale's POV

I walk into the research unit kitchen and spot her sitting alone at the corner. I knew very well that she would be hiding here by herself. I haven't seen her since Friday and by the judge of things her weekend was a very busy one. I mean she has been yawning every 5 seconds since I stood here and watched her.

Me: “Hi”

Pheladi: “Hi, Doc”

She says with that smile that always melt my heart. How I wish I could wake up to it every morning. I smile back as I take a sit next to here before taking out the two takeaways from the plastic bag.

Me: "I brought lunch" I say placing two take away on the table.

Pheladi: "Thank you. It's as if you knew, I am hungry and lazy at the same time" she says taking one plate.

I smile as I watch her face lights up at the realization of what is in the plate. I have never meet some who loves 'malana' (Chicken intestines) like this woman in front of me.

Me: "So I was off campus and I thought I should pass by gate 2 and get you a plate"

Pheladi: "Thank you very much" she says digging in.

I smile and open my own plate before digging into my Pap and hard body chicken, something I haven't had in a very long time.

Me: "Hectic weekend neh?" I say as she finish yawning.

Pheladi: "Hectic but amazingly beautiful. As tired as I am, I don't regret over doing it. If I had a power to keep my life in a loop, I would do it from the past Saturday to Sunday" she says with her face lighting up.

I force a smile and nod, how I regret asking that question because I know for sure that she was with her boyfriend. I mean I did not need to know how epic their weekend has been and how they over did the sex and went overboard so much so that she did not get enough sleep.

Pheladi: “Wena, how was the party?”

Me: “Boring. I was like the 5th wheel on the car, so I ended up leaving early”

Pheladi: “I am sorry to hear that”

Me: “It’s okay. Have you given any thought to that email I sent you?”

Pheladi: “The one about a conference in Paris?” she ask with a hint of nervousness in her voice.

Me: “Yes. I think it will be a great opportunity for you, plus getting published in an academic journal of that magnitude could be great for you career in academia”

Pheladi: “I will think about it, and will get back to you regarding my decision”

We spend the rest remaining part of lunch over academic conversation. I really need to convince her to submit an abstract for this conference. I have seen her learn and apply the knowledge with ease. I wish she can sometimes see herself

through my eyes, she is academically gifted and all that she needs to do is to trust her capabilities. Unfortunately she has spent most of her life being oppressed that she has forgotten how awesome she can be. We all need someone who will push and cheer us on as we want to short sell ourselves because we don't always see out greatness.

That's the problem with abuse in a long run because the victims tends to believe that great things are not meant for them. The oppression blinds them from seeing their strength and believing that they can conquer the world. Fortunately for Pheladi, I have made it my mission to remind her of her greatness and how far she can reach if she only tries. I come from a very poor backroom but none of that had restricted me from achieving my dreams because there was someone who believed in me and kept cheering on when I was about to give up. If we are going to reach greatness as a black community, we need to push each other towards greatness as we have nothing to lose but help someone reach their height.

Me: "I need to head to a meeting with an honours research student. So I will see you at 16:30, we will discuss the abstract on our way home" I say getting up.

Pheladi: "But I said I will think about it nje" she says amused.

She must know by now that I don't easily take no for an answer.

Me: "I know, but time is not on our side"

I wink at her before walking off leaving her behind as she laughs. I walk off with my mind at ease because I know she will end up writing the abstract and the paper. Who knows maybe this trip to Paris is all we need to set the tone of what our relationship ought to be. Plus it's the city of love after all.

Rofhiwa's POV

I am chilling on a couch chatting to Pheladi. I can help but grin like a love struck puppy, yes I am love struck and I am loving it. The truth I have always felt like this about Pheladi even in our university days but she never gave me a change of the day because I was active in politics and a member of the SRC. It was a loss for me because good girls like her used to have a misconception that SRC guys are players so she did not really trust my intentions. I guess it's true what they say 'if it's meant to be, then it shall be'. I mean who would have thought that almost 16 years later she and I will find our way into each other and finally become an item.

Livhuwani: "If I was a thief neh. Hai, I would have probably stolen this whole house without you even noticing a thing" she says bringing back to earth.

I look up and chuckle at how she is leaning by the door looking at me like an amusement animal at the zoo. I must have been lost in my own bubble chatting to Pheladi to even hear her drive in.

Me: "Good thing you are not a thief then" I say focusing back on my phone.

I smile at the text that I just received from Pheladi saying she misses me, lord know how much I miss her.

Livhuwani: 'Wow, I would like to read whatever it is that is making you smile like that on your phone. I mean you are not even happy to see me, it's like you did not even miss me or something" she complains.

Okay, I need to wrap up my conversation with Pheladi because Livhu is about to do what she does best and cry for my attention.

Me: "Come sit down, I will be with you now now" I say busy typing on my phone

I sent Pheladi a text that I will talk to her later, and laugh at this woman who failed dismally as she tries to snatch my phone from my hands. I did mention that she is always demanding my undivided attention.

Me: "Respect my privacy woman" I say amused.

Livhu: "Mxm" she says causing me to laugh even harder

This woman is very nosey I tell you, you should see her giving me a sulking face as I put my phone in my pocket.

Me: "I don't go through your phone Livhu, so respect mine too. How was your trip?"

Livhu: "Now you want to know. You need to bring my bags in from the car because yoo they are so heavy for me to carry"
She says dramatically as she flops on a couch next to me.

Me: "I will fetch them in few minutes. I am still a bit tired, I had a hectic day today with auditors demanding this and that expecting me to work miracles"

Livhu: "It's fine. The in the mean time you can tell me what got you grinning at your phone like that?"

Me: chuckling "You are not going to give up, are you?"

Livhuwani: "No I am not. Ni a divha sometimes I wish you were not such an open book to me Roro because I can sense when there are changes in your life"

Me: "How do you do it vele?"

Livhuwani: "How I do what?" she asks confused

Me: "Walk around in those shoes" I say trying to change the subject.

Livhuwani: "The same way you drive to Polokwane every week in that German machine of yours"

I laugh and shake my head slowly, I bet she is not going to let me off the hook just like that. She shakes her head too in amusement before taking off her stilettos

Livhuwani: "I can feel it when something is different in your life Roro. So out with it" she says placing her feet on my lap.

I can tell you this, Livhuwani has no manners whatsoever, and she is also a bully of note. This is her telling me to give her a foot rub without even asking meaning I don't even have an option to say no. What else can I do except to oblige since I am the one who started the 'feet being hurt' topic, so I rub her left foot while ignoring her probe into my life. It is true that she knows me too well and I know her too, that is why I don't think I am ready to tell her about Pheladi. Not yet anyway.

Livhuwani: "So are you going to tell me or what?" she says giving me puppy eyes.

I chuckle in defeat because she knows exactly what she is doing and it's working. She learned this trick a long time ago when we were still young and that way she would get me to do everything she wanted. My mother used to say that us being twins makes it difficult for me to say no to her since I also feel a sense of obligation to see her happy. Unfortunately, my sister always uses this to her own advantage.

Me: "I think I am in love Livhu" I say with a huge smile on my face.

Livhu: “I knew it. Tell me more, how did you meet? Do I know her? And why you have been keeping this away from me” she says all excited as she softly punches my shoulder.

Me: “Slow down. One question at a time” she nod excitedly
“You might know her from varsity because I used to have one hell of a crush on her”

Livhu: “So you had a crush on her in varsity but only starting to date now? How, were you not rich enough for her back then?” she asks confused with a hint of concern in her voice.

Me: “No she is not even moved by my money. She never gave me a chance of a day in varsity because I was in the SRC and she thought I was a play because of that”

Livhu: Laughing “She was not wrong though, I mean you were a fuck boy in varsity”

I shake my head at how she said it, but we all have a past hey and beside that was then and this is now. I out grew all that when my mother dies a tragic death and then reality of life started kicking in that I needed to respect woman and not see them as being objects of my pleasures.

Me: “yeh yeh, keep reminding me of my not so pleasing past”

Livhu: “So does she have kids? Works? What is she doing with her life?”

Me: “She has two Kids, doing her Master of Arts and working for the University of Limpopo on a contract basis”

Livhu: “Impressive, and the father of the kids?”

Me: sigh “They recently divorced. So he is just that, the father of her kids”

She removes her legs from my lap and sit up straight as she looks deep in my eyes with a concerned look on her face

Livhu: “She is not another project is she?” she says softly.

Me: “What do you mean?”

Livhu: “I mean, you are my brother and we shared a womb for 9 months

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so I know you and how good of a heart you have. I have seen you taking on woman in the past who are broken in an attempt to fix them up into perfect individuals. I am not saying there is anything wrong with that, please get me right but you can't fix everyone”

Me: “I am not trying to fix her up. Besides, she is doing all the healing by herself and she doesn't even need me for that. Like I said, I had a thing for her since varsity and I guess seeing her again just reignited the spark in my heart”

Livhu: "If you say so, because I will not be able to handle another Thabisa. That girl nearly destroyed you"

Me: "Trust me, she is not another Thabisa. This one is a remarkable woman Livhu. Strong, beautiful, intelligent and most importantly sweet and kind. She knows what she wants and she is strong willed. She is all that underneath all the scars that she bear, not letting her past determine her destiny and she does all that as gracefully as she can. I have seen her remain calm in stressful situation dealing with things rationally don't even get me started on her emotional intelligence because she is friken amazing" I say with so much pride as I think about Pheladi.

Livhuwani:" Hai ke, now I want to meet this on earth who obviously stole your heart" she says amused.

Me: chuckling "I don't think I am ready for her to meet you. Coz I know you will definitely scare her off" I say laughing.

Livhu: "Mxm. Go get my bags I need to shower because you can tell me why they needed you fast at the correctional service over the weekend even when we told them we don't want anything to do with that man. It's not like he is our father" she says worked up as she picks her shoes and walks to her bedroom.

Pheladi

I am sitting here looking at this girl, who looks very young to be going through what she is allowing a man to make her go through. Who am I kidding because I was also around her age when Tshepo started being abusive with me and like her I did not see myself leaving. Like me and many other woman in abusive relationships she is suffering from what they call a battered woman syndrome. I am not going to judge her because I once suffered from it too and thinking Tshepo's abusive ways was somehow my fault, hiding the abuse from my family and friends while pushing them away in the process. I couldn't help but feel her pain when she told me that she is afraid to live because he threatened her life and that of their daughter.

Me: "Bona Conny, I am not here to tell you to leave him because that is a choice only you can make. All I am here to do is to tell you that leaving is also an option. Talk to someone, a professional even so that they can help you deal with all this. If not for you, do it for your child, it's all well now because she is too young to see anything but what will happen when she grows alder and start noticing that mommy is not happy?"

Koko Tlou: "Please Conny, that man is going to kill you one of this days. What do you think will become of your child, with a dead mother and a father locked up in prison? Pheladi is here

because she has been where you are right now and she is a living proof that it can be done. So do the right thing and divorce him now ngwana ngwanaka (Granddaughter)”

Me: “Like I said Conny, only you can make that decision and until you do none of us can force you into divorcing him” I say much to Koko Tlou’s death stare.

She shouldn’t have called me here if she did not want my honest opinion. I know exactly where Conny is and I know I have been there myself. I cut off ties with my family and friends because I tried to protect Tshepo from them and did not want them to know the truth as I was afraid they would force me to leave. The problem with being forced to leave someone you still believe you are in love with is that you will always find it easy to go back to him. Until she says enough is enough and she wants him no more there is really nothing any of us can do.

Conny: “I would not know where to start. I am not working and he is taking care of all my needs. I can’t be depending on my parents forever and I will be a laughing stock of the community”

Me: “Conny, people will always talk. Whether you leave or stay, they will talk but you solder on because none of this is about them but you and your daughter. I did not have it easy either, as woman old enough to be my parents told me to my face that I was allowing the devil to us me against their precious Pastor

but I did not let any of that deter me from leaving because I was up to here with the abuse. My pain was obviously not theirs and I had to do what I deemed best for me and not anyone else”

Koko Tlou: “Pheladi is right, we used to judge and condemn her forgetting that it was not our place to do so. So let them talk, they will not be taking anything away from you” she says with a hint of embarrassment.

I honestly did not mean to make her feel embarrassed, I was just trying to share with Conny the realities of our society and how judgmental people will be towards her decision should she decides to leave. Her husband will always be attached to her in one way or another, people will always ask her about his and share with her how he is doing in life even if she is not interested. I still go through that, I mean just the other day someone called me just to ask how am I felling now that Tshepo and Mmabatho are getting married. I could have lost my cool with her because people are nosey like that, but I just told her that I am happy for them. As much as I feel that he wasted my time and derailed my life in a way I am happy that he found someone to move on with. At least now he has shifted his attention from me to her, leaving me to enjoy my life in piece something that most people are failing to see.

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Prof Chiloane: “Hi Pheladi, is this the results you were working on today?” he says sounding irritated.

Me: “Hi, Prof” I say taking the hard copy that he is holding next to my face.

I frown as I go through it. Indeed, these are the results I was working on this morning but they are not something to be proud of. The work is sloppy and embarrassing.

Prof Chiloane: “So?”

Me: “I am sorry Prof, I don’t know what got over me, but I will redo them again” I say pleadingly.

He is fuming and I don’t even blame him. Who would when I get delivered a mess of a report like that as if I am not getting paid for the job?

Prof Chiloane: “Just make sure it’s fixed before you got home because I need those results ready for a presentation that I am delivering to our funders on Monday. I know that our budget doesn’t affect you and your pay but there are other people who depends on these grants” he says before walking back.

I get that he is angry and all, but to say the funding doesn’t affect me is really uncalled for. I need this job and pay as much as all the other research assistants do.

I go through the soft copy of the report one last time and realized that the whole document needs to be redone. I must have been distracted by Koko Tlou’s call prior to working on the document telling me that her granddaughter has decided to go back to her husband. I wish I could say I was surprised but I wasn’t, I just hoped she would prove me wrong. I spend the rest of my morning worried about her because I know how dangerous and damaging the situation she finds herself in is. I have been keeping her in my prayers asking God to give her strength so that she can finally see her worth and find her inner strength.

It also got me thinking about all the other woman in my province going through what she and I went through. How many of them have support from their family, friends, church, traditional leaders and the community at large. What really become of those who do not have support a place to run to go when things are no longer working out in their marriage? We have to be honest with ourselves because there are those parents who say to their daughters never to return home because they are now married. Maybe I should looking into starting an NGO and build a shelter for these woman so that they can always have a place to find refuge and work on building their lives again.

Yoo, time really is never on one's side when there so much to do. I need to call my daughter and let her know I will be home late because it's already 16:00 and I am nowhere near finishing kamo the boss made it clear that I must send the corrections before I head home.

Tshepiso: "Mother dearest" she says cheerfully.

Me: “Hi baby, just calling to let you know that I will be coming home late tonight. Please see what you can eat in the fridge and prepare something for your brother as well”

Tshepiso: “What about the Lion King?”

Me: “What about the Lion King? Gape you are not making sense” I ask confused

Tshepiso: “It’s coming out today in cinema mom and you promised to take us to watch it at the mall” she says disappointed.

Me: “I am sorry baby, we will go tomorrow and we can do lunch before watching the movie, plus we have the whole day”

Tshepiso: “Except, Tshepang and I have to attend a wedding tomorrow” she says in a very sad tone.

I totally forgot that Tomorrow, Tshepo weds Mmabatho in a traditional ceremony and both my kids needs to be there to

support their father and his new wife while I also promised Rofhiwa that I will come to Venda and spend the night.

Me: "I will try to wrap up as fast as I can baby

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maybe we can catch the 08:00 movie" I say trying in desperation.

I don't even know how we will be able to attend a 08:00 movie when we no longer have a car. I am sure taxi to Bendor would be finished by then.

Tshepang: "It's okay mom, I understand that you have to work. We can always catch the movie next week" she says with all hope lost.

Now I am heart broken. I really hate disappointing my kids. Especially because Tshepo is already doing that without any fail. I always try my level best to keep my promises to them and provide as much as I can. Unfortunately, I also need this job in

order for us to survive and afford some of the little luxuries of life and as such sacrifices needs to be made sometimes.

(The next day)

Tshepo's POV

I take one last look at the glass of whiskey in my hand before galping it down in one go. Damn, it's hot and I am not one for alcohol except today to gather the little strength that I can in order to go through with what I am about to do. I can't believe that I am really tying myself to one woman when I just got out of a marriage. I mean, I don't even love Mmabatho and among all the woman I cheated on my wife with, she was the least candidate to become Mrs Mamabolo.

What else can I do when I need to survive? I was left with no option but to marry her. I mean I tried stalling things but she kept pushing even when I said I did not have enough money for

lobola she offered me a loan that I could pay back as soon as I am back on my feet. Maybe this marriage might work unlike the previous one that totally failed all because I was not a man enough to love and respect my wife.

Thapelo: “Everything went well in there, we can now all go in” he says opening the car door.

Me: “Thank you I am coming” I say in a low voice

I watch as he looks at me with pity in his eyes before shaking his head and closing the door leaving me to my misery. I take in a deep breath before letting it all out, I am going to go in there and put on a best show. I take out my phone and dial Pheladi, maybe she will be able to talk some sense into me and stop this while I still have the time.

Pheladi: “Hello” she says in her sweet beautiful voice. “Hello” she says as words fail to come out of my mouth. “Okay, I am going to hang up now since you are not planning on saying anything to me”

Me: "Please don't hang up" I says abruptly

Pheladi: "Tshepo, is everything okay with my kids?" she says in panic.

Me: "No, I mean yes, everything is okay. I wasn't calling about them"

Pheladi: "Oh okay, what can I do for you?"

Me: "I just wanted to ask for your advice...."

Man's voice: "Baby what flavor did you say you want again?
Ooh sorry I did not know you are on the phone"

I listened as my heart broke into million pieces.

Pheladi: "It's okay love, just make it lemon and herb extra source please"

I hang up before she could get back to me. It's no use talking to her now because she sounds happy with her life and surely she doesn't need to remind her that I am now marrying a woman I have always told her she had nothing to worry about when she first suspected that we were having an affair. I take a look at her picture one more time in my wallet and kiss it before saying a little prayer. 'Forgive me father, for I am about to take your vows in vain' I say to myself before getting out of the car. I am welcomed by woman singing and ululating in celebration, to much of my irritation. If only they knew how much of a sham this marriage is they would save their voices and strength. I walk in the yard faking a smile and follow my delegates to a tent before taking our designated sits.

I walk and stand in front as per the pastor's orders and watch as Mmabatho walks towards me. I wish I could say she was the most beautiful bride and I couldn't keep my eyes off her but I would be lying. She was beautiful, she naturally is but I have seen better and I did not feel the butterflies that I felt the first time Pheladi walking in the hall on our wedding day. She did look like an angel and I couldn't keep my eyes off her even when my tears were blinding me. I force a smile and nod once at her brother who just handed her to me.

She mouth 'I love you' and I mouth 'I love you too' before we both turn to the pastor to officiate us.

I can hear him speak but not what he is saying as he preaches. In my mind I am thinking of all the things I would put down if I were to write a letter to a 22 year old me so as to avoid repeating the mistakes that I made unfortunately life has no second chances.

I find myself walking to the balcony to take one last look at this beautiful view. I can't help but take in a deep breath as I try to inhale all that fresh breeze of nature as provided by the green hills, trees and river of this side of the country with my eyes closed. Oooh this sure feels amazing. I could definitely wake up to such beauty of nature every day of my life and I would never get tired of it. Unfortunately, I have to go back to my life with no such views of beautiful nature, where I will wake up only to open my bedroom window to be greeted by a gray wall on the other side.

Rofhiwa: "We should get going now, unless you want to spend one more night and I can drive you back early in the morning" he says in his deep sexy voice hugging me from behind.

To be honest I almost forgot that he and I were not even in speaking terms. Mxm. Rofhiwa must think his Vendaconda is that good enough to make me forget about the way he spoke to me earlier. Shame, he must have me confused because I am a woman who is used to going months on months without any vitamin D.

Rofhiwa: “okay, suit yourself then” he says while I untangle myself from him and walk back inside the bedroom.

I grab my hand back and walk out with him following behind with my overnight bag while he is busy whistling. I grab an apple and a bottle of water from the fridge on my way out, well he did say feel at home when I first arrived here so yah. I wait as he opens the garage door with a remote before unlocking the car. I couldn't even wait for him to come and open the door for me as I pull the door open and slide in before turning on the radio and switching the station to Jacaranda FM. I watch through the review mirror as he shakes his head in defeat before opening the boot to throw my overnight bag in.

Me: Singing “I played the devil's advocate, I played into his hands, I played the fool, I played with fire, I played the victim's hand. And if you bump into the devil, tell him I understand, rather the devil you know, than the devil you don't, I hope you can understand, I'm only human after all”

I am busy singing along to the Parlotones ‘I'm only human’ when Rofhiwa decides to switch the radio off before turning to look at me with his not so friendly face on. I am not going to

plead with him to switch it back on, it's his car after all and he can do exactly what he wants in it because I am just a mere passenger.

Rofhiwa: "It's either we are going to use to trip to talk things through or we will drive all the way to Polokwane without any music in the car."

Well, I guess it's going to be as silent trip then, I might as well adjust the car seat and lay back comfortably drives out. I guess it

Rofhiwa: "Just for the record, I think you are over reacting. What I said to you earlier came from a good place even if you don't see it like that now" he says talking to himself.

Yes, talking to himself because I have no interest in what he is about to say in justification of his words. I ignore him and choose to look outside the window admiring the beauty of this

green majestic place. Venda land is beautiful, a true African Eden. I am told it's green all season long and the soul is so rich which it's evidence lies in all the hectares of plantations we keep passing on our way to Polokwane. Don't even get me started on the people because I have so far meet only the most welcoming and friendliest people ever. House on the hills and the mountains surrounding this place are just amazing to view as we pass by, not forgetting the rich history of this place and how the culture is still well-preserved. I just love it here, my only issue is the heat, I mean even in this cold front that is threatening the country, and Venda is just hot. But I still love it though.

We keep driving on in silence as the only sound that can be heard is our breathing patterns. The tension in this car is just too much

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I never imagined this weekend ending in such a somber mood. I mean we were happy one moment and then not in speaking terms the next, just like that. I really can't wait to get to Polokwane and leave all this negative energy space behind. I just want to see my kids and hold them tight. How I miss them, my true happy place and my two most precious products in this earth. I can even feel the smile form on my face just thinking

about them. If given a chance to go back in time and change my life so as not to meet Tshepo, I would not take it, just so I can still have my Tshepiso and Tshepang in my life.

I involuntarily let out a deep sigh of frustration at the road sign that says 100 KM to Polokwane, much to Rofhiwa's chuckle of annoyance. He better not start with me, he have said a mouthful today and I don't want to hear any of his psychoanalysis of my life as if he is qualified to do so. The guy spent just few hours of his time with me and he thinks he has me all figured out. Nx. I keep looking straight with my focus on the road even when I notice him looking at me intensively through the corner of my eye before shaking his head and focusing back on the road. I am sure this ride feels as long for him as it does for me judging by how he keeps pressing on the accelerator.

At least I am not the only one who wants to see us reaching our destination in no time. I am sure it, It's all getting to him too, the silence and tension. It's funny how the road back seems to be longer than the time I was traveling there. Phela it feels like we are not even moving even though I am aware that his is doing nothing less than 120 on the speedometer. If only, I was given an option, I would have surely taken a taxi and not be

feeling all this suffocation in this tiny car of his. Okay, maybe I am being spiteful now because his car is actually huge, just like everything of his.

I bet today, Rofhiwa learned how stubborn I can be as I refuse to crack under pressure to respond to his silly jokes that he keeps making in the car. Jokes that he only finds funny. My heart does a happy dance with my face lighting up as I see a toll gate up ahead. I now know home is no longer far away. Like a guy on a mission to keep ruining my day, Rofhiwa drives into a Caltex filling station just before the toll gate. 20 minutes or so unnecessary time added to my estimated arrival time at home. Should have fought harder to take a taxi than be driven home.

I remain in the car as he walks out without asking me if I want anything before banging the door. Mxm. Not gentleman like at all. I keep looking at my wrist watch losing patience as he doesn't come back fast enough. I shake my head in anger when I see him emerging from the store 2 minutes later with a plastic bag. I keep quiet as he opens the door and slides inside the car before handing me the plastic but not after he took a bottle of water from it. I hear him chuckle as I try to suppress the smile on my face at the sight of my favorite snacks. I chose to ignore him as I take out my magnum and munch on it.

Rofhiwa: “A thank you would be nice. But then again, I am not going to keep my hopes high because you are stubborn like that” he says shaking his head slowly.

It's a good thing he is not going to keep his hopes high because he would hang for long waiting for me to say something.

Believe it or not we, we drove all the way to Polokwane in silent until he dropped me off outside my gate and sped of after I took all my things from his car.

I am looking at my daughter in total admiration as she narrates to me how her father's wedding went down. Apparently it was a beautiful affair and I am just happy for them. We are all snuggling in my bed with Tshepang snoring. He must be tired, apparently he spend the whole day playing soccer with his brother Karabo before being driven back home. I can't help but smile at this young lady who is growing up to be beautiful, wise and caring. I don't want to brag but Tshepiso has taken all my good qualities, not just manners but body shape and all. Her body is starting to take my shape as she comes of age,

curvaceous and bit of meat in all the right places while the stomach remains flat with an hour glass shape around the waist.

Tshepiso: "I can't wait to be a maid of honor at your wedding mom" she says all excited.

I look at her with my eyes popped out like WTF?

Tshepiso: "Okay not maid of honor ge, but I will definitely be a brides maid" she says responding to my reaction.

I was actually not shocked at her being a maids of honor but the fact that she is day dreaming about me getting married.

Me: "Unfortunately for you young missy, I am not getting married again" I say before taking a sip from my hot chocolate.

Tshepiso: "But why? I mean you deserve a happiness too. If dad can marry again so can you"

I shake my head no because I am not about go into such a conversation with her. She is too young to understand anyway.

Me: “But I will definitely be a bride maid at your wedding. No, scratch that Maid of honor” I say before we both burst into laughter.

Tshepiso: “I am not going to have a granny maid of honor. No ways” she says as she laughs.

Home sweet home, this is exactly what I missed. Having hot chocolate and laughing with my daughter. While the 3 of us are sleeping in my bed, reminding each other that we are all the family that we need. Nothing more and nothing less. I check my phone and notice Rofhiwa’s countless missed calls and one of the many SMS’s that say he arrived at home safe. Now I can sleep peacefully, as much as I am angry at him I still care about his safety and wellbeing.

I am having lunch at Paledi Nandos with Cate since she is working on a project this side and today is her pay day. I am glad because I was having a pretty bad day since Rofhiwa has not contacted me once today. I understand that I have been ignoring all his calls from last night and messages but for him to stop trying is just a bitter pill for me to swallow.

I watch as she sips her juice with her eyebrows raised waiting for me to say something. I don't even know where to start because I might have over reacted with the way I responded to him. I mean driving all the way from Thohoyandou to Polokwane without saying a word to him was just mean. I am sure he regrets inviting me over to his place because it just ruined everything. Maybe I am comfortable with this relationship being just about pushing time and taking each day as it comes than making plans for the future.

Me: "Okay, stop looking at me like that" I say pleadingly.

I watch as she laughs at me causing me to join in the laughter. How did I even get here because dating is the most difficult thing ever? If you could have told me 1 years or 2 ago that I

would be ignoring a man's calls and be catching feelings at the same time that he is not calling, I would have laughed at your face and recommended you to a mental institution.

Cate: "So are you going to tell me why you spent more than 200 Km on a road with your boyfriend without even saying a single word?" she says getting impatient.

Me: "Okay ke, as long as you promise not to judge me"

Cate: "I would never judge you friend, even if they were to say you hired a hitman for Mmabatho's husband" she says before we could both burst into laughter.

Cate is just crazy shame, she can't believe that Tshepo and Mmabatho went and got hitched just like that. I take a deep breath as I try to calm myself down so that I can start narrating the story.

Me: "So, Rofhiwa asked if he could meet my kids and I said no because I don't think my kids and I are ready for that.

Sooooooooo he asked me if I see a future with him and I just couldn't give him a definite answer. All I said was I don't know" I say biting my lower lip and shrugging my shoulder.

Cate: "But do you see a future with him?"

Me: "Honestly speaking I don't know. Gape, I am still trying to find myself. Learn what is it that makes me tick. What dreams I still want to achieve and I don't think I will ever achieve any of that by tying myself up to a man. I am scared that once I introduce my kids to him then I will be making a commitment that I will stay at his table even when I don't like what is being served because I would be afraid of confusing my kids"

Cate: "Those sounds like valid reasons to me so did you tell him all that?"

I shake my head no in shame because I failed to lay it down for Rofhiwa like I just did for Cate.

Me: "I couldn't. I don't know why but I just couldn't"

Cate: "What exactly did you say to him?" she says concerned.

Me: "I just said no and when he asked me why I said because I don't want to confuse my kids introducing them to everyman that comes into my life. So he asked if I trust his intentions for me and I said I am not sure which I was being honest"

Cate: "I still don't get why the silent treatment though?" she ask confused.

Okay, Cate is my friend and she must know this by now that I am not the best story teller. I am aware that I don't go straight to the point because I try by all means to describe how the whole thing started and what lead to what so that a person can get a complete picture.

Me: "He asked if I am in love with him and I said I don't know. He then asked why I was in a relationship with him if I did not know and I couldn't answer him there. Jiki jiki he was accusing me of using him to get over Tshepo because he believes mina I am not ready to be loved. He said that, I have been hurt so

much that I don't think I deserve it when a man loves me the way he does"

Cate: "So, that's what made you angry?" she said, as it came out more of a statement than a question.

Me: "Yes. I felt like he is calling me a damaged good. You know, phela he was basically saying that I am too damaged to know my worth and he is so freaken wrong" I say getting worked up again.

Cate: "Okay calm down. This is me and then again I am not judging but did he call you a damaged good"

Me: "Not in so many ways he didn't. But the way he said 'you just don't want to allow yourself to be loved because you don't believe you deserve love' it was just condescending and I did not like it" I say exhaling deep after trying to imitate Rofhiwa's voice.

Cate: "Do you believe that you deserve to be loved?" she says with a straight face.

I look at her confused because I don't understand why she is asking me that. I mean who would feel that he/she doesn't deserve to be loved?

Me: "Isn't it obvious. If I did not

I would not have given up my title of being the minister's wife no matter how hot the sit was" I say all defensive.

Cate: "Okay. Here is my two cent opinion. Rofhiwa was wrong for failing to understand your reasons for not allowing him to meet your kids yet because it's still early. Those kids still have to deal with the idea of having a stepmother and it wouldn't be fair on them throwing a stepfather in the mix now"

Me: "Right, I mean at least you get it" I says relieved.

I am glad that she sees I am not insane and just plain stubborn but Rofhiwa was wrong nje.

Cate: “Not so fast because you were wrong to over react too. I mean the poor guy voiced his opinion and all you heard was just something else. I also asked if you think you deserve to be loved and all you said to me was obvious in a very defensive manner. But you are forgetting that what is obvious to you may not be obvious to someone else. To Rofhiwa, you are holding a lot back because you don’t trust him or his intention for you. The love that he is showing you is just foreign to you and you think it can’t be true that a man can love you like that when Tshepo couldn’t. How long must people suffer for Tshepo’s sins?”

Even worse you still play games, I understand that you have been out of this dating game for more than a decade but silent treatment is a no no. As adults we talk things through and lay down our feelings not make the other party play a guessing game. He called you all night and you ignored his calls and messages, he stopped calling today and you are angry that he is not calling. Is he a mind reader that he should know where the wind is blowing today?” she says with raised eyebrows.

I nod slowly with words failing me. Okay, who kidnaped my friend who is in engineering and replaced her with someone from clinical psychology? She definitely said a lot of things that I need to digest and think over.

Me: “Wow, thank you for your honesty my friend. I definitely needed to hear all that”

Cate: “Just think things through and learn to communicate with him because without communication your relationship is as doomed as your marriage to Tshepo was”

Me: “Okay. Can we please stop making references to Mmabatho’s husband in our conversations please?”

Cate: “Is it possible though?”

Me: “Nah” I say before we both burst into laughter.

I mean Tshepo has done the things that obviously made the pots not to be done so yah, he shall forever remain an example and lesson of our life time.

Cate: “Come let me drive you back to the campus. Lunch time is almost up and o Jonny Motsayi (You are a Jonny Walker)” she says teasing me.

Me: “Wait until I win the Lotto shame and I start enjoying life with all my friends who own private jets and not bo Cate badi 4 wheels” I says also teasing her as I get.

We both grab our hand bags from the table and walk to the car over laughter and a good conversation. My days are never gloomy with this one around, that’s why I love her so much.

I am walking to the admin block with so many thought going through my mind. Scared and worried because I don’t know why I was summoned to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Teaching

and Learning)'s office. I came back from lunch to a message from one of my colleagues that my presence is being requested in Prof Moseya's office. I mean I did not even know who Prof Moseya was until like 3 minutes ago making it difficult for me to even guess why she would be requesting for my presence.

I walk out of the lift and greet the receptionist who is smiling at me wider making me even more nervous of my visit here. I shouldn't be here, phela this is like the second highest office in the institution and I am mere contract worker who has not even been in this institution for long.

Me: "Good afternoon. My name is Pheladi Molopa and I have been told that Prof Moseya is requesting for my presence" I say nervously.

I think she sees it too because she nods at each word with a huge smile on her face, probably hoping to make me feel better but she is just making things worse.

Her: "It's nice to meet you Pheladi. You may go through, he has been waiting for you" she says showing me the two huge glass

doors written in bold letters PROF N MOSEYA: DVC (TEACHING and LEARNING).

I smile back at her and walk towards the door. The way I am nervous, I did not even ask if Prof Moseya wasn't a she because I clearly heard her say 'He has been waiting for you'. I could swear Makgale said she is a woman or maybe I just did not hear him right.

I knocked softly and patiently waited for a come in from the inside but it never came until the girl at the reception shouted for me to go right through. I opened the door and there his was standing by the window looking outside with his back on me. I don't really know much about non-verbal communication but the way he is standing and how he has his back on me definitely means I am in trouble.

Me: "Afternoon Prof. I have been told you wanted to see me" I say with a shaking voice.

I watch as he signal with his hand that I should come closer to him without saying anything or changing his position to look at

me. I walk towards him and stop right next to him even afraid to look at his face as my heart was beating fast and hard.

Without any warning I was pinned to the wall with this man kissing the hell out of me. I fought back at first before allowing myself to enjoy the kiss. It was just aggressive and making me wet instantly. How my heart was doing the vosho like I wasn't just nervous few seconds ago. The heat that was rushing through my body was just too much and the breathing patterned were just going higher and higher while his hand was finding its way through the insides of my skirts rubbing on my throbbing Nirvana that just became wet instantly.

Ooh fara gawd, are we really about to do what we are about to do in this office right now. I am not going to lie and say I might stop him because my desires are too much for me not to allow myself such pleasures in life. I think the thrill of someone walking in on us as the door is unlocked is pumping up all the adrenalin that is rushing through my entire body. Forgive me father for I am about to sin as I am going to allow my needs to be controlled by the flesh and whole-heartedly choosing not to think rationally.

Rofhiwa: “You better remember this session the next time you think of ignoring my calls throughout the night” he whispers in my ear from behind in a very stern voice.

The only thing I can manage to do is to nod yes because I am too breathless to say anything. I keep holding on to the table for balance as I wait for my feet to stop trembling. I hear him moving away and walking to another room within the office. What just happened? Did I just have punishment sex in someone’s office during working hours with the door unlocked? I am too shocked at myself to even fully comprehend what just happened. I am not sure if I am embarrassed by the whole thing or just proud of myself for taking a walk on a wild side of life.

Rofhiwa: “You need to go and clean up the bathroom is in there” he says taking a sit on a couch in front of me with a smirk on his face.

I bet he is proud of himself and how helpless he is able to render my body as it responds to him in ways I never knew it could betray me. Finally, I let go of the table and walk to the

bathroom to clean myself up. 'Who are you' I laugh as I ask my reflection on the other side of the mirror. Imagine my shock when I walk back to an empty office so I assumed that he probably went out to answer the phone or something so I took a sit and waited.

I couldn't stop day dreaming about what just happened, I am sure my walk had changed too because he did give me a whipping. Sepedi sere thupa ya mosadi ke lepara (I can't think of a direct idiom but what it means is that 'the only weapon that should be used to beat a woman is a D'). I can tell you this right now, I guess Rofhiwa understood it too well. Thinking of Rofhiwa, yazi I have been sitting here for 15 minutes and there is no sign of him. I don't think he could have left me in here just like that. So I took out my phone and decided to call him.

Rorfhiwa: "Baby wa nga (my baby)" he says with a hint of amusement in his voice.

Me: "Where are you?"

Rofhiwa: "I am passing Nobody love"

Me: "Passing Nobody" I repeat

I know that I heard exactly what he said, but I want to make sure that I heard him right.

Roro: "Yes baby, passing Nobody. What's wrong?"

Wow, only he can ask me that after what he did. I have no reason to believe that he is joking because I can hear the sound of a hooting car in the background.

Me: "Nothing, everything is okay. I just wanted to check where you are"

Roro: "Okay love, enjoy the rest of your day at work okay. I will see you before driving back home"

Me: "Cool" I say before hanging up.

I take one last look in this office to make sure that everything is in place and exactly the way we found it. It would be very embarrassing for the owner to ever find out what we did in here worse of all leaving evidence behind.

I walked out with shame written all over my face as I approached the girl at the reception who is catching up on Idols on her phone with her headsets on. I hope she had them on before Rofhiwa and I did what we just did because it would be too embarrassing for me to know that she heard us. I guess she noticed me coming because she paused her phone and took out one side of the headset from her ear and looked up to pay attention to be.

Her: "I was asked to give you this" she says handing me a box of red and white roses.

Me: "Thank you" I say receiving them from her.

I walked away to the lift thinking about how mysterious Rofhiwa can be. I mean I can't keep up with him at all. Yazi the difficult part was the walk back to the office. Have you ever felt

that everyone on the road can see right through you and knows exactly what you just did few minutes ago? You are indeed lucky if you haven't, trust me it is the most messed up feeling ever.

Phew, finally I arrived at my office

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or should I say working space since I share the office with 4 other people. I smile nervously at Makgale who is looking at me like he can see right through me. Can this day end so that I can go home and take a proper bath, I swear I even stink of the deed. Maybe if I bury myself in work and keep my eyes glued on the computer screen and notes before me, I can be able to forget about what just happened and how it seems everyone knows.

I keep at it doing what I get paid to do until I am disturbed by a figure in front of my desk causing me to look up.

Prof Chiloane: "Good afternoon Pheladi"

Me: “Afternoon Prof” I say surprised and worried at the same time.

Prof doesn’t usually walk up to our desks unless he is not happy with your work. The last time I received a visit from him was when I he was not happy with the work I submitted. Otherwise, he would call whoever he needs to see in his office or give instructions over the phone.

Prof Chiloane: “So tell me. How do you know Nonhlanhla?”

Me: “Who” I say surprised because I don’t know any Nonhlanhla nna

Prof Chiloane: “The DVC of teaching and learning, Prof Moseya”

Me: “Through a friend”

I mean that was not entirely wrong mos.

Prof Chiloane: “Interesting Pheladi, you seem to be making friends in all the right places here”

Okay, I don't even know what that was about. I mean which other friend in the right place did I make in this institution?

Me: “Not really Prof. like I said we share a mutual friend”

Prof Chiloane: “Still, that woman has been giving me trouble on some course outline for my honors students. Maybe you should come with me to the next meeting who knows she might just be lenient this time”

Me: “I don't think I will make any difference being there plus I don't know anything about the subject that you teach”

The honest truth is that I have never meet this Prof and I know for sure that she would not be lenient and approve his course outline just because I am present at that meeting.

Prof Chiloane: “What is that smell” he says softly sniffing in.

My heart rate at this point is beating too fast. I can only pray it slows down because at the point its going, it might just jump out right through my chest.

Prof Chiloane: “What is that small people” he shout at the whole office

Phindile: “I am sorry Prof. I must have set the microwave too high for the pop corns” she says getting up from her desk.

Prof Chiloane: “How many times must I tell you about those pop corns of yours? No mahn” he says before walking back to his office

Phew!!!! That’s was just too close for comfort.

I am sitting with Rofhiwa in the car, parked outside my gate. As promised, he is just passing by to talk before he could drive back to Thohoyandou.

Rofhiwa: “I am sorry for pushing the issue about meeting your kids. I know it’s still early for that and I promise to be patient until you are ready for them to meet me. I just wish you could have told me exactly how you were feeling on yesterday instead of ruining a perfectly good weekend over a miscommunication. The silent treatment was pure torture and I hope we can start using words next time we are not happy with one another”

Me: “Apology accepted. I am also sorry for blowing things out of proportion, I now realize that I over reacted when I misunderstood the point that you were making. I promise to use words next time and express myself better”

Rofhiwa: “Apology accepted”

I smile and rest my head on his shoulder. I am glad that we had this talk because we are now back to our normal selves. I guess that went well, our first fight and no one laid their hands on anyone. I think I am going to enjoy my relationship with this man.

Mmabatho's POV

She stands there waiting on me to take my pills like I am a child. I shake my head in disbelief of her reaction before throwing them in my mouth and downing them with a glass of water. I can't believe that this is what my life has come down to, having a nurse wait up for me to take my pills and having to open my mouth just to prove that I have indeed swallowed them all. I force a smile as she nods in satisfaction and takes the glass from me before walking away.

I hate this place and how it makes me feel, don't even get me started on the nurses because they treat us like prisoners. Well, I don't know about others but I for one do feel like I am in prison. I mean the way I am constantly watched, monitored and told when to do certain activities like eat, take a walk, attend therapy and what not to eat or drink does make me feel like a prisoner. It doesn't even help that I have only been here for 7 days and I still have 14 more days to go to make it all 21.

I want my life back, that is all I need nothing more and nothing less. I want my life before I became Mmabatho Mamabolo

because then everything just went south. Gape I did not even know that we have a place called Unicare in Polokwane until I was referred here after I fainted at work. I was just fatigued but the doctor just screamed depression. Yes, I have lost so much weight due to stress, I don't sleep at night and I am sad for days. All I do is cry and cry and cry like there is no tomorrow but I believe the doctor went overboard with his diagnosis of depression because I am not depressed.

I tried arguing with him but he keeps saying I am depressed and I need to go over a course of medication and talk to professionals. That's all I have been doing since I got here, talk, talk and drink more pills than I can count, but I still don't feel any better. Maybe he is wrong in his diagnosis because depression is not for people like me. I mean

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I was the bubbliest woman in my circle, had the greatest childhood and upbringing, went to the best schools and doing well in life career wise. But here I am, confined to a mental institution with pills forced down my throats like I am absent minded and constantly monitored because I might be suicidal.

Sister Molebatsi: “Hello Mmabatho, how are you feeling today” she says walking in my room and taking a chair next to my bed.

I guess the shifts are changing now because she wasn't here earlier and she always makes it a point to come and see me when she is on duty. I am glad that they make them sign some non-disclosure clause because I know her from church and I wouldn't want my life to be known by everyone out there.

Me: “I am feeling a whole lot better. Can you please talk to the doctor to let me go back home. I promise that I will take my pills as recommended and in time please” I say pleadingly.

Sister Molebatsi: “If I could I would. But the doctor recommend that you be with us for 21 days straight so that we can monitor your progress and help you into this healing journey” she says with so much pity in her eyes.

There is nothing I hate like being pitied because it reminds me that I am a victim. I victim of my own choices that lead me into the hands of a monster. I shift my eyes from her and look at the floor just hoping it could open up and swallow me. Maybe then

all this pain would be gone since the pills are not helping me at all.

Sister Molebatsi: "I am told you still refuse to see any visitors. Don't you think that maybe it would have to know how much you are loved by your family and friend?" she says after a while of staying in silent.

Me: "I don't think seeing anyone would help me right now because I can't stomach all the pity in people's eyes. There is nothing as painful as watching people feel sorry for you like you are a helpless soul. I am a proud person and for people to see me at my lowest is just a no no"

Sister Molebatsi: "I am sure your husband is one person who would not even look at you like that. He was so broken yesterday when he was told you refused to see anyone including him....."

I couldn't help but laugh out loud. Does this woman know the person she is talking about? I mean Tshepo Mamabolo is a master manipulator who knows how to play in other people's

emotions. There is no doubt in my mind that I am here because of him and for him to play victim in all this is just selfish.

Sister Molebatsi: “Did I say something funny?” she ask concerned.

She should be because she is falling for Tshepo’s charm and sees nothing but a victim in him. I guess to her I am just an ungrateful wife who can’t even see when her husband is trying to be supportive and throws all his efforts in his face.

Me: “No you did not say anything funny. You just remind me so much of myself few months ago. Unfortunately things aren’t always what they seem in life. It is easy for us to judge people and their choices because we have not walked in their shoes. Trust me when I say, the decision that I took not to see anyone including my husband is what’s best for me. I don’t even expect you to understand because you have walked in my shoes. I think I need to rest now, if you may be so kind to go and attend to other patients” I say before laying on the bed and facing the wall.

I listen as she stands up and walk away before closing the door softly. How many of us here have ever said we would take certain decisions should people do certain things to us only to do the exact opposite? I am speaking from experience as Tshepo's wife because I used to believe that I would pack my bags and leave before allowing any man to raise his hand twice at me but I am still here. I guess I know better now because the future is really known to no one.

It's easy to say 'Nna motho aka ntseba botse, ke Mmabatho gae 1' (If someone would ever do that to me they would know me well) than actually doing anything about it. I would only take your word if you were to come to me and say 'I actually packed up my things and left the first time he raised his hand at me' because I'd know you are speaking from experience. I salute all the woman who have said, this is not going to work for me and I need to choose myself and walk away no matter how long it could have taken them. Leaving is not easy, I tried it so many times but I am still here.

Pheladi

It's after hours and I am still sitting here in front of my laptop working on my paper. My abstract was accepted for the conference in Paris and the University Research and Innovation Directorate has agreed to fund my trip. I can't believe I nearly changed my mind about going when Rofhiwa told me how unhappy it made him feel especially taking into account the fact that I am going with a male colleague.

Thank God I attended a woman's conference in church last Thursday and thanks to it I decided to go to Paris and present my paper. The Woman's conference's main topic was self-love and I needed to hear all that was said to remind me that I need to put myself first. I have done enough sacrifices in life to put other people's needs first.

'Follow your dream and stop selling yourself short to accommodate other people' one woman kept saying and it was like she was talking to me. I would not have learned anything in life if I did not learn from my previous marriage and relationship with Tshepo by repeating the same mistakes of selling myself short and sacrificing my dreams to accommodate a man. I am now all about me and my dreams before anyone

else. I need a man who is going to support me or just back off, that's my new found attitude. Some of you may not understand but I don't expect you to because you don't know how much I sacrificed in my previous relationship and marriage.

My phone vibrates against the table disturbing my train of thoughts as I type a paragraph on the findings of the study. I check only to be welcomed An SMS from an unknown number coming through.

'Thobela Pheladi, I know this may come as a surprise to you but I need to see you. May you kindly visit me at Unicare Polokwane tomorrow between 17:00 and 18:00? I know you have no reason to do this for me but I am begging you please. From Mmabatho'

I read the SMS 3 times just to make sure that my eyes are not deceiving me. I am familiar with Unicare and the services that they provide making it obvious why Mmabatho is there but for her to request for a visit from me is just unexpected. I will have to sleep on night and decided tomorrow whether or not I will go see her because like she said, I have no reason to do this for her. If it were up to me I would have no dealing with her

whatsoever, unfortunately she is married to the father of my kids and that means she is constantly in their lives. I now wish I did not read the SMS because I can't concentrate on my work anymore as my mind is running wild with million reasons why Mmabatho would like me to visit her. I might as well pack up my things and go home because my mind will not be producing anything useful now.

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Choir sings “Ngathi ngisahamba emhlabeni ngahlalel’ithuna lami la.

Njengembali eqhakaza lamhla, ngakusasa isibune nya.

Ngokunjalo kwangizum’ukufa ngisemusha, ngiyingane nje;

Kanti qhabo, ngiyaphila futhi, ngitshiyil’umzimba wodwa la.

Sengiphiwe ukuhlal’okuhle, laph’ukufa kwahluliwe nya;

Sengibong’iNkosi yaphezulu kanye lezithunyw’ekhaya le.

Ningakhali bazalwane bami, sahlukene umzuzwana nje;

Ezulwini sobonana futhi zonk’insizi seziphele nya.

Ingoma yesiZulu” the choir sings

The heart wrenching cries that filled this place as the coffin goes down is enough to break even the coldest heart. I can't even bear to look at her parents who are crying uncomfortably. The last time I looked in their direction her mother was on the floor weeping with other family members trying hard to console her with no success. They should just let her cry it all out, at least she is not bottling things up which might lead her into some mental state not good for her.

I hope her parents are not blaming themselves right now. They did not know what a monster he was before marrying her off to him. Even if they did, there is nothing they could have done to stop her from marrying him since she believed they were in love. We all know that some of us tried talking to her but she still made a choice to go back to him. I am sure like most of us she believed that things would get better and this phase shall pass, unfortunately her decision to stay has led her to her untimely death. Like most woman in abusive relationship the ending was the end of both their lives. With her in a coffin and

him behind bars, I can only pray she haunts him for the rest of his miserable life.

I don't know what it's like to lose a child but I am sure it's the most painful thing ever. I can only pray never to experience such pain because this is not how God intended things to be. I am sure parents are not meant to bury their kids, I mean who must then take care of them in their old age and in turn bury them when they depart from this world. Unfortunately, we live in the physical world where evil has been unleashed to roam free. It's events like today's that reminds me how lucky I am that I managed to walk away while I was still strong enough to do so because like this young woman my life could have been cut short and contributions to the world would be no more. Imagine me leaving my children behind in this cold hearted, evil infested world with no guidance or motherly love.

I turn my attention to her grandmother who is trying by all means to act strong in her church regalia clinging to her bible close to her chest. I hope she can find healing in the word of the lord and forgive her for choosing to stay even when it was toxic. Unfortunately, those who are left behind are the ones who are left to pick up the pieces and try to make their lives whole again. It's not going to be easy because surely the void

she has left in her parent's lives and those of her family members is just too much to fill.

The Priest: ""For dust you are; and unto dust you shall return."
He says throwing in the first soil into the grave.

As the soil and stones hit the coffin like he hit a nerve, the mother wailed louder and uncontrollably screaming 'WHY'. I couldn't concentrate on what the priest was saying because her cries just shattered me inside. So much so that I felt my tears falling down my cheeks uncontrollably. Her why question is too deep to answer in situations like this. As Christian we believe everything happens for a reason but for what reason would something so painful happen?

Choir sings "See u nkalimileng sona, – Ha u re, ke se busetse

Le teng ke tla leka ho re: – Ho lokile!

Leha u re, ke lesane – Le ba ratoang ho fetisa,

Le moo, ke sa leka ho re: -Ho lokile!

Leha lefu le bohale – le khaola tšiu tsa ka

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Ke sa ntse ke leka hore: -Ho lokile!”

‘Easier said than done’ I say to myself as the choir sings the song while the family members goes to the grave to throw in the soil one by one. I mean how many of us can easily say ‘It’s okay’ when we lose our loved one or when we are asked to return what God has borrowed us. My wet eyes lands on her beautiful toddler carried by one of the aunts to the grave, she has no care in the world as she doesn’t even understand what is happening causing all this people to gather here today. Poor child, she is too young to even understand that she will never see her mommy again. I hope her grandparents with make sure to keep her mother’s memories alive for her sake. The rest of the service goes on with more heartbreaking songs that are

meant to heal the broken but the tone they are sang in keeps reminding us that we are at a funeral.

Me: “Rest in peace Conny, you have fought your battles and now it’s your time to rest. I believe you have been healed. May your story inspire others to walk away when it no more safe to stay” I whisper very low before walking away to the car.

I will drive past her home, wash my hands and have a word with Koko Tlou before leaving. She needs to understand that she tried her best to have her leave the marriage but she choose to stay. She should stop blaming herself and mourn her granddaughter so that she can soon find healing. I hope she will be able to find her strength in the lord in this mourning period and remember Psalm 34:18 The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

After the funeral service I attended, I decided to come here and see Mmabatho. I have been avoiding this visit for a week now. I did not think it was a great idea for me to come here and hear

her out while she caused me so much pain. But then again, I need to hear her out for my own sanity and help her where I can. I can be all bitter and let her suffer the consequences of her actions but I know I will lose some sleep over her and her well-being while I could have helped. This woman on woman hearted needs to come to end because it gives man like Tshepo power to keep playing us against each other.

So what if she broke my marriage by agreeing to be Tshepo's mistress while she know he was married. I mean truth be told my marriage to Tshepo was long broken as he was too adamant to break each and every vow made before the church and the lord. I take in a deep breath before turning the handle to open the door. She smile faintly when she sees me with relief plastered across her face.

Me: "Hi" I say walking in slowly.

Mmabatho: "Hi, Pheladi. This is a nice surprised" she says excitedly.

Me: "I am sorry, I took longer to come but it's been hectic"

Mmabatho: “No, Thank you very much for coming. Please take a sit” she says sitting up.

Shame poor Mmabatho so looks so fragile right now, the confident woman that I once knew is no more. Sometimes we die a million deaths before we actually die and the sad part is we keep holding on where our lives are drained over and over again. This is what man like Tshepo Mamabolo do to you, the suck the life out of you and leave you depressed and broken.

Me: “Thank you”

I grab a sit next to her bed while we sit in an awkward silence as my eyes moves around the gray walls of the room. She better say something fast because the silence is becoming too much to bear.

Mmabatho: “Have you ever been here before” she catching me off guard.

I shake my head no.

Mmabatho: “Me neither, this is my first time and to be honest with you did not even know that such a place existed. But life has a way of throwing you under the bus and taking you places you never thought you could ever find yourself”

Me: “True that. But we must not forget that the choices we make also contribute to the directions we take in life. We are constantly at a fork and whatever direction we choose to take leads us where we finally finds ourselves at”

Mmabatho: “But how do we know which road is best to take when we get to the fork?”

Me: “By thinking not only for today but tomorrow too, hence there are rules in life and we know what is right and wrong. For example, I just came from a funeral of a young beautiful lady who is a victim of a domestic violence that turned deadly. She knew her situation was not normal and what was happening to her was wrong but she choose to stay in that marriage. Her grandmother tried to intervene and tried to get her some help

but she still choose to stay but Alas she is now no more and her family is left behind with broken hearts and memories of how she used to be”

Mmabatho: “How did you do it?”

Me: “How did I do what?”

Mmabatho: “Decide to leave?”

Me: “To be honest I am still not sure how I did it. It wasn’t by my strength or wisdom but by God’s grace. All I know is that I knew I deserved better and started working on a way out. It must have been the hardest thing I ever had to do but I thank God for the strength because I am at my happiest. Yes, there we great times in my marriage but they were all short-lived by the hard times. I remember more days being crawled up on the cold floor taking in a punch after the other and kick after the other than days where I was genuinely happy. I attempted suicide twice but never went through with it because of my kids, but I soon learned that the best solution is usually the one we are afraid of taking. That is why I decided to choose me and

my kids and walk away” I say wiping off the tears that are falling down my face.

I wish I could speak about my past without tearing up but the wounds are still too fresh for that. The images still play vividly in my mind and the pain is still there tearing me up inside. I must remember to do a session before going away to Paris.

Mmabatho: “I just got married, what will people say if I leave now?”

Me: “That’s you standing at the fork alone. People will always talk, whether you stay and leave in a box or starting packing up your things and walking away. My mistake was not to hold Tshepo accountable for the things he did to me because then the cycle this continues on you. Sometimes you need to forget about people and choose yourself, trust me when I say it’s not going to be easy and people will feel sorry for him while they mock and laugh at you. It’s a very cruel world we live in and society continues to victimize the victims”

Mmabatho: “Why aren’t you a motivational speaker, I feel like there are many people out there who would die to hear you share those wise words”

Me: Deep sigh “One woman at a time and right now my focus is on you Mmabatho. Let this be a learning curve and a motivation to take your life back. We are having too many funerals and are our kids are becoming orphans while burial sites are staked with more young woman than old people”

Mmabatho: “I am soo sorry Pheladi. I can’t believe I did all those things to you and today you are sitting here with me giving me words to strength me up like this. I wish more of us had a heart like yours and this world would be a better place”

Me: “You need to forgive yourself too Mmabatho because no matter what you did to me or anyone else you don’t deserve what Tshepo is doing to you”

Insert 40

(Few weeks later)

I let out a deeply sigh of relief after the amount of energy I had to use closing my luggage by force. I have been struggling with it for the past 5 minutes or so and I must say I am glad I finally won. I wish I could blame Mogale who took me shopping and forced his black card on me but I am not going to lie and say I did not enjoy every moment of it because I did. Who am I to look a gift horse in the mouth? Phela this is an opportunity of a life time, one I would not let pass because I am too proud to let another human spoil. Especially one who has been more like a brother to me since the first time I stepped into the University of Limpopo premises as an employee.

I can't believe that man like Mogale and Rofhiwa exist when I have been exposed to man like T. Mamabolo for most part of my life. Sometimes it feels like a dream experiencing the kind of love that Rofhiwa is offering to me. I think he notices that I get shocked because he always tried his best to assure me that his love for me is real and he is indeed in it for the long haul.

Speaking of Rofhiwa, I need to return his skype call since I missed a few of his earlier when I went to have my nails done. I dig for my phone in my hand bag before skyping him.

Rofhiwa: “Ooh elle est toujours en vie” he says answering the call.

I can't help but blush. I don't know what he just said but there is something about France that is just sexy.

Rofhiwa: “Why are you blushing?” he says confused

Me: “Because of how you answered the call. Its sounds so sexy”
I say smitten.

Rofhiwa: “Okay I better not tell you what it means then because it would spoil this whole mood” he says in a mocking tone

I look at him with raised eyebrows because I am now curious, he can't really expect me to just let it go just like that. I mean what if he was swearing at me.

Rofhiwa: "Okay, I said you are still alive. Phela I have been trying to get hold of you with no success"

I let out a deep sigh of disappointment. I can't believe I have been blushing to such.

Me: "I am sorry about that. Last days are usually hectic because you are trying to get everything done after realizing that this is the only chance you have. So yah"

Rofhiwa: "I see, anyway I decided to drive up to OR Tambo so that we can book in for a night before driving back this side the next day"

Me: "You decided?" I say repeating his words so that he can learn of his errors.

Rofhiwa: “Yes, I decided that it’s best I drive that side because I miss you and I know you miss me” he says.

Like there is nothing wrong with his statement.

Me: “What about my kids? Don’t you think I miss them and they miss me too?” I say in a bored tone.

I mean this man knows very well that I am a mother first, and for him not to even consider my kids in all this is just concerning.

Rofhiwa: “I know you miss the kids but I am hoping to steal you just for one night, surely that will not do any harm. It’s not like you left them alone”

I can’t believe the things that I coming from this man’s mouth. This is the problem with dating people who don’t have kids of their own. They really don’t know what it means to be a parent and how our kids are our number priorities. Especially those of

us who are still trying this dating this, you know that the kids should never feel neglected.

Mmabatho's POV

The most difficult part after being admitted for depression is having to deal with people feeling sorry for you post admission. I have been back for a week now but people still look at me with those pitiful eyes that while moving around me like I am some sort of a glass. Yes, I was depressed and got hospitalized for it but what matters is that I am trying to stand up for myself and move on from it all. I don't really need people feeling sorry for me reminding me where I actually come from because I am better than that now.

I hear the sound of the gate being opened and wonder who it is because I am not expecting anyone. I wanted to peek through the curtain to see who it was but then I was too lazy to move towards the window for such a bad habit. Few seconds later a knock came through at the door and I decided to keep quiet

and pretend like I wasn't home. People should learn to call first before coming over because sometimes we are just not in the mood to entertain guests.

Tshepo: "Mmabatho open this damn door before I break it down. I know you are in there, stop acting like a child and open up because I am really getting tired of your games now. You were busy begging me to marry you and now you are busy acting like a child. A ko o bule mo (Just open here)" he says banging on the door.

Mxm. He can go ahead and break the damn door as he puts it and see where it actually get him. I know I should be afraid but I am not, as much as he can break the wooden door her needs some sort of powers to get through the bugler door so I am not even moved by his words.

Tshepo: "Mmabatho, I know you are in there. Open this damn door now because I am not going anywhere until we talk and sort all this out" he say furiously.

I smile and sip on my green tea, I was really having a great afternoon until this devil decided to ruin it for me. I let him shout like a mad man that he is for few minutes before deciding to open only the wooden door while standing behind the safety of the bars.

Tshepo: “Bula monyako o wena Mmabatho (Mmabatho open up this door)”

Me: “Onyaka eng? (What do you want?) I say as calm as possible

Tshepo: “Bona, I just need to talk to you. Why are you doing me like this mara? Phela you and I are married and now you send police to collect your car from me

block my accounts and get a restraining order? Aowa hle Mosadi waka (please my wife)” he says pleadingly.

Now this is the Tshepo I know. Hot one minute and cool the next acting like he is the victim that he is clearly not.

Me: “Please say your peace and leave me alone tu” I say with a straight face.

Tshepo: “Xap xap Mmabatho your aim is to embarrass me neh. I mean why are you acting like this. What did I do to you so bad that makes you want to embarrass me like this?”

Me: “What have I done to embarrass you nah?”

Tshepo: “firstly, you told the nurses at that crazy hospital of yours not to allow me in and then when I stop coming to see you, you cut me off financially and send your cop boyfriends to come and collect the car from me. Gape I was at a business meeting when they came for the car, do you know how much money you made us lose in that deal mara?”

I couldn't help but laugh. Doesn't this guy ever get tired of his lies mara? Business meeting my left foot. What else did he want me to do while he was busy spending my money on girls and cheap whore houses while I was busy fighting for my rational state of mind. Swiping with no care in the world because it was my money he was wasting and not his. Different

dirty bums exchanging sitting in my car while he was enjoying life. I thought him a lesson he would never forget. I froze all my accounts using my banking app making it difficult for him to access any funds, tracked my car to a well-known whore house and reported it stolen. He is lucky they did not arrest him as he knew some of them so they only collected the keys and brought the car to the house.

Me: “That crazy hospital as you call it was as a result of your whoring ways and treating me like trash. You used me Tshepo and I am taking my power back, the buck stops here for you papa. Go back to you whores and leave me the hell alone, stop coming here because next time you do I will have you arrested. Mxm” I say before banging the door in his face.

Tshepo: “Mmabatho we are still married demit” he shouts from the other side.

Me: “And I have no intention of divorcing you Tshepo. Let’s stay married from far” I shout back before moving to switch up the music.

I am done talking to him, unfortunately divorce is not an option from me because I stand to lose half of my assets while he gains. He and I shall remain husband and wife while we lead separate lives. He should find means to survive because my days of supporting him have finally come to an end.

Pheladi

After my argument with Rofhiwa which ended high emotions I decided to go out and paint the town red with the good doctor. Lol, I said the good doctor, it's not me but the wine talking. This is my last night in Paris and I am not going to spend it sulking in a hotel room while I might never come back here again.

Mogale: "I think we should call it a night now. We have both had enough now" he says taking the bottle of wine from my hands to stop me from drinking.

Me: “You are right, I actually need to lie down. Why did you let me drink all that alcohol” I say starting to cry.

Mogale: “I am sorry okay. I should have stopped you a long time ago but you kept calling the glasses babes”

Why is he being nice? We both know he tried to stop me and I was just stubborn and kept drinking one glass after the other until I graduated to drinking straight from a bottle.

Me: “Oh nooooo” I say as I try to get up and find a balance.

The lights in this place are making me all dizzy and nauseous. I want to run to the bathroom and vomit but this place is spinning making things worse.

Mogale: “Okay, I got you now. Let’s go and sleep it off” he says catching me as I am about to fall.

Me: “Ohh damn you are strong man” I say running my hand through his arm as he holds me tight.

Mogale: “The amount of hangover that’s going to hit you tomorrow. Let’s hope you will be better by the time will fly out because you won’t enjoy your flight” he says amused.

I am glad he find my predicament funny because I don’t. We push through a crowd of people as we try to make our way out of the club. I may be feeling like hell right now but I had fun tonight and I got to see Mogale’s fun side. He loosened up and danced to various songs shocking me in the processes especially with the moves he was pulling because I did not take him for the good dancing type. I mean he is always serious, talking about research, research and more research.

Mogale: “Let it all out now” he says brushing my back as u puke by the pavement waiting for our ride back to the hotel.

Damn, this is very embarrassing. How am I going to look at this man tomorrow?

Me: “Thank you” I say taking a bottle of water from him and rinsing my mouth before drinking down some.

Mogale: "You are welcome, are you feeling better because our ride is here"

Me: "Let's go" I say holding on to him while he leads me to the meter taxi.

I got in at the back followed by him. I am glad he let me rest my head on his shoulder because it was light out for me as soon as the car drove off from the club. Never mind the dizziness and puking but tonight was a great night. I screamed and danced to loud music while letting go and having fun, will deal with the hangover tomorrow.

Insert 41

Mmabatho POV

“Sorry

Is all that you can't say?

Years gone by and still

Words don't come easily

Like sorry, like sorry” Baby can I hold you by Tracy Chapman

Sorry, the most abused word in the world. It is usually said to us to make us forget of the pain experienced as if it is enough.

Why do we find using the word ‘Sorry’ so easy even when we don’t mean it? I mean this is one word I have heard Tshepo uttering the most in the past few weeks. As if it’s enough to take away the pain he has caused or the dignity that he

ruthlessly stripped me of. Sorry, as if it's enough to mend my broken heart or heal my womb to be strong and healthy enough to carry a child. Sorry, he has been using this word so much so that I lost count. One might be thinking at least he is apologizing, that is more than what some serial cheaters do, but it's not true. Tshepo's sorry is just a word that he has to say to get keep receiving the comfort that is attached to me. The access to my cars, a roof over his head and a food in his belly. There is never sincerity in how he says 'sorry' because he doesn't even mean it.

It is sad that the world think only woman are capable of using man for material things but it's not true. Unfortunately not enough is being said about unofficial gigolos like Tshepo in public spaces because as woman we want to give our man the dignity of being the provider in the eyes of others. I am speaking from experience because I actually tried to make Tshepo into more of a man than he is actually worth. Unfortunately he had to keep disrespecting me and breaking my heart over and over again. The man is down and out and I kept polishing his image so that people cannot notice.

It's no secret that things took a turn for the worse in his life as soon as he got a divorce from Pheladi. As if God and his

ancestors turned their backs on him, he lost most of his assets through a friend whose name got dragged into a battle with the law. As if that was not enough he lost most of his investment as the economy was taking a turn for the worse leaving him in a very bad financial state. Some might say I was just desperate to become the minister's wife which may be true because in my own naïve ways I did believe we were in love and I was really the one for him.

'I am sorry my love, can we please meet so that we can talk about what the devil is doing to our marriage' as sms from Tshepo.

I couldn't help but laugh out loud. There is that word again, sorry, sorry, sorry, like I haven't heard enough of those. Mr all talk and no action, that who my husband is and I am not even moved by his apologies. I mean who is the devil in this picture that is messing with our marriage if it's not him who can't help his wondering eyes. I have found myself admitted in a hospital for 21 days to help deal with my depression because of him. As if that was not enough to scare him into changing his ways he kept splashing my money on cheap woman and continued with his cheating ways. Only for him to come back and say sorry like it will undo all the damage done.

I must have been blind and stupidly in love before to accept his worthless sorry each time he begged me to. It might be a moment too late since I have signed away my surname to his but his days to playing with my feelings are long gone. Some of you may be saying I deserve all this because of how I got into the relationship but how many of you are brave enough to cast the first stone?

You might not have dated a married man before but maybe your sins may be worse than mine. My story is not about me asking to be felt pity for, it's about what woman get themselves tangled in unaware of beast behind the smooth talk. Yes, I got served but do you still think I am the problem here even when Tshepo did the same to his first wife while she did not steal him from any one? Let's face the truth. Tshepo is the one who needs to be psychoanalyzed because he is clearly set to break every woman who comes into contact with him long term. It was Pheladi yesterday, me today and it could be you tomorrow.

Pheladi

The drive from OR Tambo feels longer than usual. It must be the awkwardness and tension in the car. I am a very strong willed woman who knows exactly what she wants, now more than ever. Going through what I went through with Tshepo somehow triggered something in me to stand up for what I believe in. I have been pushed around by that man so long that I told myself that I would not allow myself to be any man's pushover. Not in this life time anyway. I am my own woman and if I was able to walk away from my marriage of more than a decade what is a few months' worth of a relationship. I have tolerated too much from my previous marriage to be still tolerating things in my current relationship.

Rofhiwa: "Stop sulking, I am taking you home mos" he says with a hint of annoyance in his voice.

Me: "Did I ask you to?" I say with the same if not more hint of annoyance.

Unfortunately, I push back every now and then when I feel someone pushing me

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it's a recent thing. Newton's third law: When body A hits body B, body B will exert the same amount of force to body A. In simple terms for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction, it must be all that time I spend helping my kids with homework that I remember all this.

Rofhiwa: "I really don't like your tone right now Pheladi. You said you wanted to go home to your kids and I am driving you home. Why can't you appreciate that as tired as I am, I am making a second trip in a day on this road just to make you happy. Not only that I am losing money on that room I booked because I am not eligible to get my refund back since it's already late" he says raising his voice at me.

I am sure they could hear him in all those passing cars. To say I am annoyed is an understatement. First of all I told Rofhiwa that I can't be spending a night with him in Johannesburg because I haven't seen my kids in week. Not only do I miss them but they are also expecting me today meaning I can't just not show up. Secondly, I was booked a flight by the University from OR to Polokwane International Airport meaning I did not need him to drive up here and play chuffer.

Me: "I would refund you if I could, but then again I told you I can't spend the night with you as my kids are expecting me back home but you went ahead and booked the room anyway"

Rofhiwa: "The room was already booked when I spoke to you about it AND it's not even about the money I just needed to spend some time with you that's all" he says in defeat.

Me: "The problem is one here, you never consider my kids in your decisions. I am a mother and my kids comes first and everything else second. You need to understand that and we won't have such issues"

Rofhiwa: "When have I never considered your kids?"

Me: "Wow, is that all you got from all that statement? Not the fact that my kids come first and all?" I ask sarcastically.

Rofhiwa: “When? Have? I? Never? Considered? Your? Kids?” he says with emphasis and pause on the each word with his voice getting higher and higher on each word.

Me: “Today like the day you drove off with me leaving my kids sleeping in the house alone that one time”

I don’t know what is funny because he just chuckled at what I said.

Rofhiwa: “Wow, I am sorry for trying to save you from your manipulative ex Pheladi I did not know I was being an ass”

Me: “Wow, you are forgiven sir, just stop being an ass like today” I say matching his sarcasms

He shakes his head in defeat and concentrate on the road. Estimated arrival time in 1:30 minutes meaning I will be home by 18:00. I can’t wait to see my 2 bundles of joy, I am sure they have some stories they can’t wait to share with me on how Koko made them do all chores in the house and forced them to

eat Cabbage and Spinach not as a salad and what not. Really I can't wait. But then again there are people like Rofhiwa who do not have kids and just won't understand all this.

“Surprise” they all scream as walk into the sitting room.

I laugh holding my chest which is holding back my heart from jumping out. Wow, they really got me as I was not even suspecting a thing. I smile at the writing on the wall ‘Welcome home international mom, we missed you’.

Tshepiso: “Please don't go away again anytime soon mom, the past week was theeee longest week ever” she says holding on tighter to the hug.

Me: “Not anytime soon baby, I missed you too”

Tshepang: “Okay, that's too much sesi. I want my hug too” he says breaking the hug between me and his sisters.

I can't help but laugh at these two, they have never fought for my affection before. I guess the week was indeed too long for them missing me.

Me: "Don't worry baby I missed you more" I say to Tshepang as he falls into my embrace.

Tshepang: "I know mommy, Phela I am the only man in your life now" he says giving me those kisses that I usually beg for.

I was indeed missed in the house. I go around hugging and kissing everyone else at this welcome home party which is only my brother and mother before sitting on a table to enjoy the meal over a million questions about my trip. They have cooked my favorite meal and all. Wow, they really went out. Just imagine if I slept over in Johannesburg with Rifhiwa all this would have gone to waste and my children's heart would be so so broken. Tonight my house is a happy home, filled with nothing but laughter and happiness.

Insert 42

Rofhiwa's POV

Lufuno: "Whatever it is that is eating you is not good for you. Deal with it now before you burn this house down. Sometimes the best way to deal with things is just to let go" she says taking the coffee pot from my hands.

I let go of the pot and take in a deep breath. Thank God she walked in when she did as I was not even aware that the cup I was pouring into was overflowing.

Me: "Thank you" I say using a cloth to wipe the coffee that I spilled on the counter.

Lufuno: "How is the Polokwane project coming along?"

Me: "I told you she is not a project" I say snapping at her.

Lufuno: “Woooo. No need to bite my head off, I was actually referring to the work project that got you working in Polokwane most of the time. I couldn’t care less about your girlfriend and how she is especially if she is the reason you have been moping around like a zombie the whole weekend” she say before banging the fridge.

Me: “Sorry I did not mean to snap at you. The project Leeto project is actually not going according to the schedule so we will just have to wait and see” I say not entertaining the Pheladi part because my sister is not her biggest fan so far and she never hid it from me before.

Lufuno: “Yoh. Here I was thinking you will be done before December and maybe we can take that vacation you promised me to the Maldives for a week or two plus I need a serious break and you could also use one”

Me: “Sure will see if I can be able to get some time off then I will let you know”

Lufuno: “For all time’s sake neh” she says winking at me

I can't help but chuckle while shaking my head in defeat before taking my coffee and dragging my feet to the table to have breakfast before heading to work. I think I will call in sick because I do feel like a zombie and I will be very useless in the office.

It must be the sleepless nights I have had for the whole weekend hoping Pheladi would at least call and apologize on how she spoke to me on Friday. I mean for her to accuse me of not considering her kids whenever I make decisions is really uncalled for.

Lufuno: "I think its best you go back to sleep. You really can't go to the office looking like that" she says taking a sit adjacent to me.

Me: "Ya, I will just call my PA and let her manage my diary and other colleagues' expectations. I will go straight to bed after finishing breakfast"

She nods while giving me a reassuring smile that I will be okay. We fall into a comfortable silent and both concentrate on our plates.

Lufuno: “Do you remember the day I broke Baba’s favorite cup and you quickly tried to fix it up with paper glue?” she says after a long silent.

I nod and show her the scar inside my palm. I mean, I can’t really forget with the scar acting as a constant reminder of my mistakes as a child. What I don’t get is why she is reminding me of all this now.

Me: “Why?”

Lufuno: “Because that’s who you have always been Roro, even when we were children. I would break things and you would try your level best to fix them up. Some you would win but some like that cup you would only end up hurting yourself”

Me: “Okay” I say confused because I really don’t get what she is trying to drive at.

Lufuno: “What I mean is, you can’t fix everything including people. Some are just too broken to be well put together and because of how broken they are, their sharp edges are very dangerous to you and they will only cut you deep.

Unfortunately people are not mugs we can easily replace so we can only take a step back and hope they take a step towards recycling themselves and their perspective of life. After what you told me about your girl, the few sessions of therapy she has been taking are not enough. She still needs more or you will keep paying for her ex’s sins” she says like she has been holding it in for too long.

Me: Deeply exhaling “So what do you think I should do?”

Lufuno: “I can’t really tell you what to do but think about how dangerous sharp objects can be. You have a scar inside your palm for a better reference” she says taking my hand and pointing at my scar.

Okay, definitely not how I planned to start my day or my week. Spend the most part of the morning laying down my feeling to my twin sister. At least she is a great listener and she gives best advices because she never hides how she feels about a situation so she calls a spade exactly as she sees it. She has really made me see certain things in a different point of view and I can see now that whenever Pheladi and I are fighting it's like I am suffering for her ex-husband's sins. It's like she keeps saying to herself, I did this with him so I will not be doing the same with you. As if him and I are the same.

Lufuno: "It's okay go and rest. I will be right here when you wake up" she says responding to my yawning.

Me: "Thanks for the chat Sis. You are still the smartest" I say before walking away.

Lufuno: "Always remember that brother"

Me: "I am joking. Just play PA today and answer all my calls. I left the phone on a charger in the sitting room"

Lufuno: “It would be nice if you were to leave me with your banking App pin you know”

Me: “If only you were not a gold digger” I shout as I keep walking away leaving her in stitches.

Pheladi

Thank God I was wise enough to take leave for few days post my Paris trip. I still feel jet lagged, I am sure I would not have been able to cope at work today. I yawn as I stretch my arms before taking my phone to check for messages and missed calls.
3 missed calls

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2 from Cate and one from Mogale and 5 unread messages but none from Rofhiwa. He must really be pissed at me for how I spoke to him on Friday. I don't regret the decision I took of coming back home but I should have at least addressed it better.

I don't really know what got to me but I somehow suspect the guilt that I must have been feeling deep down in my heart. Have you ever done something so wrong and felt like the other person can see right through you? If not, keep staying away from doing wrong things because it is the most messed up feeling ever. I shake my head no like I am trying to shake off the images in my mind of what happened in Paris because they sure makes my skin crawl.

Finally, I decided to press the call button and see how it goes. Damn, it's ringing meaning no turning back for me, I can only hope he doesn't answer.

"Hello" says a female voice on the other end.

Thinking I dialed I wrong number, I quickly removed the phone from my ear and checked the caller ID.

"Helloooooo" she keeps saying.

Me: “Good morning. May I please talk to Rofhiwa”

Her: “Rofhiwa is sleeping, can I take a message?”

At this point my body is feeling all sort of heat while my heart is pumping faster than normal. I mean it’s 09:30 in the morning and he is sleeping while some girl has access to answer his phone.

Me: “Please ask him to call me back when he wakes up” I say trying to hide the hurt in my voice.

Her: “Who shall I say called?” she says yawning.

Does this mean she was sleeping too and I actually woke her up with the call?

Me: “Pheladi. Please tell him Pheladi called and would like for him to call her back”

Her: “Okay, I will be sure to tell him you called” she says before hanging up.

Not even waiting for me to say goodbye, how rude.

My mind is playing all sort of scenarios about what just happed and none of them are good. I mean if she is asking who should

she say called, does it mean he deleted my numbers. Which would make sense as to why he hasn't called me the whole weekend.

I mean the poor guy was only trying to spend some time with me and I blew it in his face. I swallow hard before punching in his numbers and let the battle begin in my mind on whether I should call him or not.

After few minutes of trying to crack my skull I decide to let go of it and get out of bed. Let me take a quick shower so that I can go help my mother around the house before the kids come back from school. I am sure she is not happy with me either because in her world a woman is not supposed to sleep past a certain time. She is old school like that. I stop on my track as I hear a familiar voice in the kitchen talking to my mother. I knew it, I would recognize that voice anywhere. Mrs Mamabolo Snr. I wonder what she is doing here.

Been a day since I have been back at work and I have been buried in one report after the other. Working and studying can be quite draining at times because both activities demands one's full attention. This is definitely not my week as I am an emotional wrack, nothing seems to be going great in my life. I am drowning with school work as I have so much work to submit before my next meeting with my supervisor, work load is a lot too since I have been away for more than a week and personal life is just pure disaster. As if that's not enough, I have to play hide and seek with Dr. Mogale every day at the institution as I have been avoiding him.

I take in a deep breath and let it all out silently when I notice Dr. Mogale walking towards my table at the student cafeteria. I am not one to have lunch at the student cafeteria but today I needed a hiding place. I don't even know how he managed to track me down, honestly I can't face him not after what happened in Paris on our last night.

I watch as he shakes his head slowly and huff before taking a sit in front of me. Silent, we are both sitting there in an awkward silence while he is gazing deep in my eyes. Why is he torturing

me like this? He should say what is on his mind and leave me in peace to enjoy my lunch. Few seconds passed into what felt like an eternity and still words were just failing me.

Mogale: "Are you avoiding me?" he says finally.

I want to say 'yes' but my throats is just too dry to utter the words confidently so I just settle on shaking my head no.

Mogale: "I am glad. You really had me worried you know, not answering any of my calls over the weekend and having lunch here of all places" he says looking around the cafeteria crawling with students "so I thought maybe you are freaking out about what happened in Paris....."

Me: "no I am not" I say abruptly.

Mogale: "None the less I still feel I should apologize for that night. I hope it won't change anything between us because I like us and how we are together and....."

Me: “No, I am the one who needs to apologize for coming on to you like that. I am too old to be blaming the alcohol for the kiss and I am sorry and thank you for not taking advantage of the situation and stopping me” I say a little embarrassed.

Yes, I was drunk but that’s really there is no excuse for my behavior. It’s a good thing he stopped me and walked away. Although it left me feeling shitty, I am actually glad that he did not take advantage of my intoxication like most man would have.

Mogale: “I want to make one thing clear though, I did not stop you because I didn’t to kiss you back”

I look at him shocked because he did make me feel somehow rejected at the time but I am glad now that he stopped me.

Mogale: “The truth is I did want to kiss you back, more than you could ever imagine but not like that. I did not want us kissing or any making love act to be something you would regret the next morning. I like you Pheladi a lot and I regret not making my intentions clear earlier on when we first meet because I think

you don't even notice. So from now on please know that you stole my heart and I do see a future with you" He says catching me off guard.

Me: "Oooh" that all I could manage to utter the way I am shocked.

Mogale: "Wow, is that all you can say?" I ask disappointed.

Me: "I am just shocked that's all and with everything going on in my life right now. I don't think I am the right woman for you. I mean I have my own baggage, things I still need to deal with on my own before learning to love another person" I say before we could both fall into a silent mode while he nods continually as if he is still processing all that I have said "I hope you can understand where I am coming from" I say pleadingly.

Mogale: "Yah, I do understand" he says with a hint of sadness in his voice.

I watch as he gets up and walk away. Deep sigh before burying my face in my hands, I am not sure if our friendship is ever going to be the same again. I regret going out for drinks that night and drinking too much over the limit. Maybe if I did not try to kiss him that night he would not have tried to come on me like that. Stay away from alcohol Pheladi, it's not good for you. Me making a mental note to myself.

Mogale: "What if I tell you I am willing to wait?" he says catching me off guard as I was not aware he came back to my table.

I removed my hand from my face and looked at him pleadingly because it's unfair of him to ask that of me. I am not that selfish to expect him to wait for me because I for one don't even know if I feel for him like that.

Mogale: "I am serious, I could wait for you to deal with whatever you need to deal with and just maybe"

Me: "I really can't expect that of you. It wouldn't be fair on my side. You are an amazing person and I wish you nothing but the

best and right now that's not me. I am too broken to love you back and you know how they say, the first cut is the deepest"

I watch as he nods slowly like it's really sinking in, the look in his eyes shows hurt and disappointment but rather blow him off now than break him badly later.

Mogale: "Thank you for being honest though. Not what I wanted to hear but thank you still"

Me: "I am sorry" I say in what came out almost as a whisper.

I watch as he nods and force a smile before walking away. Can this week get any better?

(Later that day)

I knocked off early today and meet up with Cate at her house to chill over ice cream and cry over my break up with Rofhiwa. Yes you read that right, Rofhiwa and I decided to call it quits in what we deemed as a mutual agreement. As much as he took the blame for our failed relationship, I know very well that it was not him but me who did not bring their A game to the relationship. 'Defensive and being in it with just one leg' were just few of the weaknesses that I brought to the table. But like they say

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if you truly love them set them free and if they were really meant for you they will come back in due time. I had to face the reality that he is not the problem in this relationship but I am.

Cate: "Maybe you were not ready to love again, maybe you still need time to yourself. Time to rediscover who you are and what makes Pheladi tick. I mean, you have been in a relationship for a very long time and in that time you had to be someone you are not. No one is putting you under any sort of pressure to go back there and have a person. I feel guilty because I am the one who encouraged you to even look at Rofhiwa twice but I was hoping it will only be about sex and nothing more. When things took a more serious turn I thought maybe you were just lucky and your past will not have any hold

your future but I was wrong. Find you mgani because until then you will keep dragging your baggage from your past into your current or future” She says squeezing my hand tight.

I am almost in tears when she is done with her speech. I am really touched by her words and the fact that she did not choose to throw every wrong thing I ever did to Rofhiwa in my face.

Me: “I wish it was that easy you know. Letting go and all. Yes, I wasn’t ready for a relationship but the few months I have been with him were some of my happiest months. I have no doubt he loved me and I him. For a little time that he was there he gave me an escape reality you know. He made me forget all that I have been through and saw me beyond my scars and broken pieces. He loved me regardless of my past, protected me from myself even when I was not aware. He basically made me happy Cate” I say with a pained heart.

Cate: “Maybe that was just his purpose in your life during that time and now that his mission has been accomplished you need to set him free. Dating is not easy trust me and you are yet to kiss a few frogs before finally finding the one”

Me: "Like you said there is no pressure for me to be in a relationship. I am really focusing on myself, my kids and studies.....while kissing few frogs along the road ofcourse" I say before we both burst into laughter.

Cate: "Here is to kissing few frogs" she says raising her glass midair for a toast.

I shake my head while raising my glass too, trust Cate to see a glass half full than half empty. I wish I had her perspective of things in life in fact most of us do need her perspective if things in life. Maybe then we would be more content with what we have and get rid of everything that is not bringing positive results in our lives.

Me: "So did I tell you the master piece?" I say changing the subject.

I am sure we have dwelled on the break up too much now and quite frankly I need to start focusing on other things in life than talking about Rofhiwa this and Rofhiwa that.

Cate: "What master piece now?" she says popping out her curious eyes.

Me: "Tshepo's mother came to my house the other and....."

Cate: "Please tell me you set dogs on her, like she did not even get a chance to enter your house" she says all dramatic while cutting me off.

Me: "Wow, would you have done that? I mean set dogs on her?" I ask knowing very well that she would have.

Cate: "Just get her to come to my house and see, that how much I hate her. Mxm, bloody monster in law"

Me: "You are too extreme my friend, I feel sorry for all your ex's and their mothers" I say jokingly.

Cate: “So since you gave her your time and probably served her tea and scones while at it, what did she want?” she says like someone not even interested.

Me: “As usual she was on a war path, apparently I am staring up trouble in her son’s marriage and she came to ask me to back off and let her son be happy for once. Akere I am the problem in her son’s life apparently I have always been that, a problem. You know she kept on saying how nna I am a poisoning and now that Tshepo is finally rid of me I am using Mmabatho. Yah, she said a lot of not so pleasant things, some can’t even repeat” I say exhaling deeply when I think about all the things she said to me.

Cate: “I am sorry my friend. We both know that woman never liked you and I hope you did not take any of the things she said to heart. She is a bitter old witch hiding behind the cross but we both know that she is a devil worshiper. Next time, don’t even entertain her just set the dogs on her” she says hugging me tight for comfort.

Cate knows very well all the things that woman put me through even before Tshepo and I got married. I used to think it’s

normal for mother in laws to be hard on their son's wives but I now know better. She is just too hateful to love any person who is not her own child.

Me: Deep sigh "Yah, her words actually cut deep because that woman knew what her son put me through all those years and she did not just turn a blind eye then she is also doing the same with Mmabatho. How many more woman must her son damage before she sees that there is something wrong with him and get him the help that he actually needs" I say getting worked up

Cate: "Calm down my friend, she is not worth you getting worked up over. She is just hating because despite everything that her son did to you, you came out strong. It's not like she doesn't notice how you are building up your life and yena kamo her son's life is falling apart. I mean it's no secret that her son is not doing so well and woman are dragging him to court for maintenance left right and center"

Me: "Shame, ke sono (It's pity)" I say feeling sorry for him.

Cate: “Ke sono? Please don’t even tell me you feel sorry for him. Not after everything he put you through. This is payback time and he better cough up” she says shaking her head in frustration.

I understand why she would feel the way she does about him and I know that she expect me to be happy with everything that is happening to Tshepo but the truth is I am not. Not that I still care about him or anything but he is still the father of my kids and for their sake I don’t wish him any harm.

Pheladi

I woke up with such a broken heart today, it was so bad I couldn't even get out of bed. I had to call in sick just so I could nurse my state of mind, as I am forced to relieve my trauma all over again. Cry my beloved country, what is currently happening is just too much to handle. The gender based violence plague that is infesting the nation, at a rapid speed should come to an end. What have we done wrong to deserve such abuse as woman? Enough is enough.

Must we as woman be afraid of waking up in the morning because I might just be next? What happen to man who were nation builders and used their strength to hold their houses together? Where have we as mothers gone wrong in raising our sons because some have become monsters who take pleasure in inflicting pain on the woman species? Where are we even safe? Certainly not at home, school, work, church, streets, taxi, hospital, stores, even the post office, basically there is no place safe enough to protect us from deranged man.

I should know because I was married to one. One who kept his demons so well hidden behind church and the word of God. I have experienced all sort of abuse from my ex-husband to know the pain of everything that most woman in this country are going through, have gone through or might just go through and for that my heart breaks. Must we weep instead of rejoicing when giving birth to a girl child at the thought of the life she might just experience at the hands of another human? Must we deprive them life because we are trying to protect them from cruelty that might befall them?

My daughter had to literally beg me to let her go to school because she had an important test to write when I told her she can't go to school today. But until when will I keep here an eye on her while I deny her happiness and a chance to truly live her life. I also understand that not all males are responsible for this but the few that are rotten are making all of us live in fear. I am even scared to see into the future of how my son would become as I pray that he should not take after his father. Thinking about Tshepo, that man broke me and left scars too deep to cover up and I never even asked him why.

I sit up on the bed and furiously grab my phone before scrolling his numbers and pressing the call button. He needs to

understand that as much as he has not paid for what he did to me it is still wrong and one day he will have to answer for it. It may not be today, tomorrow or in this life time but he shall pay.

Tshepo: “Pheladi” he says with a hint of excitement in his voice.

Me: “Why mara Tshepo” I say angrily.

‘Face your fears, deal with them head on and you shall heal’ those are famous words from my therapist. She says that I am failing to find closer because I have not faced my fears head on or truly dealt with was really done to me. It’s true, until I confront Tshepo he will always have a hold on me and today I shall use the fear that man in this country has instilled in us as woman as a strength to finally ask him why.

Tshepo: “Why eng? (What?)” he says confused.

Me: “Why did you make me go through everything that you made me go through all those years mara Tshepo? I was loyal to you, faithful and an obedient wife but you still found a

reason to make my life a living hell. I have never asked you this before because I did not have the strength to do so because of the fear I had of you. Today, I am taking my power back and I need you to set me free by truly telling me why you abused me so much?" I say with my voice cracking as I keep fighting back the tears.

He keeps quiet for something while breathing heavily on the other side of the line.

Tshepo: "I am sorry Pheladi for everything I have ever done to you. I know it's too late now because of the damage that I have done but please know that I am truly sorry for all the pain I have ever caused you" he says after a long silent.

At this point I am crying silently because for the first time his sorry sounds meaningful and not just something he would say just because he wants me to leave him alone.

Me: "I get that you are sorry and all. But I still want to know why? Why did you beat me like a dog most days of our marriage? Rape me? Treat me like a worthless human being

and torment me like that Tshepo? That's all I need to know please" I say pleading with him.

I head as he takes in a deep sigh of frustration. I don't care if I caught him off-guard but he needs to start answering my question because I am now like a dog with a bone, I am not going to let it go.

Tshepo: "This is too much to talk about over the phone. Let's set up a meeting, you pick a place, day and time and I promise I will come and we can have a sit down and finally talk about things. What I did to you was wrong. For now please understand that it was just a misplaced anger that really had nothing to do with you. I am willing to sit down and tell you everything. I am ready to apologies and own up to my mistakes and sins but just not over the phone please" he says sounding like he is grasping for air.

Me: "I hope this is not one of your manipulation games Tshepo because I have had enough of those to last me a life time"

Tshepo: "I promise, it's not. You deserve better than that. Trust me I know that now"

I shake my head like he can see me before hanging up. I am now taking my power back from my abuser and that includes him telling me why he did all those things to me.

Mmabatho's POV

Today my colleagues and I decided to come for lunch to celebrate a new deal. At least something positive a country covered by a black cloud. I am a victim too and I know very well that it can easily happen to any of us without reason or provocation. I pretend to be strong in the face of the world but deep down I am falling apart. Falling apart because I am also a victim of gender based violence. Violence that has left me barren and empty inside but still I need to force a smile and pretend I am still whole.

Me: “Can we pick another restaurant?” I say as soon as I see him sitting at a corner table.

He is not alone. With him is a girl who seem to be in her matric if not first year of varsity. I guess that’s what he has downgraded to, young girls he can easily manipulate and control.

Charmaine: “Why” she says with her eyebrows raised.

I swallow hard before pulling her away from our male colleagues as they continue walking inside to pick a table for the 4 of us.

Me: “My husband is here with some girl and I am not in the mood to deal with him” I say in a low tone.

Right now, I am not sure if I am angry, hurt, embarrassed of scared as I found myself feeling all those emotions within a very short space of time since we arrived her.

Charmaine: “Well let me deal with the girl, there is nothing a hate like a home wrecker. Mxm” she says storming towards them.

Okay I actually know that she is crazy like that and she will mop the floor in no seconds. Charmaine is not afraid of anyone and is very much capable of fighting battles. She likes to say I am too soft and that’s why people walk over my head most of the time. She says I should have been raised in her neighborhood of Westenburg just outside Polokwane maybe I would not be such as softy.

Me: “Please don’t. I don’t want any trouble that why I wanted us to just leave and go to another restaurant” I say grabbing her arm.

Charmaine: “Fine, but we are not going anywhere. We choose this restaurant because we like their food and that’s exactly what we are going to have. Let’s go join the guys before I mop the floor with her face and fake hair” she says changing the direction to join the guys.

Lesedi: "I have ordered drinks for all of us. Juice for you Mmabatho and a Daiquiri for you Charmaine" he says as we settle down.

Tumiso: "Are you okay Mmabatho, you seem a bit distracted nyana so?" he says looking from me to Charmaine and back to me.

Me: "I am just tired nje that's all. So why did you guys order juice for me and not a daiquiri or mojito?" I say changing the subject.

Lesedi: "Because you have a report to work on when we leave her while some of us go home to rest. You lost the bet remember?" he says before they all burst into laughter attracting unnecessary attention to our table.

I force a laugh even though deep down I am worried that Tshepo might have now noticed I am here and take advantage of the situation to force me to talk to him. To be honest, I haven't seen or heard from him since the day I came knocking at my house. I don't know where he stays or what he is up to

this days since I am not interested. However, seeing him sitting there a minute ago reignited the fear that he has instilled in me.

I choose to ignore my sixth sense and worrying if Tshepo has seen me yet or not before finally joining in the conversation with my colleagues as we sit there talking and laughing. Finally our food arrives and by then I had already forgotten about Tshepo and his girlfriend. The company is great and the conversation is just flowing.

Tshepo: “Hey wena Mmabatho. O busy wanfebela mo heh? (You are busy cheating on me here, huh?)” He says grabbing my arm tightly before pulling me from the chair forcefully.

Me: “Auchhhhhh, wa nkgobatsa (You are hurting me)” I cry out.

Lesedi: “Aowa me bra, o dirang (No, my brother what are you doing?)” he says trying to come to my rescue as Tshepo is busy slapping me.

Poor guy was just hit with one punch on the face and it was lights out for him. Where is Charmaine and Tumiso when I need them most, they have been gone too long to smoke outside. At this point I am taking in the punches and insults as I am called a whore who broke his marriage only to disrespect him in public. It is just chaotic in the restaurant as people are screaming and only taking videos instead of trying to stop him. I could feel myself drifting off as he throws in one punch after the other and my eyes are now too swollen to stay open. Finally I could hear what sounds like Charmaine's voice screaming insults at Tshepo followed by Tumiso's voice before I could feel him be pulled away. I am in pain and I have lost all the strength to scream or cry, so I lay there silently and let my heart bleed out.

I see nothing but darkness as I fail to open my eyes, so much so that I am not even sure if I am still conscious or not.

Charmaine: "Hold on dear, the ambulance is on it's way and so are the police" she says squeezing my hand.

That's just about the last thing I remember before the darkness is accompanied by complete silent.

I am very disappointed at Tshepo and his barbaric behavior. Ke gore he went too far this time, assaulting his wife in full view of the public. It's been almost 2 weeks since the whole thing happened and I still can't get over that video. It was as if the punches were directed at my body as I felt the pain of the impact each time his fist came into contact with her body. Finally, people are able to see him for who he truly is, a monster who abuses woman and have no regards for their feelings.

Tshepang: "Mom, what is going to happen to dad?"

He says bringing me from my thoughts. I let out a deep sigh because I don't know what to tell my son. I mean the video of what he did to Mmabatho went viral and both my kids ended seeing it. It's even worse for them because they get teased and bullied at school by other kids because their father is a woman beater. I place the mug back on the counter and walk towards Tshepang who is standing there waiting for me to give him an answer of what would happen to his father.

Me: “Come let’s go sit down and talk” I say leading him to the sitting room.

We both take a sit on the same couch before I take his hand in mine.

Me: “You know, I never really asked any of you how this whole thing is affecting you. I know about the bullying and teasing at school and I went to speak to your principal about and he promised to deal with it. Now, what I really want to know is how do you feel about this whole thing and your father?”

Tshepang: “I don’t exactly know how I feel. I mean I am angry but he is not here for me to direct my anger at him. I think I hate but at the same time I am worried about him and how he is being treated in prison. I wish he was the only person paying for his sins but my sister and I get to pay for them too. So yah” he says shrugging his shoulders.

I nod continuously as I process all that he has been saying to me. I guess we have come a long way since the days of him trying to take his own life to actually opening up about his

feeling. Yes Tshepang has a lot of anger but he is dealing with it in boxing class and therapy. It seems like they are both helping because he approaches things with a very calm attitude now.

Me: “Would you like me to fetch you after school so that we can attend court together”

Tshepang: “No” he says shaking his head “I don’t want him to mistaken my presence for support. He needs to pay for what he has done and know that he is alone in all this. He may be my father but I will not support a woman beater”

I smile and look at my son with nothing but admiration in my eyes. It’s safe to say I am raising a better man, who would not be like his father because he knows and understand that beating up woman is wrong. A son who knows that it doesn’t matter who does it, a friend, family, teacher, brother or father it is wrong to beat a woman and he should not support such people with their bad behavior.

The problem with our society is that man tend to protect one another even when they themselves know that it is wrong. I

mean they sit in corners and discuss woman's bodies like objects and laugh at how they use and treat us. We need brave man who are going to stand up and say 'No bafwethu (My brothers) that is not right and I will not stand for it. How can we sit around and laugh knowing very well that what Tshepo did is wrong. Stop woman abuse and deal with your own issues because beating up a woman is actually a sign to show how weak you are exactly'. Man who would not go to great length to hide killers, abusers, rapist and all this thugs who torment us but instead call them out and have them reported to authorities.

Me: "I am proud of you son, and I know you are going to make a great husband and father one day" I says kissing the back of his hand.

Tshepang: "That's because I have been raised by a queen and I know woman are to be treasured and love" he says giving me a huge smile.

Me: "You guys make raising you both a whole lot easy and I would not trade you for anything"

Tshepiso: “It’s not like you have a choice mom” she says with a hint of amusement “Tshepang we need to go or we are going to be late” she standing at the door.

Me: “Go before you both miss your transport” I say to Tshepang before turning to Tshepiso “Ofcouse I have a choice, I can just unhave you both” I say jokingly.

Tshepiso: “yeh right ‘unhave’ is not even an English word mom” she says before we all burst into laughter.

I have said this one, and I will say it again. My kids are my life line, when it’s dark and gloomy they brighten up my life and lift up my moods. And they are the best thing that ever came out of my marriage with Tshepo Mamabolo.

I am sitting on a chair next to Mmabatho’s bed reading to her some of the letters that has been sent to her hospital room. Some are offering words of comfort but mostly are just from

woman who have been through some sort of abuse from man either family member

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colleague, stranger, boyfriend or neighbor. The contents of this letters are just too heavy, reminding us that most woman are living a nightmare, something Mmabatho and I know very well.

Me: “Do you want me to read another one?” I say putting the letter back in its envelope.

Mmabatho: “No, that’s just too much for today” she says shaking her head with her eyes closed.

I get what she means, because I can’t take it too. So I pack back the letters into a box and push it back under her bed. This has been our routing for as long as she has been admitted. I have been coming to check on her because she has no one.

Me: “We really need to do something about this. We can’t just read all this letters from woman pouring their hearts out about

the painful things they have gone through and just leave it like that”

Mmabatho: “What are you thinking?”

Me: “I don’t know exactly. But I am thinking something like Sister’s 4 life where we offer each other help and support. Some women are stuck in abusive relationships because they don’t have anywhere else to go or the justice system is failing them and they just gave up”

Mmabatho: “A center for abused women, offer support, empowerment and help, I like that” she says forcing a smile.

Poor woman, her jaw was nearly dislocated and now very painful.

Me: “I will start with the research and all, when you get out of her we will start lobbying for support and ask for donations”

This has always been my dream. That's why I introduced a shelter at GTG church while I was still the minister's wife. But I have a feeling that this is going to be big and its impact will be far better than what we had at church since we were not extending a helping hand to the outside community. Woman building each other up because we can't be tearing one another down while there are already man doing that.

Mmabatho's POV.

I open my eyes slowly and close them back again because I must be dreaming. There is no way that I am seeing right because the person who is sitting on that chair can't be here.

Mrs Mamabolo: "You are awake. I was beginning to think you will never wake up" she says when I open my eyes again.

Me: "I am tired, do you mind coming back tomorrow"

Mrs M: Deep sigh "Tommorrow might be lite for my son Mmabatho. I know you are tired but I need you to hear me out please" she says taking my hand in hers.

I would yank it back but I am too weak to do so, it must be the heavy drugs that the doctors keep pumping in my system.

Me: "What do you want?"

Mrs M: "That's rather rude Mmabatho. Absolutely no to way to talk to your mother in law"

Me: Deep sigh "I am going to doze off and leave you sitting there alone because you don't want to say your peace. Don't even think about killing me in my sleep because your son's rap sheet will have murder added on all the crimes he is currently charged with" I say before turning my back on her and facing the other direction.

I hear her standing up but instead of walking out, the witch decided to come to the other side of the bed to talk to me.

Mrs M: “Okay, please hear me out and I will leave. My son is not coping in that jail. Did you know that he is being denied food and he has a swollen eye Mmabatho.....”

Me: “A swollen eye? You are telling me about a swollen eye when I have 12 broken bones and some missing teeth and you are telling me about a damn swollen eye” I say getting worked up.

Is this woman okay in her mind mara? Coming here to tell me about her son’s swollen eye like I am the one who punched him.

Mrs M: “I am sorry Mmabatho for what Tshepo did to you but don’t let him die in that place. Please drop the charges and I will make sure that he stays away from you. Please” she says pleading.

What the hell is wrong with this woman? At what cost she is willing to protect her crazy son? Is she that blinded by motherly

love that she can't see what her son really is? A monster who beats and abuse woman?

Me: "Get out, get the hell out of my room before I call the security in you"

Mrs M: "Please Mma....."

Me: "I said GET OUT!" I shout hurting my jaw.

Mrs M: "I am sorry. Just think about it please" she says before taking her things and walking away.

Wow. That woman's level of insanity is just beyond control. The other problem we will always have in our community is mothers, sisters, aunt and wives who protect and hide the wrongful things that man do to other woman. We are fighting against man domination while at the same time fighting against female domination. Will we ever come alright?

I wish I could say I am enjoying my time at work but the truth is I am not. One of my colleagues has been giving me some bad vibes I don't even understand why. I know she and I have never been friends or close before but it's worse now because she has been throwing unnecessary shades at me. I really don't understand this woman pulling woman down syndrome. Like, does it make people feel better about themselves and their lives? If not why do so many woman especially in the work place enjoy so much of pulling others down? None the less I will try and not let her spoil my time here, after all we are not here to make friend.

Makgale: "So sister P, what is your secret vele?" he says standing in front of my desk

I look up from my computer screen and smile giving him questioning look because I don't know what he is really one about.

Makgale: "I am talking about research. I hear you nailed chapter 4 and we could be looking at 3 papers publication in top academic journals" he says with a smile on his face

Me: “You mean that. I did not do much except be lucky to have 2 of the best supervisors who are more like mentors. I mean we both know Prof Sefolo and Dr. Mogale’s academic accolades so it’s expected that they would push me to work harder towards producing great results. Eish mara it was not easy, I can tell you that chapter was returned to me like a zillion times”

We both turn and look at Mamie as she laughs mockingly.

Makgale: “Don’t mind her” he says dismissing her laughter “So, are you aiming for a cum laude?”

Me: “Not really, the aim is to get an MA and if a cum laude is attached then that would be a blessing especially after everything I have been through ”

Makgale: “I get you, phela it would say a lot you know. Like, ‘my power was never taken and I can still achieve greatness’.

Powerful message indeed because most woman tend to give up on life after divorce and believe life ended at a stroke of a pen”

Mamie: “Okay we get it. You were abused and then you left and now all these men are chasing after you and you can never do wrong. Kodwa ase mathomo ka wena hle (You are not the first) Mxm” she says annoyed walking towards us.

Really?

Me: “What is your problem with me?”

Mamie: “Do I look like I have a problem?” she says with a stinking attitude

Me: “Yes you do”

Mamie: “I don’t know. Maybe I have a problem with how you act. Busy acting like a perfect human being when you actually not. I mean you come here telling us that you are a victim njani njani, you are loving and caring while you are using people for your own gain” she says in my face.

Makgale: "Okay let's all come down. Mamie no man"

Mamie: "Why am I not surprised, akere she has all these man wrapped around her little finger so who are you not to fall under her spell?" she says pointing her finger at Makgale who is just standing there shaking his head.

I have seen enough already, let me just step outside because I say something I will later regret.

I was gone for 15 minutes and when I came back Mamie was the only one in the office. I guess I came back too soon, should have stayed out a bit longer. But now that it's just the two of us, maybe she can tell me what her real issue with me is.

Me: "Mamie

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what have I ever done to you?" I say taking a sit in front of her desk.

Mamie: "I hate woman like you who act all glorious and independent selling stories of being abused while using man to get up the ladder"

Me: "Excuse me?" I say with my eyes popped.

This girl just insulted me in the worst possible way. What does she mean I use man to get up the ladder?

Mamie: "Stop the act Pheladi. It's just the two of us here. Agona motho (There is no one else). Ohh yes I know how you got this job so stop playing miss holly holly with me"

Me: "So Dr. Mogale put through a good word for me, that's not a secret" I say getting up and ready to walk away.

Mamie: "What is the secret? The fact that you turned him down for people like me to be with a man who is still hung up on you while he is paying your month to month salary?" she says raising her voice.

Me: “I would like to believe that I get paid for the job that I do here and not to date him. As to why he is hang up on me I don’t know because I never promised him anything”

Mamie: “And yet your salary comes straight from his bank account” she mumbles before taking a sit.

Me: “What did you just say?” I ask because I don’t think I heard her correctly.

Mamie: “You heard me” she says before burying her face on the computer screen.

I stood there for a moment frozen like a statue processing everything she just said. How could I have been so stupid? I mean it all makes sense now, like how Prof Chiloane once said I am not affected by the funding and the fact that 2 months before I was hired 2 people were let go because there funds were not enough to pay them. I finally snapped out of it when I noticed Makgale walking back into the office and started moving towards my work desk.

Makgale: “Are you okay?” he says stopping by my desk.

Me: “Yes, I am. I just need to go and do a radio interview” I say before grabbing my bag and walking away.

I wonder how many more people know that a man is actually paying me out of his own pocket so that I could survive because I am actually down and out.

(At the radio station)

I take in a deep breath in and out just to calm down my nerves while he makes the introduction. I listen as he talks about gender based violent in the country and statistics.

Presenter: “so in the studio we have a Pheladi Molopa, a survivor of abuse because when I look at her I don’t see a victim but a survivor. She is going to tell us about the project that is running in order to help other woman to become survivor and

take back their Power. Welcome to Mabs community radio station Mme Pheladi”

Me: “Thank you very much for having me in the studio but firstly let me greet the listener at home and I hope we will have a great discussion over this topic that has become a thorn in our lives today”

Presenter: “Thank you also for joining us. Before we go any deeper can you please tell us about your own experience of abuse when did you decide it was enough?”

I went on to narrate the story of my life with my ex-husband, how he cheated and abused me physically, emotionally, sexually and mentally. How he was one person in public and a monster behind closed doors. How I gathered the strength to file for divorce and how I finally got freed of him. How he remarried again while I still have to deal with demons from my marriage. How his current wife is in hospital and undergoing countless operations and he is just a free man because our justice system is failing us as woman. I was all in tear when I was done narrating the story because it’s really scary how man easily get bail even when there are witnesses and videos

depicting exactly what happened to Mmabatho at that restaurant.

Presenter: “You are a strong woman Pheladi and I am glad that you are here to share your story with us and I hope someone is taking courage from it and making a decision to also choose herself. It is true that graveyards and hospitals are full of woman who said he will change. Now tell us about this organizations that you and your partner Mrs M are currently working on to help other woman”

Me: “We decided that since there isn’t enough support system going around for victims of gander based violence we need to help ourselves. Stand together and empower one another to win this battle. The shelter will provide housing, skill development training center, medical practitioners from GPs to psychologist and legal aid for those who needs lawyers”

Presenters: “I love your spirit Pheladi, really showing that being beaten and broken doesn’t necessarily mean the end of the road. There is actually life on the other side of the abuse all one has to do is pack up and leave. So how can we as the public

assist in this project because it sound like something most of us would like to get involved in?”

Me: “For now what we need is donations and people to volunteer. We are a nonprofit organization and as such we can’t afford into paying anything yet we need doctors and lawyers and assistance we can get because we have already been contacted by 4 woman in this week alone who needs help. One is fighting to have access to her kids whom the husband is keeping away from her because he can afford to and she can’t fight him back. So we need all the help we can get”

Presenter: “Wow, it seems as if people are eager to help out our phone lines are already flashing. Good afternoon and welcome to the Mabs Community Radio Station go ahead and speak to Pheladi”

Caller: “Hi” she says giggling

Causing me to laugh because I know that voice.

Caller: "My Name is Mmabatho and I would like to take this time to appreciate Pheladi because she has really an amazing person in my life. After destroying her marriage to my current husband she still came to be by my side and offered word of encouragement reminding me of my worth and that I need to stand up not just for myself but for other woman too. I have never told you this Pheladi but I am sorry for everything I have ever done to you that brought sadness and pain in your life and thank you for being there for me always. Uyimbokodo Womandla to you Pheladi Molopa"

Wow, Mmabatho's words truly touched my heart and reminded me how important this journey is. Like the work of Christ we need to free and educate one woman at a time and teach them to go ahead and teach other. That way, learners will soon become teachers and eventually there will be many teachers to touch every woman's life in the world.

Mogale: “Please take a sit and I will be with you in a moment” he says with a smile before turning his attention back to the student in the room.

I take a sit silently and take a moment to let my eyes wonder around the office. I have been to this office like a million times but I have never really taken a moment to pay attention to the pictures on display. Like few pictures of a little girl who looks exactly like Mogale which got me assuming that maybe it’s his daughter. What kind of a person am I really, that I never asked Mogale if he has kids or not? He must think I am one selfish woman who only cares about getting her story across and not even worry about other people. I look up and smile at the student as he bid farewell.

Mogale: “I am sorry about that. I thought we were only meeting tomorrow to discuss your dissertation” he says walking back to his chair after seeing off the student.

Me: “Wells you are not mistaken about meeting tomorrow. I am sorry, I should have called to setup an appointment I was free and decided to use this opportunity to come and see you. I

should not have assumed you were free as well” I say apologetically.

Mogale: “No worries. I actually had that one student and I am free until my next meeting at 2 with the University’s Higher Degree’s Committee. So what can I do for you?”

That how bad things have become between the two of us since the day I turned him down. I really wish he had not opened up to me about his feeling because now we struggle to hold a casual conversation. We always communicate in business form and that’s not how we used to be from the first day I stepped into this institution. We literally went from being friends to being business associate just like that.

Me: “Well, I am here on a more of a personal agenda than business. I hope you don’t mind me coming to you during office hours”

I watch as he raise his eyebrows all curious waiting for me to go on. Where do I even begin? I mean this things seemed a whole

lot easier when I was playing the conversation in my mind all along but now I don't even know where to start.

Me: "Well I am actually here regarding my salary" I say eventually after a moment of silent.

Mogale: "Ohh, But I don't normally deal with salaries and increments within the project. Prof would be the right person to talk to not me" he says dismissingly before turning to focus on his laptop.

Me: "I am not asking for a raise. I just wanted to say thank you"

I watch as he raise his head from the laptop to pay more attention to what I have just said.

Mogale: "and you are thanking me for what?" he says confused.

Me: "For paying my salary from your own pocket" I say in a very low and soft tone.

Mogale: "Who told you that" he says as his face turns red.

Now I don't think it's such a great idea for me to be revealing names because I can already see he is not happy that I know. Surely he had his own reasons for not telling me about it even though I wish I knew why he would go to such extremes. Phela the money I am getting is not small change for someone to be giving it away easily every month without expecting anything in return.

Me: "Well I went to the bank yesterday to do few things and the teller actually mentioned how lucky I was to be receiving money without any fail from my man. So I probed further because as far as I knew I was only receiving my salary and not girlfriend allowance from anyone anymore" I say lying through my teeth.

I really hope he won't catch me in the lie because then I would be forced to give up Mamie as the one who spilled the beans.

Mogale: “Look, I was going to tell you about it eventually. Plus it’s a temporary solution until the new financial year when you will be officially added to the project budget. I hope you don’t think I am trying to buy your love or something”

Me: “No, I am sure that you would have made me aware of it a long time ago if you were buying off my love. Thank you a million times I will never forget what you have done for me. I know it’s huge and it can’t have been easy on your finances as well, but I appreciate this a lot”

Mogale: “I am only helping out a friend in need” he says with a smile.

Me: “Are you sure this is not putting any financial strain on you. Because I wouldn’t want you to suffer just because you feel obliged to help a friend in need” I say in a more serious tone.

Mogale: “Trust me, I would not give away such an amount of money monthly if it was putting a financial strain on me” he says laughing.

Me: “Good because I need the cash” I say joining in the laughter.

I may have said it jokingly but it’s nothing further from the truth. I truly need the money to keep up with my kid’s school fees and other things because I have invested the large amount of money received in the divorce settlement. Plus the dividends from the businesses where I own shares are not that much since the share price has dropped with investors jumping ship after Tshepo’s video that went viral.

Me: “So who is she” I say taking one of the pictures from a little girl on his table.

Mogale: “My daughter” he says with his face lighting up.

Me: “She is beautiful. How old?”

Mogale: “Well that pic was taken 3 years ago when she was 4 years old unfortunately she passed away few weeks later”

Me: “Ooh, I am sorry to hear that” I say putting the picture back on its place.

I want to ask what happened to her but then I don't want to be sensitive. So I change the topic an academic one.

Mmabatho's POV

I am very disappointed in our justice system. It keeps failing us as woman over and over again. I don't understand how Tshepo was granted bail after what he did to me in full view of the public. I thought of letting it go but I just can't, so I came to the police station to complain. But then again

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I have been sent from pillar to post and no one seems to be interested in my complain.

Woman: “Are you still here mam? I thought you left ages ago” she says mockingly as she stops next to where I am sitting.

Me: “I am not going anywhere until I meet the station commander. Like I said earlier” I says looking at her dead in the eye.

Woman: “Well be prepared to wait the whole night because he is not here today like we kept telling you. Your matter is no longer of this police station, we did our part and arrested your husband. The court is the one that granted him bail not the station. If you are not happy with that you need to ask your lawyer to lodge a formal complain to the court and fight to have the bail reversed not put the blame on us” she says before walking away.

We still have a long way to go as a country. Maybe she is right, it's not their fault that Tshepo was granted bail because they did their job and arrested him. But lady justice decided my pain is not enough and let Tshepo loose into the society again. This is what happens when you become a victim everyone decided to victimize you all over again. Maybe it's time we start fighting fire with fire and not leave our fate in other people's hands as our pain is clearly not theirs. I finally stood up from the bench

before taking all my belongings which include x-ray pictures from the hospital and made my way to the car.

“I am done becoming a victim, see me after work. We need to get the project moving fast” sent an SMS to Pheladi. I think focusing all my energy on the project would be good for me and my soul right now. My second chance to becoming a better human, helping others like me get the justice that they truly need.

You can imagine my surprise when I got home only to find Tshepo in the house. I don't even know how he got in because the gate was still locked and I changed all the locks to the house.

Me: “What are you doing here Tshepo? This is my house have you forgotten?”

Tshepo: “I live here Mmabatho, you and I are married so it's my house too” he says before turning his focus back to the TV.

How disrespectful. I walked away to the kitchen and grabbed a butcher knife. I am not going to be bullied and disrespected in my own house.

Me: "Get out now Tshepo before I call the police on you. I am sure you are contravening your bail conditions by being here plus I have a restraining order against you" I say pointing a knife at him with my hands shaking.

Tshepo: "Put that knife away before you hurt yourself Mmabatho. I am not leaving if you want to leave you are definitely welcomed to do so. All I know is that there is no restraining order against me as a friend of mine had it wiped off from the court system" he says with a smug on his face "Now be a good girl and put that knife away. If you can't live with me, go ahead and pack your things and leave because I am not going anywhere" he says getting up and walking towards me.

I stood there with my hands shaking as I kept pointing the knife at him, my breathing patterns going higher and higher as he got closer. I don't know why I am not moving back but I feel like my feet are just stuck on the ground to move. I don't know what

happened but I saw myself swinging the knife at him cutting the inside of his palm as he blocked to protect his face.

Tshepo: “You B***H, look what you have done” he said grabbing my throat with his other hand and choking me.

Fight or flight, my survival instinct kicked in. I couldn't run because he had me by my throats choking the life out of me so I had to fight. His biggest mistake was not taking away the knife from me the moment he got closer so on his exposed stomach I stabbed. Over and over again, even after he had let go of my throat. I kept stabbing and stabbing as he laid there on the floor. I stabbed him over and over again until I had no strength to stab him anymore. That's when I released what I have done and now this was my chance to run.

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I am woken by loud continues bang on the door which I tried to ignore but only seem to be getting worse. I hope Tshepo has not started again with his tricks of coming to my place at night.

Me: “KE ETLA (I AM COMING)” I shout before grabbing an empty pan. “Ke mang? (Who is it?)” I says standing next to the door.

Woman: “Ke maphodisa bula (It’s the police open up)” she says with a stern voice.

Nah, what would the police be doing in my house this late? I don’t buy her story. So instead of opening I switched on the porch light and peeked through the window. Okay she was not lying about being the Police but what are they doing in my house at this time of the night.

Me: “what can I do for you officers this time of the night” I say busy unlocking the bugler door.

Man: “Just open up mam, we have the search warrant” he says dangling a piece of paper.

I open and step aside to let them in. The first one to enter hands me a search warrant before walking into the house followed by many other cops whom I was not even aware were present. I lean by the counter reading the search warrant as the move around the house searching for a fugitive that I might be hiding on the property. Do these people honestly think I would hide Tshepo in my house if he was running away from the law? Then they clearly don't understand what that man once put me through.

Me: “Sorry sir, can you please tell me why you would think I would hide my ex-husband here?” I say to one of the office who is passing next to me.

Him: “We are not looking for your ex-husband man but the detective will be here soon to ask you all the relevant questions” he says before walking away.

Detective? Why? I look on frustrated as these man and woman in blue look around the house turning things upside down. I have never really understood the police, they tend to let criminals roam around free but treat some of us like criminals. I mean surely there is a rapist or murderer that they could be chasing out there but they are here turning my house upside down in the wee hours of the morning. I am a law abiding citizen and they only time I could have been on the opposite side of the law was when I was caught speeding on the road. That's one crime I have ever committed and I paid a ticket fine of R800 for it.

Man: "Good evening man, my name is detective Michael Mahlangu with the Polokwane homicide division and this is my partner detective Takatso Rankwe" he says extending his hand for a greeting.

Me: "I think it's safe to say good morning because it's past 12 now" I say with a shaky voice while extending my arm.

I am more scared than ever now because this means whatever brings them here is scarier than I thought. The two detectives are not bad on the eye themselves but what scared me the

most was the word 'homicide' because that's means someone has been killed. Ooooooh Lord I pray that Tshepo did not kill Mmabatho because that would mean we are really failing as a nation when victims of domestic violence keep ending up in boxes buried deep inside a hole.

Michael: "Yes, it's already past 12 but this couldn't wait until the son came out in the morning. We take our job very serious mam especially when someone just lost their lives in the most brutal way" he says leading me to a coach for a sit.

Maybe I am mistaken, but I thought this was my house and only I had a right to offer people sit not the other way around. None the less I obliged and sat down because the uniform also has a way of instilling fear in us civilians.

Tshepang: "What is going on mom" he says running into my arms sounding scared.

The damn police must have woken my son from sleep while they were busy searching his room.

Me: "It's okay baby, the nice policemen and women are only here to search the house for few minutes and they will be gone soon" I says hugging him and shaking my head with disappointment to the two detectives on the opposite couch.

Takatso: "Come son, let's go make sure they are done in your room so that you can go back to sleep" he says with a smile on his face like he is trying to bribe a 3 year old baby.

Tshepang shakes his head no while holding on to me tight not wanting to let go.

Tshepiso: "Mom" she says complaining while walking into the sitting room as well.

Me: "I am sorry baby, but these nice gentleman promise that they will be done soon and they will be gone before we know it" I say signaling for her to come to me for an embrace.

She oblige and we share a hug among the three of us that says everything is going to be okay while we sit like that in silent

until a very rude detective cleared his throat ruining a family moment. I let out a deep sigh as we break the hug before my kids settle on either side on of me.

Policeman: “Boss mike we searched everywhere and it’s safe to say there is no sign of her here” he says walking into the room.

Me: “Did he say ‘her’? kganthi who are you people looking for in my house?” I say confused.

Takatso: “We ask the questions mam, not you. So when last did you see Mrs Mamabolo?” he says rudely before taking out a notepad and a pen.

Why would I hide that old hag here?

Me: “I can’t remember sir but it has been too long, my ex-mother in-law and I don’t see eye to eye so we don’t even keep in touch” I say in a rude tone because I can’t believe I have been woken up so early for that woman.

Michael: "I am sorry man

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my partner was not specific. We are actually looking for Mmabatho Mamabolo not her mother in law. So when last did you see or talk to her?" he says with a warm smile on his face.

I guess it's a good cop/bad cop routine that they have going on.

Me: "I haven't seen or spoken to her today but she left me a message during the day"

I watch as Michael nod and Takotso write something in his notepad.

Michael: "Can we please see the SMS mam?"

Me: "Yes, Tshepiso please bring my phone from the bedroom"

She gets up and takes her brother's hand before walking away to fetch my phone.

Me: "I know it's not my place to ask question but can you please tell me what all is this about. I mean my kids and I have been woken up and my house is upside down. Please" I say pleading with Michael since he is the good cop.

Michael: "First can you please tell us where you were between 3 and 4 yesterday in the afternoon" he says maintaining his smile.

Me: "I was at work"

Takatso: "Are you sure mam?" he says with his eyebrows raised.

Me: "Yes I am" I snap at Takatso before turning to Michael "Why are those specific times important" I ask softly.

Michael: "Because that the estimated time of Mr Tshepo Mamabolo's brutal murder"

Tshepo & Tshepang: “WHAT” they both say before breaking down.

Damn, the SAPS not receiving proper training to break down devastating news. I am sure that’s not how my kids needed to hear that their father is no more. I rush to both their side and hug them tight trying to console them. Their painful cry is piercing through my heart reminding me that I did hear the detective correctly. Tshepo Mamabolo is no more, I guess he had to get the easy way out without even suffering half the pain I had to go through in his hands.

Mmabatho’s POV

I found myself spending a very cold night under a bridge playing in my head the scene that took place earlier in my house. How did things turn so bad so fast? God knows I did not mean to kill him but he kept coming at me, mocking my pain and threatening my life. What other choice did I have but to defend myself? Now I am a fugitive who has no escape plan or where

to go next. Damn you Tshepo Mamabolo for ruining my life. If it wasn't for you I would still be an innocent church girl who still dreams of finding a prince charming.

I am sure my mother in heaven is looking down on me all disappointed at what I have become. A home wrecker turned killer on the run. Heavenly, please save me from all this because you alone knows my heart and know I was only trying to defend myself.

I block my mouth with my hands to conceal the sound of crying as I hear the police sirens passing above the bridge. I am not ready to go to jail, I will not survive and no one is going to believe I was only defending myself. I wish I can say I am feeling better knowing that no woman would suffer again in the hands of Tshepo but I don't. In fact the only feelings I have are those of regrets and fear, fear for what is still to come for me.

Ooooh my God. I wonder who is Pheladi and the kids taking the whole thing. If there are people who are going to get hurt but doesn't deserve the pain, ke Tshepo's kids. All of them, their father was a monster but I am sure they still needed to know they had one.

Nyaope boy: “Sure sister, ke go zame ka cudbox? (Hi my sister, do you want me to lend you a box?)” He says starting me.

I shake my head no and continue hugging myself with my back on a cold concrete of the bridge. He must have gotten up to go pee minutes ago and I did not even notice. You would be shocked at how many of us are sleeping under this bridge tonight which makes me wonder how they all ended up here.

Nyaope boy: “Ke life sister, we all find ourselves in places like this unplanned” he says before going back to sleep.

I guess he is right. I mean never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I will spend a night under a bridge wearing clothes covered with blood but here I am.

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Mmabatho's POV

I look around this dark place as I walk through the corridors of the prison in my blue uniform written correctional in circular shapes accompanied by 3 prison warders. They managed to give me a skirt and a head wrap. However, like a hardcore criminal that my justice system has turned me into, I have shackles on my feet connecting to my hands making it difficult for me to move at a faster pace. This place has been home for me for the past 3 days and I can already tell I don't want to spend the rest of my life here.

My lawyer says I am charged with a first degree murder meaning it was premeditated and intentional with a clear motive and plenty of opportunity. Apparently my self-defense strategy died the moment I ran away from the crime scene hiding from the police and the fact that I was nailed trying to cross the border into Zimbabwe makes things even harder.

“We surgeon ngi xolele, We surgeon ngi xolele, We surgeon ngi xolele, We surgeon ngi xolele (Surgeon please forgive me) X 2

Be ngathi ngiya mu bulala (I did not mean to kill him)

Bengithi ngiya m’thusa nje (I was only trying to scare him off)
X3

Be ngathi ngiya mu bulala (I did not mean to kill him)

Bengithi ngiya m’thusa nje (I was only trying to scare him off)
X3

Ufile, ufile, ufile ka buhlungu ngo mese (He died, painfully with a knife)

Be ngathi ngiya mu bulala (I did not mean to kill him)

Bengithi ngiya m’thusa nje (I was only trying to scare him off)

Mina ngiyazi sola nje (now I am full of regret)”

I smiled as I passed a by prison cells on both sides of the corridor with woman standing behind bars cheering me on with a song I only learned when I got here. Apparently it’s a golden hit by the great Freddy Gwala titled Ufile meaning he is dead. These woman here see me as a hero because I refused to die at the hands of a man but choose my life over his. You may not believe this but most of us here are in place because of a man one way or the other.

Prison warder “Shut up mapantiti ke lena (you prisoners)” she shouts with much annoyance hitting the bars of one prison cell as we pass by.

But like fuel to the fire she makes them sing even louder and louder. Solidarity is what we have in this place, us against them. I can’t help but smile because the song has become my slogan. Yes, I did not mean to kill Tshepo, I was only trying to scare him off my house with a knife but he ended up dying at my hands anyway. I certainly don’t regret killing him but if I could go back

I would and not run away from the crime scene because I was indeed trying to save myself.

Prison warder: “Stop smiling wena Mmabatho, you are not a hero but a murderer who stole someone’s husband and later stole a father away from his kids. Mxm” she says hitting me on my head from the back.

She is lucky for she has not experienced the kind of abuse that I have through the hands of Tshepo Mamabolo or any other man. Otherwise she would at least try and understand what I went through and how my country failed me. Otherwise, I will not let her get to me or react to what she just did because I don’t want to give them a reason to take me back. At least I get to go out even if it’s just for few hours but the view of the outside world and the sun will definitely do me good.

The voices and sound of woman fades away as we get closer to the exit. How I wish I was traveling with them so that they can continue giving me strength with their singing for God knows the journey I am about to take is not an easy one. I will be an outcast in that place and Mrs Mamabolo already told me how I should not bother showing my face. Damn

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it's only 6 am but the sun is already out blinding my eyes at first contact since my eyes have gotten used to the darkness.

Me: "Thank you" I say to the nicer prison warder who helped me into the van.

She smiles and nods before closing the door and hitting the van to signal to others to drive off. In my head I keep playing scenarios of how I will be received where I am going and all those nasty looks people will be giving me.

This has been the most dreadful week ever, I am glad it's all coming to an end today. It has not been easy for me watching my kids walk around with pain and sadness in their eyes every day. No mother wants to see her kids heartbroken like that no matter how much she hated the man they are mourning. What I like most about my kids is that they know and understand that their father was not a saint but he was still their father. I know his death has left a void in their lives that no one can really fill.

As much as he was abusive toward me he was a good father to them most of the times. I know and acknowledge that they still needed him in their lives even if it meant him being part of their lives from a far. Alas, he is now no more.

I have seen how people kept looking at me as I walked in and took a sit in the tent. How can they expect me not to come when I know I need to be here for my kids? If Tshepo and I did not share kids I would not be here. We all get up and started singing hymns as the hearse reverses towards the tent stationed outside the yard. I am not going to lie and say I did not find myself shedding a tear or two because I did. Seeing man carrying that box knowing there is a man in there who I used to love before he turned on me and become a monster made it emotional for me. Finally I am truly free from him and one thing for sure he will not be troubling me from the grave. The man placed his casket on its designated place before placing a picture of a happy Tshepo on top.

I guess seeing the coffin made reality sink in for my kids as Tshepang was the first to break down followed by Tshepiso. Thank God for the uncle who is here helping me to console them because I would definitely not manage on my own. I am holding my son against my chest as he cries painfully I guess the

fact that he couldn't see him one last time did not make things easier. Apparently due to the nature of his death the family decided it's best he arrives in the morning and not have his body enter the yard. Finally we settled down and the MC was about to start with the program when commotion erupted at the back. We all turned to look back only to see her in her blue skirt, blue jacket and matching head wrap written correctional survive walking towards the front. She is really brave shame, I would definitely not show my face in this place I had the strength to do what she did. She smiled at me before passing to take a sit in front right next to Tshepo's mother.

Mrs Mamabolo: "You are not welcome here, LEAVE"

Mmabatho: "I have every right to be here, for better and for worse until death do us apart" she says settling down.

Mrs Mamabolo: "Take this killer away from my sight. How could you bring her here to disrespect my son's memory like this?" she says looking at the prison warders who assured Mmabatho in.

Prison Warder: “We are only doing our job mam, she has the permission from the court to come and bury her husband” she says softly.

Mrs Mamabolo: “The same husband she killed”

Thapelo: “Mom, please come down before you give yourself a heart attack. She is here now let’s just bury my brother in peace. The sooner we get done the sooner she goes back to prison” he says trying to console her.

Mrs Mamabolo: “It’s either she goes or I go back to the house” she threatens.

Mmabatho: “Go, he is my husband anyway not yours” she says without even looking at her.

Just like that Mrs Mamabolo walked away from her own son’s funeral with Thapelo running after her. So much drama, thank God I am just a spectator in this place because this is just too much for me to handle. I feel sorry for my kids, because they

had to bear witness to their father's funeral turn into a circus just because people wanted to prove points to each other.

I guess with the life that Tshepo lived on earth this is the exact kind of sendoff he deserves. Rest in Hell father of my kids, breaker of my bones, and inflictor of my pain. You brought so much pain in most of us that some has come to torture you even in death. I can't stand this, so I got up with my kids in hands and walked away to my brother's car. We don't need to be here for this circus of a funeral. We will meet them at Silicon where Tshepo will be laid to his final resting place so that my kids can properly say goodbye.

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(Few years later)

I take in a few deep breathe before wiping my sweaty palms against my skirt. This is a big night and my nerves are now getting to me. 'You got this Pheladi, your whole life experience was leading you to this particular moment' I keep saying to myself over and over again in a very low tone so that no one can hear me. 10 000 woman in attendance waiting for me to grace the stage and I feel like running away. Not an option obviously, because I have to do this not just for me but for others like myself and Mmabatho who went through the most at the hand of man.

I smile like a little girl when I see him walking toward me with flowers in his hands. Just what the doctor ordered, the presence of my man to give me strength to get through the night. Like a magnet I find myself pacing towards him so that I can fall in his embrace and spend few seconds in my comfort place before getting the Job done.

Mogale: "Wow, glad to know I was missed" he says wrapping his arms around me and squeezing me tight.

Me: “You came” I say with a breaking voice because I did not expect to see him here.

I know he said he would come but I wasn't sure he would make it in time because he had to present a paper at a conference in Port Elizabeth earlier in the day.

Mogale: “I wouldn't miss this for the world” he says before placing both his hands on my face and kissing me deeply.

3 years later and he still makes me weak at my knees and still leaves me breathless. I know you are probably confused but a lot has happened over the years. For one I finally left the University of Limpopo to focus on my project of helping woman find their feet after going through any kind of abuse. The growth and impact of the organization has been so huge that I still don't believe how great we have been doing.

I am thankful to God for the team and support he has lead my way because it was through my work in the organization that I finally found healing and the strength to really forgive Tshepo

for what he did to me. Not that he deserved it but it had to be done for me to finally say 'I am free and he has no hold over me any more'. It's amazing how forgiving one's abuser can truly set a person free, because it was only then that I finally became content with my life.

I found myself, who Pheladi is and what makes her tick which lead me to finding my purpose in life and only then did I finally find my happiness. I got to know what it truly means to be truly happy and only then did I get to understand my worth.

Thabang: "Mrs Mogale, it's time" she says disturbing the passionate kiss between me and my husband.

Thabang is my PA who does a pretty good job of making sure I am where I need to be when I am needed. I break the kiss and smile looking into my husband's soft loving eyes that gives me the much needed strength and assurance before turning to nod at my PA.

Mogale: “You got this my love, go and do you because you are amazing and they will love you” he says before kissing my forehead and stepping back to let me leave.

Me: “Thank you. I am glad you came, come carry me out should I collapse” I say jokingly before walking towards the stage.

Curtains open and the crowd goes wild with their hand clapping while standing on their feet. A book in one hand and my speech on the other hand. Heart rate beating uncontrollably but the smile on my face hide the fear so well showing only confidence.

Me: “Thank you, thank you” I say standing at the podium calling for the woman to settle down. “Good evening to every single one of the mbokodo in the house. I would firstly like to thank you all for gracing our fundraising even tonight because the because without every single one of you, the work that we do in our communities to help woman find strength to set themselves free would not be possible.

It has been 6 years since I started this journey and to date we have liberated over 50 000 of woman across South Africa. Some

being kids as young as 15 and 16 years of age forced into marriage due to poverty. We have to date build about 8000 safe houses and 500 skills development center around the country. We all know where my journey started and it was through my experience and the experience of woman like Mmabatho who is currently serving a life sentence in Matatshe correctional service in Venda that we toiled to make this dream a reality.

Let's all focus on the screen behind me to see how far your donations are taking us as woman in this country and what impact we are all contributing towards"

I turned to focus on the screen behind me showcasing the woman whom our organization has assisted thus far while playing Michael Jackson's heal the world in the background. Showing their pictures one by one with their stories of what they went through before seeking help from us. Pictures of the first day they came through our doors, some with broken bones, bleeding and fragile. To showing pictures of their daily activities towards healing, the counselling sessions, task undertaken to refocus their anger and direct the pain. Finally the slide showed pictures of those woman today, how they

have reclaimed their power and how they are making positive contribution to their society today.

I couldn't help but become emotional at the slide show because it reminded me how far I have come. From a victim to a victor all because of my resilience and the support I received from family, friends, colleagues, strangers, my kids and the man I currently call my husband. The slide came to an end with the guest standing up to clap hands vigorously to show they are happy with what they are seeing.

Me: "Now that we know the impact our contribution is making in other people's lives, Let's all Crown a woman, from your own head to hers so that she too can know her value and remember her strength. We all had dreams but somewhere those dreams were stolen from us either by a man, because of a man or through a man. However

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we the mbokodo nation shall remind each other of our worth and pick each other down. For a woman, from a woman, by a woman through a woman. WOMANDLA" I say holding a crown in the air with both my hands.

Attendees: “WOMANDLA” they all shout.

Me: “Before we take out our phones and log on into our apps to start donating. Behind me is a screen showing zero Rands and as we start donating the money donated will reflect live on the screen behind us so we all know how much we have managed to raise tonight alone. Let the passing of the crown begin”

The woman started taking out their phones and login into our donation app. Soon the numbers of the screen started changing and changing with money flocking in. The number kept growing and growing even surpassing our target for the night. Tears came flowing down at the love I keep receiving for this project because I know how woman’s lives will get to be changed for the better. What started off as a dream has indeed blown up in the country and the results and support have been amazing and overwhelming. Nine hundred and eighty five thousand Rands was the total amount displayed on the screen as money donated tonight.

Me: “Wow, look at that, R985000 raised in one night. Together we are building a better place for a girl child to own her crown.

Reminder every woman out there that she doesn't have to remain a victim because we are all here to carry her through to the other side. Thank you very much to each one of you for making my dream a reality and becoming a change agent in the lives of these women...." I pause and watch as Thabang walks towards me on the podium.

I look at her questionably trying to hide my fear with the smile because her entrance on to the stage is unexpected. My first thoughts are on the kids who are at a hotel with my mother in law and Tshepiso who is on some exchange study program to the US. She smiles and hands me a piece of paper before she could whisper in my ears.

Thabang: "Relax, it's more great news" she says before standing on my side while I read the note.

Me: "I am sorry about that my queens. It seems tonight is just filled with good news. Thabang over here brought me a note from my husband who is in the back stage. He says that he understands Men are not allowed in today's event because it about sharing each other's crown. He is kindly asking if we may kindly accept a little offering from him and some of his friends.

Should we do, from his own pocket he will be donating the difference between what we have raised and a million, meaning with his donations we are at a million rands. He also challenged his friends to donate towards our worthy course and they have raised R300000”

The room erupted into applaud and cheerfulness of the ladies. Wow, Mogale keeps doing amazing things in my life making me fall more and more in love with him every day.

Me: “Amazing, that’s what tonight has been. We will now settle down and enjoy dinner before we get to the second part about our book reveal” I say before taking a bow and walking out.

I met a lot of people backstage who congratulated me on the night but all I could do was smile and say thank you before passing. I wanted to see my husband to hug and kiss the day light out of him for being such an amazing person. Consistent, from the first day I meet him to date, Loving and generous.

Mmabatho's POV

It is said that our destinies are mapped out before we are even conceived and born. For that I have made peace with my life and where I ended up. I remember the day I was sentenced to prison for life, I cried and asked myself 'why me' but then I came with one conclusion if not me who was it supposed to be. It was only then that life in here started to be easy for me because I was no longer in denial about my situation and what got me here. From a victim to a victor, I become part of Pheladi's organization working from the inside and that helped me a lot too.

I could have joined the gangs in here for survival, resorted to drugs for coping but I choose to better my life. I used my time in here to read up on books and became part of the positive contributors within the prison. I can't exactly say I am a celebrity in here but I am celebrated by other inmates and prison warders who have come to look up to me for guidance and strength. I can't help but smile looking around this hall that is full to it's maximum capacity because everyone wanted to bear witness to this night and celebrate with me. Who said we can't have anything to look forward to just because we are prisoners?

I take a deep breath as we all focus on the big screen in front of us projected on a white cloth so that we can all watch my big moment. The prison officials allowed for this night to happen because they know and understand that this is something big and positive coming from their prison and it needs to be celebrated. I would have preferred being there physically but they said it would raise a lot of questions. But then again I would rather be here and celebrate with all these beautiful woman mostly whom I have gotten to know and love.

Mandy: "It's about to start she is walking to the podium" she says excitedly hitting my thigh.

Me: "It's about time" I say nervously.

My biggest fear right now is rejection. What if the world doesn't to hear a story from a prisoner? What would become of my hard work and the lessons that I believe people can take from that book? I turn and look at the prison warder next to me as Pheladi start talking but we can't hear anything because it's dead silent. She signal that she doesn't know and gets up to check if the speakers are correctly connected. Why wouldn't

they check the sound first? Now Pheladi is busy with her speech and we are not hearing anything.

Pheladi: “In self-defense Mmabatho killed her abuser but she is now serving time in jail. It’s amazing what she choose to do with her time in jail. Most of us could have given up on life and drowned in our sorrows, but not her. She choose to make lemonade from the lemons that life kept throwing at her. From a victim to a victor, even in the dark cells of prison where she chose the light. Instead of giving up and giving in, Mmabatho wrote a beautiful book. The book is titled the minister’s wife: from church to prison.

We are lucky today because we are the first people to actually have access to the copy as the book will only be available tomorrow in major book stores in South Africa. How many of us are pledging to buy a copy before we leave here tonight?” she says holding the book up in the air.

Wow, the cover looks beautiful I can’t wait to hold my own copy tomorrow.

Mandy: “Wow, Batho they all want to buy you book. Looks at those hands in the hall, its all of them. Yoooo, 10000 people in one night you are a best seller girl” she says jumping up and down on her chair.

I can't believe this. People want to buy my book. Wow, I remember how I started writing the Minister's wife out of boredom and when I told Pheladi about it she said 'write a book Mmabatho and let's publish it, that way more people will get to read and learn about your story'

.....**THE END**.....

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