

Busisekile khumalo

Rubies and Rain

One

The rain didn't make things messy. People did that all on their own. – Barbara Delinsky

“I wish you died instead of Mom! You know what, I wish you could just drop dead already. You are making my life hell, I hate you!”

Those are the last words I screamed at my father when he tried to see me over a month ago. I just woke up to news of his alleged death trending on Twitter. It feels like a nightmare. The first thing I do is call his number,

“The number you have dialled does not exist.”

Don't panic, Ruby. Don't panic, uncle Gumburai will clear this whole mess. He never leaves my father's side. I dial his number too and it doesn't even ring, tut-tut-tut the line tappers off and I can feel my chest closing in but I won't panic. This is probably one huge misunderstanding. Uncle Batsirai! His number rings and after what feels like ages he finally picks up my call, breathing heavily.

"Ruru! Thank God, are you ok? I have been trying your phone since last night."

Shit! My phone has been off since the club last night, my battery died and I only turned it on when I woke up and got so many notifications I didn't check my voicemail.

"I was studying... please tell me it's not true, Sekuru. Please tell me that bitch didn't kill my father."

Uncle Batsirai's heavy sigh followed by a pregnant pause makes my throat choke up and I feel like I can't breathe.

"Ruby, something just doesn't add up. I don't think Vimbai would have the capacity to kill anyone let alone your father."

Arghhhh! Of course, that bitch has my uncle under her claws as well. I honestly don't know what they see in that hood rat, she probably slept with my uncle too. I angrily hang up without hearing another word of the Vimbai's absolution brigade. That girl is conniving, she tried to sink her claws into Chatunga and when she found out that he only used her for sex, she turned her charms on my father. When I get my hands on her, I will kill her myself.

The anger that I am trying to direct at Vimbai comes back to me and I realize that I brought this on my father, I wished death on him until death finally

located him. It feels like the time I found out my mother was dead, only this time my father isn't there to draw me into his arms and let me cry until his t-shirt was wet with my tears. I want to scream Daddy, why!!!! But I haven't called him Daddy in forever. The realization hits me squarely on my chest like a fireball and I start screaming in pain. This can't be happening, he was always supposed to be there, even with our differences, Daddy was supposed to always be there.

The last words I screamed at him taunt me and make me sob harder, I wish I could take them back. I wish I could have at least talked to him, given him a hug. The fleeting pain and sadness in his eyes the last time I saw them is stuck in my head, driving me crazy. I sob until I have hiccups and I hug my pillow to at least feel some semblance of comfort but all I wish I could do is be a little girl again and curl up in my father's lap whenever there was a thunderstorm. He would brush my back and say soothing words until I fell asleep.

It's funny how in death I now remember all the good things about him, I have been angry at him for so long that it overshadowed the times I would "help" him make pancakes for my mother on Mother's Day and on her birthday. It would end with both of us looking like ghosts but the laughs and kisses in between were worth having to be scrubbed clean. When I was a little girl, my father could do no wrong in my eyes. He was my Superman and that is who I'm sobbing piteously for. It hurts, it hurts so bad like someone cut my heart open and poured some chillies all over it.

Dad, why? Why did you leave me a complete orphan, Daddy?!

I can't even scream the words because my throat is clogged with tears and I'm a mess of tears and mucus. It hits me squarely that I have no one now, no one who will obsess over my safety and no one

who will follow up on everything that I do. The thought makes me cry harder until I feel dizzy.

.....

I must have cried myself to sleep. I wake up with a pounding headache, my throat is on fire, my eyes feel heavy and I'm irritated by the banging on my door. I drag myself from the rug in the living room, my bones protesting from being subjected to that uncomfortable position. I stretch a bit before checking on my spy hole. Peaches. The last person I want to see right now but I open the door because her knocking is driving me crazy. She springs into the room, she looks...excited and her strides are purposeful.

"I heard the news, finally you get to be free and live your best life."

God give me strength, this must be a temptation. Surely no one can be this insensitive. Can't she see my puffy eyes and blotched cheeks?

"I'm an orphan Peaches, my father died and you are saying I'm free to live my best life. What next? Should I throw a party too?"

"Geez, I thought this was what you wanted. Why are you using that tone? Are you touched by his passing?" She has the nerve to look and sound affronted.

"What was your first clue? You know what, I can't deal with your ignorance right now Peaches. Not everything is about your hotep politics and your endless campaigns."

"There is no need to call me names, I'm not the one who's mourning a homophobic narcissist who made

your life an absolute hell.”

“At least I knew my father and he made an effort to be in my life.”

I’ve gone too far I think as soon as the words leave my mouth but Peaches doesn’t stay long enough for me to apologize. I wince at the sound of my door being slammed hard. Touching on her deadbeat father was a low blow from me considering that she was just calling my father all the names that I called him, behind his back. I have so many emotions waiting to erupt within me and I don’t know how to process them.

“Siri play Hurt by Christina Aguilera.”

As the haunting notes start I slide down on the floor and I break down and cry. I just want my parents back, both of them. They can’t leave me within a



year of each other. They just...

“Seems like it was yesterday when I saw your face  
You told me how proud you were but I walked away  
If only I knew what I know today  
Ooh, ooh

I would hold you in my arms  
I would take the pain away  
Thank you for all you've done  
Forgive all your mistakes  
There's nothing I wouldn't do  
To hear your voice again  
Sometimes I wanna call you  
But I know you won't be there”

I dial his number again hoping against all odds that

this is one twisted nightmare and I'll hear his deep voice asking why his princess is crying and who does he have to kill. Oh, Daddy! Instead, I receive the same automated response. I'm about to throw my phone away when I realise that notifications on Twitter are going crazy. I keep being mentioned in a thread.

Sungurai

@son\_of\_the\_soil

Chibaba Ian's contribution to politics remains one of the most underrated aspects of our sad nation's legacy.

There are different reactions, some agreeing and some saying that he only left behind a legacy of looting. My throat goes dry when I see Peaches' reply.

Phindiwe

@peaches\_je\_bitcheez

He was a homophobic piece of shit even his own daughter couldn't stand him.

Oh but that is not even the worst of it when someone calls her out on not even knowing him like that, her response knocks the air right out of my lungs.

Phindiwe

@peaches\_je\_bitcheez

I know his daughter

Then she attached a video that I didn't even know exists of her going down on me and both our faces are showing clearly. No, no, no! Peaches what have you done? The song keeps playing in the background like my life hasn't turned for the worst.

"If I had just one more day

I would tell you how much that I've missed you  
Since you've been away  
Ooh, it's dangerous  
It's so out of line  
To try and turn back time"

.....

Good morning family

I haven't finished the project I am working on, please  
bear with me for now our posting schedule will be

Monday

Wednesday

Friday

Warning, this story contains a lot of triggers; please be on the look out for trigger warnings on inserts.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

Rubies and Rain

Two

“The best thing one can do when it’s raining is to let it rain.” – Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Nosihle

I can never get used to the Beitbridge heat, it feels like I have been dipped in a dry hot water spring. The

whirring sound of the fan is irritating because only hot air seems to be coming out of it. My blouse is plastered against my back, making me itchy and I try to get it off my back.

My tiny cupboard office is crammed with a lot of Income Tax Self-Assessment files, Presumptive Taxes files and files on Carbon Tax per-liter collection and migration from Customs Duty to Excise Duty on fuel dating back to 2007. I pick the file I'm currently working on and I try to fan myself, that only seems to tip the sweat onto my face.

I sigh looking at the time, I just want to get to my small room at the Zimra flats and strip to my panties then stretch my limbs in front of my tiny fridge. Dammit it's not even 3.pm yet.

My phone rings and I groan when I see that it's an unsaved number. It's either Jacob's wife or someone sent by one of my classmates asking for a favour

with clearing their car or goods at the border. I almost don't answer it but something moves me to pick up.

"Hello?"

A sob greets me back and then a flurry of words come bursting out in the other side of the line and all I can make out is,

"...sis Vimbai...took her...hiding...scared...to call you."

"Whoa, whoa, calm down. Take a deep breath, there you go. Now tell me from the beginning."

I think there's an impatient snort from the girl who called but she starts over even though her voice is wobbling so hard it's still hard to hear what she is saying.

“My name is Davirai, Vimbai is my sister. Just now, we were doing some of my homework when there was a loud knock on the door. Sis Vimbai told me to hide in the cupboard and to call you should anything happen. Some big Rovai men came in and started searching the whole place and then they dragged sis Vimbai away. Please come and help me, I’m scared.”

I don’t know what to make of this call because Vimbai doesn’t have a sister that I know of except her step-siblings and I doubt she would have called one of them to stay with her in Harare. I haven’t been talking to her lately. Things kind of got strained between us when I kept asking what happened between her and Tafadzwa. On the other hand, the fear in the girl’s voice is palpable even through the line and she also sounds desperate.

“Where are you now?” I ask, the heat and my laziness all but forgotten.



“I am still hiding in the cupboard,” her voice has dropped to a whisper, as if she’s scared that someone might hear her.

“Do you have WhatsApp?” when she gives an affirmative answer, I ask her to send me her location. Before she can answer there is a loud thud in her background.

“What was that Davirai?” I find myself whispering too.

“I don’t know sis Nosi, there is someone or something at the door.”

“Do not open that door, do you hear me? Don’t open it for anyone until I get there. Send me your location right now.”

I don’t know how I am planning to get to Harare, I

have work tomorrow and it's just a week from payday, I will have to dip into my savings but something tells me that this girl is telling the truth and Vimbai needs me. I get up to go look for my supervisor, work all but forgotten.

“No, you cannot just take leave on a whim. You have to fill out paperwork requesting leave and we send it to HR and they will either accept or reject your request.”

I suck my teeth and try hard not to tell at the man. I still need this job to take care of my mother and sister's children.

“Sir, it's a matter of life and death. My friend...” I don't even get to finish, he cuts in with a condescending air.

“Nosihle this is not your mother's stall in Gwanda,

we do things by the book around here. No special favours.”

Something in me snaps and I look him straight in the eye, something I have never done in almost a year of working here.

“Listen, sir, that friend I’m telling you about is the only reason I am alive and standing in front of you today. Had it not been for her I would have died in some disgusting room in Mbare,” just thinking about it makes me emotional.

Vimbai saved my life from a botched illegal abortion that left my womb scarred and she wouldn’t even allow me to pay her back.

“I need this job, yes, but I am going to Harare to repay her kindness even if it means I won’t come back to a job, it’s fine. God will make a way but I’m

going.”

He looks at my eyes for a moment before grunting and handing me a leave form.

“A month is all the leave you can get and don’t make it a habit.”

My relief is instant and I hug my supervisor or his hanging belly. I fill out the form quickly before he changes his mind.

I rush to the flats to go and get some cash and I throw some clothes into an overnight bag. The hustle is trying to get transport to Harare. The busses from South Africa pass me, full and I am afraid to hitchhike. I am about to give up and go to the bus station when a haulage truck driver that I once helped with paperwork for his tobacco stops when he notices me and fortunately, he is heading to

Harare. I send a short prayer to God that he doesn't rape me along the way before swinging my bag up to him.

.....

I reach Harare in one piece and the middle of the night, just after 11. I fell asleep in the driver's bed just behind his seat. He was the perfect gentleman and he refuses my offer to pay just as I refused his after I helped him back then.

He can't get inside the CBD because of the size of his truck but he does call his cousin for me and waits with me until his cousin comes and he makes sure to tell the cousin to get me home safely. I breathe a prayer of gratitude. Davirai sent me a location to some snazzy flats near Avondale. She has to ring me up before the security lets us drive in. My heart almost stops in my chest when I realize

that there is a pool of blood in the doorway of the apartment number that Davirai gave me, it is one of the only two apartments in this floor. Wait no, she said it's 18 not 19. My relief is short-lived because there is blood in the handle of that apartment and when Davirai flings the door open she has blood on her dress.

“Oh, my God! What happened?”

I am freaking out and there is no doubt in my mind that this is Vimbai's sister, they look so much alike even the knock-knees.

“It's not my blood sis Nosihle, it's uncle Joshua's blood,” she points to a heap of a man lying on one of the expensive-looking couches. There is a trail of blood that he left behind. Oh, Vimbai what have you gotten yourself into now?

Davirai rushes me to uncle Joshua and he is wheezing but not making any sound. I think he's sleeping and I move in to check where he's hurt when a strong arm grabs me painfully and I wince.

"Who are you?" his eyes are cold and I'm not the one bleeding out but I shiver.

"I am Vimbai's friend, Nosihle, we were roommates in college and I work in Beitbridge."

I know just my name would have been enough but something is intimidating, cold and ruthless about this Joshua that had me spilling my guts. He looks me over, the perusal cold, impersonal and then he lets go of my arm and there is his blood left on me.

"What happened to Vimbai? Is she hurt? Did you call the ambulance, the police? You are bleeding out."

I am bad under pressure, I panic easily and get too emotional and I wish Vimbai was here now, she has a calm way of life dealing with every situation.

“No ambulance. No police. Patched myself.”

His words are clipped and I only realize when he drags in some air that it must be hard for him to say anything.

I turn to Davirai and ask her about Vimbai. Poor child's eyes are bulging out of her face and she looks ready to burst into tears. She hands me her phone and there is a video. Vimbai looking through the spy hole and asking who it is, the barked response and the door being flung open. The police keep asking where her husband is and she claims that she doesn't have a husband.

The police are sent out by their Sargent and start



raiding the whole house. One big woman officer obscured the camera for a bit before the Camera goes back to Vimbai demanding a search warrant and the police officer is very rude in his responses. Then they agree that taking her away will bring her “husband” out from hiding.

This is worse than I thought. Way, way worse.

.....

Good morning Family

Please don't forget to tag and mention your friends and family.

See you on Wednesday.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

## Rubies and Rain

### Three

A rainy day is an equalizer. You don't know what's going to happen. You just take what you can get. – Charlie Harvey

### Nosihle

A groan from the couch disturbs my second viewing of the video, I am trying to make sense of why Vimbai was arrested. I turn to the sound and I find the mountain of a man now an ashen colour, sweating profusely.

“Bucket,” the feeble demand makes him appear even more vulnerable.

Davirai rushes towards the door on the left and comes back with a bucket. She has barely put it down when he doubles over and starts vomiting blood.

“Davirai, go to bed right now!”

I’m panicking but I think the child has seen enough horror for one day and she looks quite green herself. She doesn’t argue, she leaves for her bedroom as if she’s being chased by demons. The injured mountain is still wheezing but hasn’t vomited more blood. What’s the number of the ambulance again?

“What are you doing?” the words sound laboured but with a hint of menace too.

“I’m calling the ambulance,” or trying to if only I could remember the number. Let me Google it.

“Don’t. No ambulance. No police.”

He must be delirious from the pain. He just vomited blood for crying out loud! He fumbles with his pockets and I can tell the action is taxing because he is wheezing but instinct tells me offering him help should be the last thing I do. Even in pain, he is clinging to his independence.

He finally gets his phone and I watch as he thumps through his phone and then I hear the dialling tone. It rings twice before an alert voice breaks over the phone.

“Joshua.”

The mountain wheezes and clenches his bloodied teeth, trying to gather the strength to talk.

“Code Red.”

“Copy.”

That is the only response and the line goes dead. I wring my hands as I watch him double up again and vomit, this time only a trickle of blood comes out.

“Water!”

He excels in these one-word demands, I head to the kitchen without saying anything and it takes me a minute to figure out where the glasses are and I pour some water. The sight of blood has taken me back to that rusty room in Mbare with the metallic smell of blood hanging heavily in the place. I shake myself from that memory and rush back to the couch. Oh, God no! He is slumped on the couch awkwardly and is either dead or has lost consciousness.

Hesitantly, I place my hand under his nose to check if he's still breathing. There isn't much to go by so I look for a pulse instead. It's there but it's very faint. I start pacing, feeling helpless. Who can I call? Unlike Vimbai, I don't have any connections. I don't know any doctors. If this man dies on her couch, how in the hell am I going to explain his death? If he dies who will help me get Vimbai out of this mess? What can I do to stop him bleeding out?

I rush to the door that Davirai went to fetch the bucket. I search the vanity mirror and I find tampons, bandages and a first aid kit. I rush back and find him still out. Where is he bleeding? I touch his arms and my hands come back dry, I gulp before bringing my hands to his torso, he's bleeding in the gut.

I don't know what I'm doing but I put two tampons on the gaping wound and some bandages before holding it down with some gauze tape. It's far from neat but I hope it holds the bleeding. I take the

bucket and I go empty it even though my stomach is turning at the sight of blood. I pour some water and look for a towel. I keep the cold, wet towel on his forehead, I see them doing this in the movies all the time, I hope it helps him. He doesn't regain consciousness and he still looks a sickly shade of grey.

Thirty minutes later, I'm ready to call the ambulance and fuck what he said when there is a brisk knock on the door. Fear grips me. I tiptoe to the door and look through the spy glass. There is a man with a bag standing alone outside Vimbai's apartment at almost two am.

"Who is it?" I demand, my voice sounding braver than I feel.

"Joshua called me."

I am torn, what if he's been sent to finish off the mountain, but what if he is the one he called?

"Tell me what he said," I am taking a risk here.

"Code Red."

I open the door for him and he smiles briefly at me before walking briskly towards Joshua without another word. By the time I lock the door, I find him crouched next to Joshua and cursing lightly. He clicks a button on the couch and it opens into a bed, neat. He turns him and opens his bag, taking out some instruments, bandages, a drip of blood and some other colourless liquid. He removes my makeshift bandage and inserts some long tweezers into the wound. I expect Joshua to jump or flinch but he's still unconscious.

I pace and watch as the man who I can only assume



is a doctor, nimbly works on the mountain without saying a word. After stitching him up, he puts on the drips with precision and all I can do is pace while wringing my hands.

“You can go to bed, I will look after him,” he finally turns to me when he is done with tending to Joshua.

Sleep sounds like heaven but what if this man hurts Joshua? I tell him that I’m fine, I will stay up. He only looks me over and then goes back to looking at Joshua. I sit on the sofa opposite him and watch his every move.

.....

I must have fallen asleep because I am woken by some movement. I open my eyes, disoriented for a moment. This place is nothing like my tiny flat in Beitbridge. I remember what happened before I fell

asleep. I turn and I find Joshua's tired bloodshot eyes on me.

“You are alive.”

I feel pretty dumb after stating the obvious but he only lifts the corners of his mouth in what is meant to be a smile but ends up being a grimace.

“Well, I have been dead a couple of times.”

Something tells me I don't want to know of the other times that he's been dead. He has some colour back and new drips. The doctor is nowhere in sight. His naked torso is more chiselled than any that I have ever seen, I gulp down some hot saliva. Focus, Nosihle! You came here to repay your debt to Vimbai. I'm just about to bring it up but the mountain speaks first.

“Chengetai tells me that your first aid saved my life, thank you.”

It’s a simple enough thank you but I still feel my cheeks heating up. Focus! My brain screams at me.

“I was thinking, we can release that video that Davirai took and that will make the public pressurize the police to let go of Vimbai.”

Joshua looks at me as if his hooded eyes can see the heat on my cheeks underneath my protective coat of melanin. His scrutiny is uncomfortable and I babble some more about Twitter and Instagram.

“No,” no? He’s simply going to say no? Before I can go off on him he continues,

“You do not throw in your ace before your opponent

has shown his hand. Let's wait for the police to formally lay their charges and then trip them up with the video."

I think about what he's saying and it makes sense but that could be forever. It will also mean Vimbai has to stay in jail for that long.

"How do we get her out of jail? Where is the person who got her into this mess in the first place? The person that the police are looking for."

Again the silent scrutiny, then he dismisses me with his eyes.

"I could eat."

I'm being tested. I didn't drop everything, almost losing my job to come and be this man's maid and

now he wants me to cook. I fold my hands and give him my best stink eye. He sighs a dramatic, long-suffering sigh that doesn't sit well on his gigantic frame.

"Fine, hand me my phone."

Our hands touch lightly as I am handing him his phone and I feel a frisson of heat going down my spine. I look at the mountain to see if he felt it too and he has the same hooded-lid look, but he doesn't let go of my hand. He takes his phone and dials someone. I'm still close enough to him to hear the other person on the line.

"Joshua," is this how everyone answers his calls?

"Batsirai, tell me you are on your way home with her."

There is a tired sigh on the other side of the line.

“They are refusing to grant her bail. I spent the whole night in Central trying to get them to let me talk to her. They hedged around and only let me see her this morning. I tried getting a court case but with this pandemic it’s a nightmare.”

I feel my heart sinking but Joshua still seems passive until his next words.

“If you know what’s good for you, you will get her out or you will face the consequences.”

He ends the call and tries another number. This one doesn’t go through. He takes a small, old Nokia phone from the pocket of his sweat pants and dials again. Whoever he’s trying to get through he fails and he throws the little phone across the room. It hits the wall but in true Nokia style doesn’t disintegrate into a thousand pieces.

“What’s wrong?” I hate the fear in my voice, but the fear in his voice makes it worse.

“Everything.”

.....

Happy mid-week Family

Remember to check the links on the pinned Post to get my books on Kindle and Kindle Unlimited.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

Rubies and Rain

Four

(trigger warning: homophobic utterances)

"When it rains, it pours - figuratively and literally."

-John Cornyn.

Ruby

I haven't left my apartment since news of my father's death and Peaches posted our compromising video. A full day but it feels like it has been a year. I had to turn off my phone because the notifications were insane.

Godly Queen



@FungisaiGomo

"...an abomination with no acceptance in the Christian religion."

ZimboMotherz

@SulumaPatie

...the reason why God has turned his back on Zimbabwe, ana Chatunga vanopfamba vachinonga chero chadona." (Chatunga goes around picking whatever has fallen)

ZimExpatriate

@MoyoFelix

"Gays have no place in society, wonai beche iro ravondoka." (Look at that damaged pussy)

King Lobengula the 6th

@khumaloMdue

"Take your life and join your parents you worthless piece of arse..."

I am trending on Zimbabwe Twitter, that ghastly Zim celeb page on Instagram and every news outlet. My relationship with Chatunga is being blasted and my mother is being insulted, dead as she is. There are a few death threats and even more disturbing are offers to be dicked down since clearly Chatunga wasn't doing a good enough job. I have been getting pictures of penises with a promise to "turn my world around."

I wish I can bury my head under the tiles of my apartment and hide forever. As much as the homophobic treatment that I am being shown is getting to me, hard, I just want news on my father and my uncle. There hasn't been any as the whole focus has been shifted to me and my sexuality. Maybe this morning I will get something but I am not turning on my phone, I think I'll just end up

deactivating my social media accounts.

I drag my laptop and my hands shake slightly, I haven't eaten and my body is protesting. I tried eating yesterday and I violently threw up as if my body was rejecting even the thought of food. I go on YouTube and there is a news clip where the chief of police is giving a statement to the press.

"...we are still investigating the matter as one suspect is already in custody. The suspect is believed to have seduced her victim and then put out a hit on him after she got him to change his will, we have managed to get a copy of the will in question and she is currently being interrogated to tell us where she buried his body. It is a very sad turn of events as Mr Chikore was played a pivotal role in the mainstay and economic turnover of this country and was also one of the youngest, decorated war veterans. Any leads that the public may have are most welcome."

The little hope that I had of my father still being alive is fading rapidly. If he went into hiding shouldn't my scandal bring him out of hiding? If there is anything that could have brought him out it's this, the man cared more about his image than he ever cared about me. The bitter realisation that I am totally on my own weighs down on me, I am truly and well alone.

Tendero flashes through my mind and I use the house phone to dial her number that I know by heart. It rings for a while before she picks it up.

"Tendi please don't hang up, it's me, Ruby. I just need someone to talk to and you are the only person in this world who has loved me without condition."

My voice breaks and I hear a sigh on the other end of the line. She doesn't say anything but she didn't

hang up, that should count as something, right? I'm grasping at straws here.

"He's gone and this is what I've wanted for so long but now that it had happened I keep wishing it wasn't true, I wish I hadn't told him that I wished he was dead the last time I talked to him. I miss him, I miss him so badly and I miss you. I wish you were here to help me make sense of this whole mess. I just need someone in my corner, I feel like I'm tumbling into this endless dark hole with no one to carry me. I'm just so lost."

The tears win and I break down and sob, loud heart-wrenching sobs that leave my waning energy completely depleted. I look at the phone in my hand and she hasn't hung up.

"Listen, Ruby," wait this isn't Tendero's voice, it's her mother.

“I am so sorry for your loss, your parents were always both so kind to our family and to hear of your father's passing is devastating, I can only imagine what you are going through. My heart goes out to you, truly. But please don't drag Tendero back to being your emotional crutch, she has been doing so good lately and she is finally ready to move on from you. Please, if you ever loved her even a little, please let her go.”

I swallow the lump that is lodged in my throat and the pain goes straight to my heart.

“I..I...I understand ma'am, but can I speak with her, please? Just for a minute, I just need to hear her voice one last time.”

Another sigh at the other end of the line.

“I’m sorry Ruby but she is not in the house at the moment. Be strong, this too shall pass.”

Then the line goes dead and I stare at it for a moment before slowly letting go of the phone. I stand on shaky legs and head to the bathroom.

“Take your life and join your parents you worthless piece of arse...”

He is right, I am worthless and all alone. I have nothing to live for. I look at all the anxiety medication that I have poured into my hand, this could end it all, the pain I have bottled up. My stomach is empty, they would work very quickly yet something holds me back, fear. If I drink these pill no one will find me in time or visit me in the hospital. No one will care if I’m dead or alive. I put back the pills.

Dead eyes stare back from my reflection in the

mirror. My eyes have sunk into my cheekbones reminding me of the last time I saw my mother when cancer had steadily fed on her flesh until she had shrunk to half her size. Her eyes were hollow and listless, just like mine right now. She fought for so long in silence, I didn't even realise that she was sick until I saw her on her deathbed. This too shall pass, right? If I could go on living after her death, I can do it again, can't I? My blank eyes don't offer any answers or any motivation.

I am startled by loud banging on my door, I wait for whoever it is to leave but they are persistent and I wonder how they managed to come up without me being notified by security. I curl up into a ball on the couch rocking myself to the rhythm of the heavy knocking and shouts to open the door otherwise they kick the door in. I continue rocking even when I hear something thud against my door. I hug my knees closer to my chest, just like I did as a kid during thunderstorms. The thudding graduates into a loud crash and my door gives in and comes off its



hinges.

Boots thud and yet I don't look up to check who it is or why they are running around my apartment, overturning things. A crash and angry words, being spoken to me I think but I just keep on hugging myself, trying to warm my heart and not burst into a wail. Someone roughly pulls me up and I stare into their face as they talk, all I can see is their mouth moving but it feels like I am outside of my body watching as everything unravels in motion.

The big man in a suit shaking me and shouting something in my face. His face is distorted into a snarl. My silence angers him more because he shakes me and thrusts me away from him.

Someone grabs my one arm and another grabs the other. I want to tell them to let me change from my pyjamas at least, the shorts don't give me any warmth but I can't say the words.

My teeth chatter as we come out of the warmth and security of my apartment building to the cold wetness of the winter rain. I wonder where they are taking me as they shove me into the back of a van but does it even matter? I have no one and nothing to leave for. I have no fight left in me. I curl into another ball and watch the rain splatter on the windows covering the whole city in a dull grey haze.

.....

Morning Fam

You can grab a copy of any of my four books in any bookstore close to you, we now have copies in Exclusive Books Gaborone and Nairobi . For those who are lost, please ask in the comments and someone will bring you up to speed.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

## Rubies and Rain

### Five

Sometimes Sunshine Turns To Rain And The Same  
Ones You Love To Bring You Pain. – J. Cole

### Vimbai

Nausea burns like acid in my throat but I keep it down, holding my breath until the burning need to vomit passes. The putrid stench of the metallic bucket piled with faeces and urine by the corner isn't helping either. Once I release my breath and the smell waifs towards me, I gag until tears sting my eyes. God this place is awful. At least I'm no longer sharing a cell with a dozen other ladies.

When the policewoman hit her baton stick on the

bars of my former cell and told me to come out in the morning, I sagged with relief mistakenly thinking my captivity was coming to an end. Only to be brought to this cell, they didn't even have the decency to empty the makeshift toilet.

I won't complain though, complaining here gets you nowhere, knowing your rights here gets you targeted and the less you say, the better the treatment. I don't know how long I've been here, the tiny window is so high up, I can not deduce where the sun rises or sets. It's the worst possible place for someone like me because I have to train my mind to not listen to the voices and not jump in fright every time a rat scurries close to me.

Defeat tastes bitter than all the nausea and acrid tears put together. I have lost the will to fight, to demand my release and shout my innocence. Not only because I'm alone and caged in, but because doing all that only elicits laughs and sneers from the

guards on duty. It only drains whatever little reserves of energy I have. The sound of a baton stick being dragged across the iron bars of my cell grates my ears but I keep my head down, stubbornly not looking up even when I can feel the beams of the torchlight on me.

“Come out!”

The order is sharp but I take my time getting up and I drag my feet first to the corner with the metal bucket and I carry it as stinking as it is and hand it towards the policeman ordering me to come out. He wrinkles his nose and knocks the bucket out of my hands and the contents splatter across the parched corridor. I remain calmly staring at him as he lets out a string of insults.

He wants me to clean up but he's torn because he's been sent to get me. I wonder how Batsirai managed to get them to allow him to see me. I have only been

able to see him twice since I got here, both times he told me how hard it was for him to be allowed to see me.

He pushes me and I am careful not to step on the mess that he made. The button stick is pressed just beneath my right armpit, steering me towards the end of the silent corridors, the prisoners are either out to lunch or out to get their hour in the sun, a privilege I am seldom granted because I refuse to “cooperate”. The interrogations still happen, every day without fail but have grown shorter and sharper in intensity. Maybe I’m heading to one now. When we get to the area with lights I have to briefly close my eyes before I can adjust to the stark glare of the light bulbs.

The baton stick leads me to the interrogation room, I have walked this corridor often enough to know when we are heading to the interrogation room. My steps falter when I see Tafadzwa pacing in the tiny

room instead of Batsirai sitting warily with shoulders drooped. That earns me a rough push and I jerk but keep walking deliberately slow. My armpit will hate me for my stubbornness later but for now, I rebel.

I sit down on the wooden chair, it's a step up from the cold cement floor but it's also uncomfortable as fuck. I staple my hands and endure Tafadzwa's scrutiny without flinching. It's funny how just a year ago being around him made my heart flutter and butterflies roam my stomach, my skin prickling with awareness of him. Right now, he's looking at me intently and I feel nothing. Not an ounce of feeling.

"You should have told me that you are coming, I would have dressed up for the occasion," my tone is as dry as my cracked lips and I see him look at the chunky bright green sweater that I'm wearing, that itches like a bitch I might add.

My hands clutch onto the skirt of the striped red and

white dress that I am wearing beneath the chunky sweater, instead of providing some relief from the itchy sweater, the material is coarse and chaffs at my skin even as oversized as it is.

“Vimbai how did you end up here?” I shrug my shoulder and wait for him to say something less stupid.

“I can’t help you if you don’t tell me,” look at this fool trying to bullshit a bullshitter.

I drag my hands from underneath the table and I lean forward on the table as if to share something that I don’t want the guard to hear.

“You are not my lawyer, Tafadzwa, you can’t help me even if I tell you.” I see his Adam’s apple bobbing up and down as he gets worked up.



“Vimbai I am not the enemy here, let me help you.”

“So that you can call me more names on top of the ones you called me the last time we met?”

He has the decency to avoid my eyes when I mention what happened in front of the court the last time I saw him. I still remember the disdain on his face and the words that he uttered.

“This broken orphan who slept her way to getting toiletries and money for groceries can afford legal help, guess sleeping with a man your father’s age helps. Besides I wouldn’t want to spread my legs to pay you to get me out of here,” I throw back his words back at him and the way he’s gulping lets me know that he remembers exactly what he said to me.

“Vimbai come on, I know I was angry and I shouldn’t have said what I said but right now I am here, trying

to help you because I care about you. Dammit, Vimbai, you left me for another man twice my age but I'm the one who is here trying to get you out of the mess that he put you in."

I look at the way he's fired up and he reminds me of his passionate speech to the SRC team in Kariba, things had been so easier back then before I knew that his father ordered a hit on him, that his father wanted me dead because he thought I saw too much. Before I knew that his father had a whole other family that Tafadzwa knew about and lied about to me.

"Thank you, really, thank you for wanting to help me but my lawyer is more than capable to handle this matter."

I am wary of receiving any help from Tafadzwa because he will throw it back at my face and he did also blurt out the things I told him in confidence to a

bunch of our peers in the bloody street.

“He’s not coming back to help you,” he goads me, the ugly head of his arrogance rearing its head.

“Let me worry about that and you worry about who put out that hit on you. Thank you for coming to see me, I appreciate the gesture.”

He looks like he swallowed a plate of live caterpillars. He is right Ian left me to fend for myself in his mess and I will fend for myself. I don’t want anything to do with Ian or Tafadzwa.

Liar! You still think of him in your pathetic little cell and you are worried about him.

My subconscious bitches at me and I pointedly ignore the voice in my head and prepare to go back

to my cell with it's stench of pee and faeces.

“Did you ever love me?”

Tafadzwa's quiet question stops me in my tracks and I sit down and look him in the eye.

“I did, I thought you were my soulmate. I would have gone to the ends of the Earth for you but you thought so low of me, you never gave me a chance to explain. You know how words affect me, you more than anyone but you still gunned me down with your words. You always slut slammed me when you were angry then apologised. Only sorry doesn't take back the words once I hear them. The same way it won't take back the fact that I embarrassed you in front of your family and friends. But I am sorry, truly for the way things ended between us.”

There is no use telling him how Ian blackmailed me

into being with him by threatening Tafadzwa's life and throwing Nosihle, Archie, Liberty and I in prison because somewhere down the line, the lines became blurred and I fell for Ian harder than I have ever fallen in my life. Even now that I'm in jail because of Ian I don't hate him, I worry if he's ok wherever he is because I refuse to think of a world without Ian. I refuse to believe that I will never hear him say "Chitekete," the tones ranging from gentle to a murderous warning.

Some days I'm angry and I curse the day I met him, especially the first morning I woke up in this hell and I had to eat stale bread, dunk it in the watery black tea to soften it so that it becomes a bit palatable. I still have so many questions that only he can answer. Even now sitting across Tafadzwa, thoughts of Ian fill my mind.

"Goodbye Tafadzwa, I hope you find the kind of woman who will love you and treat you better than I

did. I hope you don't undermine her self-esteem with your words."

Without a backward glance, I shuffle up in my Tommy shoes without string laces and head towards the guard who brought me in here. I sincerely hope someone cleaned the mess we left but I know that I'll be jumping over the puddle. It's a wonder why inmates don't die from many diseases from the unsanitary state of the cells.

.....

Good morning Family

To the mothers, how was your Mother's day? Mine was blessedly lazy.

Don't forget to grab a copy of one of my books at a bookstore near you.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

Ntsiki: Rubies and Rain

Six

“Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to get through this thing called life.” Prince

Ruby

I end up falling asleep to the rattling sound of the behind of the van. I don't remember my dreams but I do wake up to my heart racing and realise that the car has stopped. We are at a garage that I'm not familiar with. Whatever numbness had taken over my body is ebbing away and awareness is prickling my body.

I can feel every ache, but mostly I feel panic rising

like an angry wave crushing against my rib cage. Who are these men and most importantly, where are they taking me?

One of them comes back from the direction of the convenience store with takeaway containers and a packet of snacks. I can not hear what they are saying but one of them looks behind at me and then nudges his friend. These can't be my father's men, my father is a stickler for proper dress code, his men are always dressed formally, not this casually in jeans with golf t-shirts tucked into their belts.

I look around the place where we are parked, only one petrol attendant and he is attending to someone at the furthest pump from where we are and there is no one else around. I take the risk anywhere and scream, banging on the window trying to get the petrol attendant's attention.

“Bad move, little girl,” One of my captors has found



his way to the back and before I can even let out another scream, he pins me and fumbles, looking for something.

He whistles, relaxed and I take the softening of his grip to bite down hard on his hand. The blow to my head is simultaneous with his howling in pain. I can't hear the rest of his scream because of the ringing in my ears. There is a dip in the van and the other man is dragging me by my feet. I try to kick him but he holds my legs tightly.

Within minutes I'm bound and gagged, told that my little stunt has forfeited me any food. I curl up on the thin sponge and try to hug my bound feet to my chest but the action is near impossible. Getting up to is not possible, I am tied up expertly. There is no use trying to deduce where we are going, I have never gone on any long-distance by road, I always fly or take the Gautrain from Johannesburg to Pretoria.

The harder I try to break free is the tighter the knots become, so I try to relax and think of a way out.

There feels like there is none. I feel tears burning my eyes when I think of uncle Gumburai, he would never allow anything like this to happen to his precious Ruru. I toss and turn but they steadily drive without stopping.

It's getting dark and cold, I am shivering endlessly in my little pyjamas, from the cold as well as from thirst and hunger. The car grounds to a halt so suddenly that I thud against the cabin, ouch, my back is going to bruise badly. The door opens and a gust of very cold night air whips in, making me shiver even more.

"I hope that you have learned your lesson. Sit up and eat," when he opens the gag on my mouth I tell him exactly what I think of him. That only seems to amuse him.

I look around and there are only trees and the highway to see around for miles, it's hard to tell where we are but there aren't even other cars going past, screaming would yield nothing. So I keep my peace while I am fed cold pie and even though my whole body is revolting against this, I know that I need to eat if I have any wish of making it out here. I almost drool in relief when I am made to sip some water. I lap on the water like a thirsty pudge.

Wait, why am I suddenly feeling like the whole world is spinning and I star seeing things in double.

"You...you, you drugged me!" my cry is feeble and I feel a bit of relief when my hands and legs are being set free.

I want to slap him and maybe kick his shin but my body is closing down from the drug and I feel a rough blanket being thrown on top of me and that is the last thing I am aware of before slipping darkness.

.....

When I come to, I feel my body throbbing and aching from inertia. I sit up and stretch trying to get my bearings but the remnants of the drugged fog around my brain make me take a moment before I realize the familiarity of the streets we are driving in.

When my mind finally clicks in recognition of the busier and more congested part of Harare CBD, we are pulling up in front of Harare Central police station. The burnt maroon almost dark purple brick walls cannot be missed, I am not familiar with them but I did read the sign boldly plastered on one section of them.

While I'm still trying to make sense of why I would be accosted and dragged from my apartment in Johannesburg and drugged then smuggled across

the borders only to be brought here, the men come around the back to get me. The sun is dipping into the horizon, giving way to the darkness, I don't get the chance to appreciate it because I am hauled from the car, handcuffed tightly before being dragged into the building. Except for a few curious stares, everyone keeps walking knowing better than to interfere in anything that might end up with them inside the police station. I am barefoot and the soles of my feet are sore as I am pushed to keep up with their long strides.

"Hel..." the plea dies in my mouth when the thick brown tape is plastered on my mouth.

I stumble over the steps at this barbaric act but I am not even given the chance to check if my toes are bleeding or not. I am hauled into the foyer of the police station. No one even bats an eyelid seeing a girl in short pyjamas, barefoot with a taped mouth being dragged past the foyer into one of the

corridors. They continue going about their business even as I try to struggle, my efforts are futile.

I am dragged into the office of one of the top officials if I can deduce from the difference in his crisp uniform, its decorated epaulettes. His cap or whatever their hats are called has the coat of arms and two gold lines decorating them and is perched on the desk just next to his beefy arm. Everything about the man is chunky, from his thick, hanging lips to his puffy cheeks that remind me of an overfed bulldog, droopy yet fleshy and his eyes seem sunken and beady in comparison. He rubs his stubby fingers as he beams at the men who brought me in.

“Good work boys, I don’t even want to know how you pulled this off,” he is beaming profusely while the boys he’s referring to don’t seem in the least amused.

“Babysitting is not part of our job description,” on

grumbles under his breath, I have to strain my ears to catch what he's saying.

“Did you find anything in her apartment?”

The men respond in the negative, claiming they found me high on drugs and the officer looks me up and down as if I am a piece of meat, I can see him smacking his gross lips, eeeuww, I just vomited inside my mouth. They continue talking, but I don't have a clue as to what they are referring to.

I am cold and I just want to use the bathroom so I tug at one of the men. He looks down at me annoyed like I'm some bug that he can easily squash between his thumb and his forefinger. I can't speak so I cross my legs and semi sweat to show him that I need to use the toilet.

“Take her to the toilet before she messes my office,

after that take her to the other one, we'll interrogate her tomorrow. Let's let her settle in today."

Everything about this man creeps me out and I try to stare him down but I end up tearing my eyes from the malice in his beady eyes. I am hauled again and instead of heading towards the toilets, I am taken to a prison warden. He is briefed about where I am to be taken and then men who can with me can not leave me fast enough.

The prison warden calls his friend and they chat for a while, never mind that I am now dancing from foot to foot because of this pee that needs to come out of my bladder. Finally, they finish their little chat and lead me down a dark corridor, they use the torches on their phones to light up the way. They come to a stop in front of another cell and shine their light on a figure that is huddled in a corner.

"First lady, we brought you a visitor to keep you



company,” the prison warden taunts and his friend hitters loudly but the person they are mocking keeps her head down and doesn’t acknowledge our presence.

My bladder feels like it’s on fire and when the man rips the tap from my mouth, I pee on myself a little. He is irritated by the person not reacting in any way to their taunts, he clicks his tongue and mutters some profanities, completely ignoring my plea for a toilet before pushing me into the cell and locking it behind me.

“You can use the bucket in there.”

Light is shown towards a metal bucket with pee and faeces stains caking around it and my stomach turns. They laugh and then leave us in the darkness.

God, I need to pee, I need to pee. The harder I try to

hold it, the more it fights to come out and I can feel my pyjamas getting wet. Fuck it, I'll just stand over the bucket and try to pee. Focusing on not touching the bucket is the only thing keeping my tears at bay. When did my life move from the high-end apartment, social media scandal to a stinking metal bucket in a prison cell?

.....

Morning Family.

I know I jock about hurting you a lot but trust me this story is as emotionally draining on me as it is on you. Funny story, I once almost spent a night at Harare Central police station for 'loitering' we were at a club with my friends and were rounded up as they were getting me a cab to go back to campus.

Anyways, I digress, the point is this story is for the

thousands of people being silenced and the millions who suffer against police brutality in Zimbabwe. I apologise for the hard themes in advance.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

[Rubies and Rain

Seven (continuation)

My heart squeezes at the thought of more than one night in here but I figure that we will be out in a day because uncle Batsirai will clear up this whole mess. When I voice out my trust in uncle Batsirai's capabilities, Vimbai laughs, a deep laugh emanating from her belly that has her clashing the sides of her stomach. I am beyond irritated by her crassness right now.

"Uncle Batsirai's law firm has defended people in The Hague, I don't know what you find funny in what I just said."

That seems to make her laugh harder until she wipes her eyes and does that annoying "Amhai we kani!" exclamation that is so ghetto. I wait for her

bubble of myth to burst but every time she catches her breath and looks in my direction, she breaks into more fits of laughter.

“I’m sorry, it’s just, how naïve are you about the state of your country?” I am offended by her question and when I don’t respond she continues speaking.

“Ruby, I know your uncle's capabilities as a lawyer, heck I’ve been working under him for a year now. This isn’t something that can be solved in a court of law. I have been here for four days but I haven’t been formally charged, I haven’t made any appearance in court yet everyone now knows me as your father’s killer. Where is his body? How did they jump to the conclusion that I had anything to do with his disappearance. You are here today with me in this cell, was any docket opened before you were thrown into this cell? Were your rights read out for you? Were you allowed your one phone call? Did they have any authority to extradite you from South Africa, for

what crime? Until you realize that these people are a Law unto themselves and that you can't even trust your own shadow right now, then you are in for a rude awakening."

Her tirade leaves my head spinning and I am getting scared but I have to hold on to some hope, something, anything.

"Chatunga won't let them hurt me," I hate how petulant I sound right now and I brace myself for her annoying laugh but it doesn't come instead she sighs, a sigh of what, pity? Yes, she sighs as if she pities me.

"Where is he Ruby, where is Chatunga in all of this? Has he called you since news of your father's death broke out? Has he called since your video was posted on Twitter?"

Tears well up in my eyes when I try to remember the last time I spoke to Chatunga. He has been distant for a while now and I attributed it to the distance and that's one of the reasons why I went hard on alcohol. I lost Tendero because I chose to please my father and be with Chatunga and also because I enjoyed his dick but I also lost him. I can't pinpoint exactly when he started detaching himself away from me.

"It's been months since I talked to him," I admit quietly hugging my knees from the cold draft in the room.

"There are some blankets there," I can see well enough to see her pointing to a small heap of blankets.

"How many months?"

I try to recollect the exact last phone call or text that

I got from Chatunga and it takes me a while, I gingerly prod the blankets with my toes. When I feel nothing I raise it only for a rat to fall off and scurry past me, brushing against me. I squeal and drop the blanket. There is no way in hell I am going to use that pest-infested blanket, what if I sleep with a rat hiding under it. The blanket also felt rough to the touch like it was woolen or something itchy.

“I think close to three months, our phone calls started by dropping from once or twice a day to every other day and finally dwindled to one call per week then they just stopped, just a few days before my father came to see me and I didn’t know that was the last time I was seeing him.”

“Do you think that it’s all one big coincidence? The timing is way too similar, for all this to be one big happy coincidence.”

She is musing more to herself but I can hear the



wheels turning in that head of hers. I have no idea what pieces she is trying to fit together. Chatunga and I, it was probably the distance thing and it isn't the first time that my father has gone away on unmentioned business but it is the longest that he has been gone.

“What do you think is happening?”

Her answer doesn't take long.

“I am not sure Ruby, but the less we know, the better for us. Just keep your wits around you and do not trust anyone, not even your shadow, Ruby. We are pawns in whatever sick mess this is.”

Her words sink in and a ball of dread grows in my stomach at her words.

“We are on our own.”

.....

Morning Fam

Happy weekend. Please spread the word, The Princess and the Piper are coming to town...

Love and Light

## Rubies and Rain

### Eight

“At times we wish that these clouds never came our way for all they bring with them is misery but on others they bring relief. It is their absence that is difficult to get by, to fill, for autumn is near. But then seasons do change.” — Chirag Tulsiani

A bucket full of icy chards of water is deposited on me and I jump into consciousness, screaming bloody murder. My reaction seems to satisfy these grown men whose sneers are laced with leering. I close my eyes tightly and open them again. Oh, God, this isn't a nightmare, I am still here in this filthy dump, barely covered in my pyjama shorts which are now filthy too, shivering from the cold water just dumped upon me, my teeth chattering.

“Rise and shine, your highness. What do you think this is? Your father's hotel?”

Their words don't hurt me, they remind me of one of the matrons who was mean to us, me in particular back in form one. I told my mother after she prodded into why I was unhappy and my father got her fired. I sigh because the recollection just reminded me even more that I do not have anyone.

“Get up!” The chubbier of the two guards snarls and when I don't move he kicks me, hard, in the shin.

I whimper through the chattering of my teeth and try to stand up, it's painful because his kick did a number on my leg. I feel somebody holding my hand so I can balance and I realize that it's Vimbai, she doesn't say a word and only in the dim brightness do I realize the hideousness of the green jersey she is wearing, her eyes have circles under them and a bruise runs from her left eye towards her chin, right

next to her burst and cracked lips. Just the day before yesterday, the thought of her looking like this would have made me happy but now it scares me because I know I will be looking like her soon.

“Don’t fold,” she mouths to me before she is roughly pushed back and I am dragged away from the cell.

The narrow passage doesn’t help me feel better, it’s dark and cold, dampness making it smell like mould. Whenever I fail to keep up with their long strides, I am jabbed in my ribs with the butt of a gun. The pain from my shin, ribs and being treated like trash has my eyes watering. I remember my father’s constant emphasis on not letting people know that they hurt you because it gives them power over you and I blink back the tears before they spill onto my cheeks.

“Look at that fat ass, what a waste,” the chubby guard's nasal voice rings out before I feel his stubby fingers groping me and pinching my buttocks.

I squirm and try to move away from his hands and that makes him pinch me harder. He only lets go when we get into the brighter part of the corridor and emerge into the brightness of light bulbs and a line of offices. I am pushed into a wooden door that could use a fresh coating of paint or something to make it look a bit better.

There is a desk that looks like it can topple over any time and mismatched chairs, one wooden and the other metal. This is a far cry from the interrogation rooms I have seen in movies. There is no one-way mirror, just walls with paint peeling off, floor with broken tiles and a certain mustiness which I am beginning to think exists throughout this place.

I am shoved onto the metal chair, my elbow hitting the edge of the table, I hold in my scream even though it feels like parts of my body are on fire. It irritates me that that hoodrat is calm and I know for

a fact she wouldn't let them see that she is in pain, if Vimbai can do it I can do it too.

The guards leave me alone and I breathe out, the chubby guard's roving eyes made me feel anxious, the way he was looking at me as if I am a steak of meat made me feel naked. I don't stay alone for long, a tall, burly man in a shirt, folded around his arms and trousers that look a tad too small, with a file tucked under his arm comes in and sits across from me without saying a word. The disdain in his eyes though is saying a lot.

“Where is your father?”

I blink and just as I used to manipulate them when I was a kid, the tears spring up in my eyes and I start sniffing.

“I haven't seen him in over three months, the last

time I saw him we fought over the woman he chose. My mother hadn't even been dead a year and he brought that gold-digger into our lives. Look at us now! It's all her fault and last night she told me she made him change his will! He left me nothing!"

With each sentence, my voice gets higher and my cries louder and by the last line I am wailing until the man bangs his hands on the desk. I jump a little and lower my wails but I continue crying steadily. I don't have to dig that deep because I have so much real sorrow in my heart.

"Does it look like I want to know your family history? Stop with the tearworks and tell me where your father is!"

Another bang makes me jump and I sniffle loudly before wiping my eyes with the back of my hand.



“I don’t know,” I tell him truthfully, “he could be in a ditch somewhere, dead.”

The detective or CID blows air in frustration before opening his file and there are pictures of my father with some seedy-looking men. My father with the President of Congo, the President of Prague, my dad with uncle Gumburai.

“Let’s try this again, what does your father do for a living?”

“He owns a technology company and some real estate as well as a couple of other companies,” the answer reels off my tongue easily while I try to not seem like I I’m very interested in the pictures spread in front of me.

“Then what is he doing with wanted assassins?”

He is pointing at my uncle Gumburai and it makes me want to hiss that uncle Gumburai is a good, gruff man. That under all that ape-man lies the most loyal, most fiercely protective soul. I widen my eyes.

“That is my bodyguard,” I say with more feeling than I should and he grins widely knowing that he has found my weakness and he wiggles into it.

“Your bodyguard huh? Look at what your bodyguard has been busy with the last couple of years?”

The first sign of satisfaction is the smug smile on his face as he pages through his file before putting a picture on the table and sighs as he staples his hand and waits for me to look. I wish I didn't because the sight of a slit throat and splattered brain has me gagging, leaning besides the table and vomiting all of the food that I have left in my stomach.

“Your bodyguard you say, he is a mercenary who kills people on a whim and gets some cold hard cash out of it and your father is the one behind the hits, getting clients and issuing the commands and he is the one who gets the customers' specification.”

He waits watching the different emotions play across my face as I try to come to terms with what I just saw. Is this real? Are my father and uncle involved in killing people in cold blood? Was I raised with blood money? Is this another one of those smokescreen tactics that Vimbai told me about?

“Now please help us get these mercenaries so that the killing and bloodshed can end.”

I sit up straighter and avoid looking at the gruesome picture again.

“I want to help you, I really do but I wasn't lying, I

haven't seen my father or unc... Gumburai in over three months and I have no idea if they are alive or dead or where they are. But after what you just said to me, they are as good as dead to me."

The smile of satisfaction on his face has dropped and is replaced by an angry snarl. The big guy is pissed and I put on my most spoilt pout.

"I can help you smoke them out though if you just let me call them or my uncle Batsirai."

He leans over and his cold stare chills me to my bones.

"Big mistake. You don't have any bargaining power in here and your lack of cooperation just cost you more than you know. Guards take her away."

The same guards who brought me here take me away and I am given a uniform similar to the one Vimbai is wearing and I am forced to strip while the guards are watching. When I hedge, a backhanded slap with so much force pushes me against the wall, lands on my face. With my nose bleeding, I strip down to my underwear but they make me take that off too and I quickly put on the itchy material.

I am dragged back to our cell, at least he isn't groping me in this uniform. I find Vimbai sitting with her legs drawn up and staring into space. She snaps out of it when I call her name and she wants to know how the interrogation went. I don't miss that she isn't surprised about the allegations of my uncle and father being mercenaries. The only reaction she has is when I tell her that I asked them to help me get a hold of uncle Batsirai.

"Are you crazy Ruby? Now they will think he knows where your father is and they will also terrorize him

to try and get information out of him.”

No, not uncle Batsirai! I feel sick to my stomach and so stupid. I thought I did well and I did what I've seen people being interrogated in movies do, negotiate. I pray that Vimbai is wrong and they won't touch uncle Batsirai who should get us out of this hell-hole.

.....

Morning Fam

Have a happy week ahead

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

## Rubies and Rain

Nine

You pray for rain, you gotta deal with the mud too.  
That's a part of it.

Denzel Washington

Nosihle

“I am going to post this video, whether you like it or not!”

I glare at him and he just looks at me, his stony gaze, icy and irritated. He doesn't get how useless I feel, not to mention that I have to go back to work soon and I can't in all good conscious go back without doing anything to help Vimbai.

“You said they would charge her and then we release the video but it has been five days and she hasn’t been charged, she also hasn’t been freed.”

We aren’t allowed to see her and yesterday I had to talk to her father and assure him that what he heard on the news was one big misunderstanding, that it was being sorted. I lied and said I went to see her and she is holding up just fine. God, I hope that there was at least some truth in what I told him. He sounded so frail, so heartbroken.

“Please tell her that I love her so much and I’m sorry I am not strong enough to come and be with her. I have let her down so much in her life... just tell her I am praying for her.”

I cried at the raw pain in his voice and I cried for the lost look in Davirai's eyes, the mountain just looked



at me with the same hooded look that he is giving me now, the only difference is that he is irritated now.

“This isn’t a game, no one is posting anything until I say so,” I feel like tearing my hair off at the finality in his voice but I just snort instead.

Before I can tell him exactly what I think of him ordering me around his phone rings. He raises one finger to shush me, the nerve!

“I’ve been trying to get hold of you.”

I can never get used to the way he answers the phone, going straight to the point as if he’s the one who placed the call. Something is commanding about this man, or he’s a bully, whatever it is it drives me crazy most of the time.

“What?! When was this?”

The alarm in his voice makes me step closer to him, even when his eyes flash a warning, stay out. It’s not like he can just stand up and walk away. He isn’t fully healed, the stubborn brute. I can hear the man on the other side of the line when I lean so close that our breaths are mingling.

“...I’m telling you, Joshua, they just came into my house in the early hours of the morning and dragged me to an abandoned spot up in Mount Pleasant and kept wanting to know about Ian’s whereabouts. I’m in hospital as I’m talking to you, my head stitched and nuts swollen. They did a number on me.”

“Shit! Did you see her?” The mountain sounds flustered and that can’t be good.

“No, I was taken to the abandoned spot only and

didn't set foot in the prison. But I have tipped off my newspaper friend, might as well have a positive spin on their barbaric ways."

He laughs and the laugh turns into a cough and gurgling sound like he's coughing up blood. Someone says something at the other end and the line goes dead. Before I can get away from my spying position, Joshua's hand shoots out and holds me in place as he dials another number.

While the dial tone kicks in, he looks steadily into my eyes and that makes my breathing hitch and the bastard notices, there is a slight upturn of the corners of his mouth. A surprisingly full mouth, with thick, dark lips that could be worth millions as a mouth model.

"Joshua!"

Whoever is at the other end of the line sounds breathless and hushed as if he doesn't want anyone to hear him. He shout-whispers Joshua's name.

"You know why I called."

There is shuffling on the other end before a door opens and closes then the man's voice comes back on with an echo as if he is in the toilet.

"I heard that you are dead, word around is that they killed you before taking the girl."

Joshua's hand tightens around my arm and I flinch, trying not to make a sound. The grasp brings me closer to him and I no longer know where his breathing ends and mine begins, it's as if we are breathing each other in.

“Yeah, well, I decided I still have some things left to do so I came back to the world of the living,” the mountain’s voice is lazy in comparison to the other guy’s rushed voice.

“Listen, you better stay dead because they want anything and everything that has to do with the Shadow. They have his daughter, brought her in from South Africa.”

Joshua curses and the other man pauses before his voice comes out even lower.

“Code red. They want to nab them all with treason and you know how that shit goes. The girls are proving useless with information and it’s only a matter of time before they are disposable.”

More curses from the mountain and his breathing has become heavier somehow forcing mine to

mirror his.

“Who is behind all this? It doesn’t make sense, the boss covered all angles, he always does.”

There is a slight pause then we hear water flushing and it’s hard to hear what he says but I catch the tail end.

“...this is so high up we don’t even know who is issuing the commands but I think the orders are coming from the highest office. Got to go. Don’t call me, I will call you.”

The line goes dead and Joshua hurls his phone across the room, again. He has anger issues, that’s the fourth phone since I met him and it’s only been five days. I try to get out of his grasp but he holds on, breathing heavily and his hand tightening on my arm until it feels dry and hot from the friction of his grip.

His eyes are vacant as if there is no one home. I try to scratch my way out of his grip.

“You are hurting me,” I try not to be too loud because I don’t want to wake Davirai up. I had to get her some sleeping pills for her to sleep.

At the sound of my voice, something snaps and he is back, letting go of my arm as if it just burnt his hand. I know I’m supposed to move away from him, but the turmoil in his eyes draw me in. While his wound was an open gapping mess he didn’t have the pain and emotions that are in his eyes right now.

“Nothing like this has ever happened before, Boss has gone dark. I can't reach him, I don't know if he is alive or dead. I don’t know how to help them,” the admission comes out in a harsh whisper and his whole body shudders as if rejecting the helplessness in his voice.

“Will the video help?”

I don't try to read into this need I suddenly have to soothe him and make it all better, lessen his load. He bows some air and it hits me straight in the face, warming my already warm face.

“It might, I don't know, or it might make things worse,” that helplessness again and then something snaps and shutters behind his eyes and he's back to being brisk and bossy.

“We need to do it remotely, where it won't be traced back to us and we need to move out of this place. It's a miracle that they haven't come back to raid again. We'll leave in the dead of night. Try to get some sleep.”

The dismissal is loud and clear, I get up and scurry



to the bedroom I have been sharing with Davirai. Sleep eludes me and I keep trying to add up the conversations that I heard. Who is the Shadow and what does he have to do with Vimbai? Treason? Police being sent to terrorise everyone close to him to draw him out is not something uncommon.

People get abducted from barbershops while having their hair cut, from in front of their homes for holding up placards and while walking in the street. It had always seemed so abstract, something whispered on Twitter, never really reported on the news or newspapers, no surprise there, most of the media is state-sanctioned.

Now that it's happening to Vimbai, it feels like I am in the middle of a very bad dream. What will I tell her father? She is his hope and from what Davirai told me, she had also stepped up and was taking care of her siblings too. I want to help her and save her life, the way she saved mine but it seems like she has

gotten herself tangled up in a web that I have no clue about.

Sleep must have claimed me because I am shaken into consciousness and I find the room dark and I have a throw covering me.

“Wake up, we have to go. Now!”

I don't need to be told twice, I rush to the bathroom to relieve myself and throw some cold water on my face, chase the remainder of sleep away. I hold Davirai's hand as we leave behind the fire escape. She is scared but also putting on a brave front. We don't say anything as we try to keep up with the mountain's long strides.

We don't go to the garage but he helps us scale the back wall as injured as he still is and we rush to a darkened corner two streets away and find a big

black car, almost a minivan but bigger, waiting for us. The moment Joshua gets in, the car takes off. Everything is dark inside the car and I can't even see who is driving.

They are having a hushed conversation, that coupled with the motion of the car has me feeling sleepy and I say a short prayer that Vimbai is kept safe and for God to help me save her, the way He helped her save me. Then I fall asleep with Davirai's hand in mine, while racing to the unknown.

.....

Morning Family

How is your week going? Anyone lost with regards to the story, above the normal lost of everyone else?

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

Rubies and Rain

Ten

“The soldier above all others prays for peace, for it is the soldier who must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war.”

Douglas MacArthur

One week ago...

Rain has been pelting down relentlessly down the moss green parks and fields in the Haagse Hout District. Such consistent and heavy rain is uncommon in the Woods of the Hague, especially in the prime of summer, nor are the whirling winds a common occurrence, their chilling clutches keeping even the locals indoors. Nothing will keep this

hulking man indoors, not when he has had this foreboding feeling in the pit of his wounded gut, since morning.

Pain, that would have doubled over a normal man, niggles at the corner of his brain, reminding him that he is slowly bleeding out. He grunts and crunches his teeth as he presses down the makeshift bandage that he tied around his lower torso. Pain is nothing new to him, he faced and danced with death more times than a cat's lives. He has done many despicable things in his life, killed, maimed, plundered but he is a soldier, a living killer machine and he knows no different from the age of fourteen when his voice was at war, the deep baritone at odds with the squeaky falsetto of a rushed childhood.

He has many scars as trophies from battles scraped through, it seldom felt like a win because loss overshadowed everything. He always had a pronounced black face, flared nose with a flat bridge,

bulging eyes under hooded lids, smooth skin that very few could boast of, some envied it and thick fleshy lips that were pink at the top and dark everywhere else. He has never been by any standards handsome, but he came back from the Chimurenga war a monster.

The most prominent scar he has stretches from just under his eye, he almost lost that eye and he still remembers it like it was yesterday, slashed his cheek, leaving congealed flesh like tiny roots in its wake towards his chin.

It is the first thing everyone see when they look at him, he always sees the revulsion before they mask it and at times even worse, pity, he thinks it a misfortune to see his face. Everyone except his boy and his Ruru. Ian offered to get doctors to remove the scarred tissue but Gumburai figured that in their line of work, the scar couldn't hurt. It bellies a meanness that is nothing compared to his actual

ruthlessness but it serves its purpose. He relishes the look of surprised disgust on people's faces as they see his face just before they die.

The wars have taken so much from him, but most of all of the wars robbed him of his humanity. The Chimurenga took his face and Gukurahundi crushed his testicle, depriving him of a chance to ever have children. Not that he wanted any besides the child that he had to pry from underneath its mother's corpse. Instead of repulsion at the scar that was still fresh then and even more repellent, the boy had looked at him with awe, as if he, Gumburai was a hero. At first, he had not wanted the boy to follow him around like a lost little lamb, when snarling and every other scare tactic didn't stop the kid from attaching himself to Gumburai, he finally conceded and stepped up to "father" the boy.

From that day, as young as he also was back then, Gumburai took the boy under his wing, protecting

him and teaching him how to protect himself. He kept the boy alive through landmines, being imprisoned in an enemy camp and the death that constantly surrounded them. In return, the boy looked at him with stars in his eyes and when the military discarded them like used condoms after a certain unclassified mission, his ward had been the one to take Gumburai under his wing and teach him how to attach a price to his unique set of skills. To blend with the shadows. They didn't have a side or care, they were mercenaries of the highest order. But most importantly, they were family.

“Uncle Gumburai, you are my Gummy Bear!”

His sweet Ruby's voice ringing in his ear, makes him grunt and brace himself against the wind which has picked up speed and continue looking even though the fog is also growing denser. They had been invincible until that slip of a girl came along. Thoughts of Vimbai make Gumburai purse his lips,



even as he narrows his eyes at a shadowy form on the ground close to him. No, it's not his Ian, just a pile of rocks. His energy is sipping away but he won't stop searching until he finds his boy, even if it means he dies while searching.

When that girl first came, he knew she was trouble from a mile off. She has balls of brass and is nothing like Ruby's mother who was the sweetest person that ever lived, according to him. While Ruby's mother had been homely, this new girl was calculating and didn't mind putting Ian in his place. But she made his boy happy, even a little crazy, lines suddenly became blurred and he had thoughts of retiring from this life. Gumburai tried to make him have sense, there was no retiring from this life, not when you knew as much as they did.

Ian was lost in a world of dreams, he wanted to give his new love a hustle free life that didn't involve security details or constantly looking over her

shoulder. They butted heads, until Ian told him of his plan to also free his Ruby from this life. That gave him pause, he hated that sorry excuse of a boy for all the tears he made his Rub-Rub cry. Always wanted to snap his tawny, little neck. He would do anything to get Ruby out of that boy's clutches.

So they went dark, into the biggest mission of their lives. He was the muscles bulldozing where necessary while Ian smoothed things over, had he wanted, his boy would have made a stellar President. He had the brains and knew how to oil people, or maybe Gumburai was just a proud father biased towards the boy he had shaped into a man.

They both knew the score of failing in this battle and so they fought hard and dirty, everything had been coming together until Ian had secured a meeting with Balster from the International Court of Justice. He wanted them to dig even deeper on the man but Ian had grown impatient and he wanted to wrap up

the mission and go home.

A slight movement, makes Gumburai stop and press himself against the trunk of a Hungarian oak tree and suspend his breath, only to let out a pain-filled breath when a squirrel scampers past him, hurrying on its way. The rain and fog make it harder for him to see anything in the waning light but he doesn't have a flashlight on him and his eyes aren't as good as they used to be.

Gumburai hadn't wanted them to separate but Ian had insisted that to gain this man's trust, considering the sensitivity of the information that they had, he would go in alone while Gumburai watched over him in a building just over The Binnenhof, a parliament building where the handover was set to take place this morning. Some of their men were also stationed close and when snipers began gunning them down, Gumburai knew that they had walked into a trap. Amid the artillery shells, air

bursting muffled sound of sniper shots, Gumburai's thoughts had only been to get Ian out of there. He was almost at the Binnenhof building, keeping to the shadows as much as he could when a bullet sliced through his lower gut.

While that had made him double over for a minute as he caught his breath, it didn't stop him from running after a car that he saw Ian being shoved into before it raced down the A12. He followed it down to the forest and something in his battered gut told them that they shot Ian and disposed of him in the forest. Which was why he was scouring the extent of the Haagse Bos, which ironically the Germans used to launch their rockets. He's running out of time. It will be dark soon and he has lost his bearings.

He keeps trudging along the damp grass, straining his eyes to try and see if he can spot Ian slumped over somewhere. He must not have been looking hard enough because he steps into a freshly dug

grave. Gumburai curses softly before retracing his steps and crouching next to the grave. It was dug hurriedly and clumsily. Heart in mouth, he starts digging through the black mud with his bare hands. His position isn't ideal for his gut wound so he kneels instead and continues digging.

An hour later his hand comes into contact with a shoe. Luckily, the grave isn't that deep but his strength is depleting at a rapid rate now. He keeps removing piles of dirt until he reaches a hand and it's dark now but he can make out the blue, breasted suit that Ian had on. His heart is hammering against his chest, for the first time in his miserable life, Gumburai tastes the acidic bitterness of fear. His rough hands briskly frisk his son's body searching for a wound, when he doesn't find any on his body, his alarm grows. Tentatively, he touches his face and sure enough, mixed with the damp earth is the sticky wetness of blood.

They shot him in the temple. Gumburai searches for a pulse with shaking hands and almost weeps in relief at the very faint ticking of a pulse in his boy's neck. He fumbles in his pockets and finds the bunner phone that took some of the brunt of the gunshot. It's wet and sticky with his blood but still working.

“Damn it to hell!”

He exclaims when he realises that there is no cell reception in the neck of the woods. He takes a fortifying breath and braces himself before picking up his boy, now a burly man, and cradling him in his arms as if he is carrying a newborn baby, careful not to interfere with his head wound. Steadily he walks in the dark forest, lost but keeping his wits around him.

He disregards the pleadings of his body, he has to get to a road or somewhere with cell reception. Ian

isn't moving, it feels like he is carrying a corpse but this is his boy, even if he had to look death in the eye and barter with his own soul, he was going to make sure that his boy makes it, for his Ruby. She won't survive losing her father too.

Through sheer brute will, he somehow gets to the road and when he checks his phone, the cell reception is back, only one weak bar but that's all he needs to place the call. It rings only once and he barks into it.

“Commander down, temple shot but faint pulse picked up. On the A12 in Haagse Bos.”

The last of his strength leaves him and he crumbles to the road, still cradling his boy and he hunches over him, willing his life to sip into his. He doesn't fear death, he is a soldier and to him, death is an honourable discharge. But the world still needs his Ian.

“I’m proud of you, my son,” the hoarse words are lost to the woods and he slips into unconsciousness, his body finally giving in.

.....

Morning Fam

Happy weekend ahead.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo



## Rubies and Rain

### Eleven

“Just when you’ve had enough, life gives you more. And just when you think it’s rained enough, it starts to pour.” Unknown

I am woken up by the sound of retching, my ears prick up and after a couple of heaving seconds pass, the retching starts afresh. My muscles are sore, coiled tightly from the coldness of the cement, a week later and my body is still protesting the harsh extremities that I have been cast into. I get up carefully and rub my eyes to acclimatize them to the dim light in the cell.

The sight of Vimbai bunched over and hugging that ghastly metal bucket has me gagging and hedging but nothing comes out, I refused the cabbage and

beans bonanza that they shoved under our cell bars yesterday. The last time I ate their beans I was diabolically sick and I guess they are having the same effect on Vimbai.

After some more dry heaving, she takes the metal cup with water and uses it and a dollop of the little collage we have left to clean her mouth. They don't allow us to have tooth brushes, so we clean our teeth using our fingers.

The conditions in here are appalling to say the least. We only got a piece of the green bar of soap which smells like poop. We get food once a day mostly and twice during the weekend, lumpy sadza with boiled cabbage or boiled sugar beans or as happened yesterday, a mixture of both. The food barely has any cooking oil and no tomatoes. It isn't surprising that Vimbai has lost some weight and she looks pasty, I can only imagine how I look.

“It’s the food, you shouldn’t have eaten it,” I tell her as she leans against the wall panting a little from the exertion. She closes her eyes and doesn’t say anything.

“When are they giving us proper hygiene products? Beds? A decent toilet at least and properly wash that bucket? We don’t even get to wash our uniforms!”

I continue talking because the silence is beginning to get to me. Vimbai talks less and less each day and spends most of the time rocking herself with her hands covering her ears. I’m afraid that the longer we are here, we will both end up raving mad.

“How long are they going to keep us here without going to any trial? What happened to innocent until proven...”

“Ruby, please,” her voice is weak and it makes me

panic and whenever I panic, I tend to blubber.

“No, really, Vimbai, we stink! Soon we will be malnourished from eating only sadza and those ghastly beans and cabbage. We need more than that smelly green bar soap and I’m expecting my periods soon, what will I use?”

“Ruby, enough!” the vehemence in her voice makes me close my mouth.

But she is already agitated and she gets up and starts pacing, wringing her hands like an addict in need of her next fix.

“I am battling each day to remain sane, to not let the voices in my head take control and make me do something to harm myself. Then there is you! Always whining. Always complaining. I am sick of it! Do you think I don’t know that we stink? Do you think

I don't know that the food is horrible? Have you ever heard me complain? This, this hell is now your reality, deal with it!"

Her words don't get to me but her tone and the crazy look in her eyes makes me shrink and try to blend with the filthy walls. She keeps muttering things until she tires herself out and she slides down the wall and breaks into a sob. A gut-wrenching sob that makes my insides churn with fear.

She has been the stronger one since I came here and I fed on some of her calmness but seeing her breakdown like this hammers the point home that we are in a hopeless situation.

I do not know if I should reach out and try to comfort her, so I just let her be. The sobs give way to whimpers and a few mumblings before the pattern of her breathing changes. She has fallen asleep. I try to make her sleep better and put the smelly blankets,

hers and mine, around her. She mumbles something again before she is lost to the world.

I know I am privileged and maybe a little spoilt. Ok, a lot spoilt but through it all, my father taught me how to treat people with respect and most importantly dignity. The treatment we get here is anything but dignified. When the clanging sound across the bars of our cell came, Vimbai still doesn't move. I want to check on her but I am dragged out of the cell by those mean prison guards.

This time I am pushed through the dark passage but instead of the interrogation room, I am pushed towards the visiting room. This is my first time getting a visitor, my palms grow sweaty and I make sure to keep my head down, in case someone recognizes me. My heart is pounding, what if it's Chatunga? I do not want him to see me like this, my hair is dry, with particles from the blankets on it and possibly some lice as well. My lips are dry and

cracked, so are my bare feet.

Relief floods me when I realise that it is uncle Batsirai but the relief quickly turns to guilt when I notice the bandage around his head, the sealing of his eye above the mask he's wearing and the sling on his arm. This is my fault, Vimbai did warn me and as much as I dislike her, she spoke the truth.

“Ruru, urisei mwanangu,” his greeting causes my eyes to tear because instead of calling me his niece, mzukuru, he called me his child and asked me how I am. No one has asked me how I am since I heard of the news of my father’s purported death.

“I feel lost, uncle Batsirai, like I am stuck in an endless nightmare. I am sorry I got you hit, it’s all my fault, I shouldn’t have...”

“Hush my child, it’s not your fault, knowing your

father I am just surprised it took this long.”

There is a wry and fond smile on his face that gives me hope but also makes me so emotional as well. It reminds me of my father.

“Why are they keeping us here? Where is my father? Uncle Gumburai? Are they mercenaries?” The questions tumble over each other, bursting out of my chest.

“The walls have ears, Ruru,” my uncle says softly while casting an eye on the guard who doesn't pretend like he isn't eavesdropping.

“I don't know why they are keeping you here, they keep delaying sending both of you to court stating fuel shortages and State witnesses going missing or escaping the country, it's a mess. I am trying my hardest to get you both out of here. How is Vimbai?”



I breathe in trying to loosen my chest a bit, it suddenly feels so heavy.

“I’m scared about her state of mind, she doesn’t say much, she just sits there rocking herself and covering her ears. Today she said she is fighting the voices in her head and she broke down. I’m afraid she might do something to harm herself.”

Uncle Batsirai sighs and rubs his face with his one good hand. He loosens his tie as if it just got hot in here.

“She was diagnosed with schizophrenia recently and she had been undergoing therapy, I brought her medicine. It might help.”

My eyes are wide as I accept the plastics that he is carrying, there are some cosmetics and bathing

products in there, sanitary pads and I almost weep when I see deodorant, chocolates, fruits and takeaways.

“I thought after the release of that video of her being taken by the police and the pressure that the public have been putting on ZRP, she would be out by now, but they are not budging. I will keep pushing though for both of you to come out of this hellhole. My sister is turning in her grave, I can't let her down.”

Mention of my late mother makes me all teary again, I wish I visited her grave more while I had a chance. I was too caught up in the pain of losing her that I couldn't stand going and seeing her in a patch of land. My mother, with her infectious laugh and big hugs, reduced to a pile of dirt. I just couldn't bring myself to go there even when my dad asked me to go with him. I wish I had.

“Thank you, uncle Batsirai,” I want to hug him but

before I can, I am jerked off by the pudgy guard, he is the meanest of all the guards.

He frog marches me out of the visiting room. I turn to look at uncle Batsirai and I catch the tears in his eyes as he waves sadly at me. Even though my heart is heavy, I smile as brightly as I can and wave back at him. That earns me a push and I almost stumble and fall. When we get to our cell, instead of opening up for me, he grabs the plastics I am carrying forcefully.

“Hey! Those are mine!”

I try to hold on to them but he has more brute force than me and a backhanded slap pushes my face to the metal bars and my body jerks in shock and pain and he takes the plastics.

“Do you think that this is your father’s prison?”

Traitors don't deserve any of this," he sneers with so much contempt in his voice while his friend snickers from behind us, watching, it almost kills me to beg him but I need to.

"Please, you can take everything else but can I at least have the medication and my sanitary pads," I hate the desperation in my voice even worse when he lets out a loud, cruel laugh.

He fumbles with the plastics and I make a short prayer that he at least shows me this mercy. He holds out a small brown bag and passes the rest of the plastics to his friend before opening it up and taking out some bottles with different medicines.

"You mean this princess?"

I nod eagerly even though my head hurts and I hold out my hands in a cupping manner, showing him

more respect than he deserves.

My heart shrinks and my teeth clench as he empties the contents of the bottles on the ground and proceeds to ground the pills into the dust. Tears that have been threatening come out in torrents of hot anger. I will make him pay for this, even if it's the last thing that I do.

Their loud laughter grate my ears as he shoves me into the cell, I hold it in until I hear their footsteps receding before I break down and cry. The pain, anger and humiliation all burning my chest.

.....

Happy week ahead Family

I will put up some of my research on the state of Zimbabwean prisons on this page's Story, do check it out.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

Rubies and Rain

Twelve

“It is not light that we need, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake.”

Frederick Douglass

Nosihle

I feel caged and all kinds of useless. Vimbai saved my life and I am failing to get her out of jail. I hate failing, I hate feeling useless and helpless. Frustrations are high and I might be out of a job soon. I need to go back to Beitbridge but there is a mountain in my way. The mountain is this pigheaded man who has somehow taken it upon himself to be

my security detail in the interim.

“I don’t understand mou... I mean Joshua, there is no way the video will trace back to me and I don’t think the police or whoever is interested in Vimbai will also be interested in me. I need to go to work.”

I fold my arms and try to coat the exasperation in my voice with a slow emphasis on each word. He only looks up briefly from his computer and utters the same words he has been uttering all day that set my teeth on edge.

“It’s not safe, until the threat against us is eliminated or at least contained, you are not going anywhere.”

He goes back to his computer and I look at the heavy vase just across him longingly, I want to smash it over his thick skull, maybe that is the only way I will be able to get through to him.

“At least let me call Tafadzwa, Vimbai's ex, he has political connections...” it's as if I poked a bear, the way he jerks up and growls.

“No one is calling anyone! Do you want to put us all in danger? I said I'm handling it and I am!”

“You've been handling it for two weeks now,” I hiss mindful that Davirai is studying in the next room, “two weeks and nothing is happening, just your pig-headedness!”

“This one is above you, I am trying to work and your nagging isn't working.” It's the way he dismisses me that has me snapping.

I don't have to sit here and be put down by this man, I am not his prisoner for crying out loud! I storm off to my designated bedroom, not in the mood to



appreciate the soft hues used in this large house and the state of the art flat-screen TV taking up half of the wall in my room. I drag my bag, check to see if I still have enough money, I do. I hesitate before dragging my overnight bag out, should I say goodbye to Davirai? I think against it because seeing her will dissolve my resolve to leave this place. It will also make me feel like a failure. I tried, I tried to help Vimbai but this is above me as the mountain said and I am the sole breadwinner at home. Vimbai will understand, I hope she does.

I drag my bag out quietly and go downstairs, hoping and praying that the front door isn't locked. I sigh in relief when it opens and I step out. I take one final look at the lounge that gives off hunting game cabin vibes, with no personal picture or anything that can give you an idea of who owns the place, then I close the door behind me and brace myself for the long walk ahead. I have no idea how far it is to the main road or any road, we were sleeping when we got here, and we haven't stepped out since.

I think we might be in the middle of Nyanga. I say this because where this safe house is built is on high land, a huge, sturdy mansion in foggy, cloudy and dewy terrain. The view in the mornings is to die for, it's like if you stretch your hand far enough, you can touch the clouds. Trees are keeping the house tucked in like a haunted house in those horror movies but somehow this house is cosier than it is scary. I would have enjoyed it more if I didn't have to worry about Vimbai and my job. All I can pray for right now is being able to find my way to the main road and hitch-hike back to Beitbridge and my job

The terrain is rough and rocky, I curse underneath my breath because my shoes though flat, do not have the strong grip needed for such a hike. There are mountains all around me, the tallest to my right with wisps of mist surrounding it. The greenery is majestic to behold and takes my mind off my shoes and treacherous terrain. The blend of clear blue sky, grey smouldering granite countertops, dense green

vegetation and mist is one that would give any artist a mini orgasm.

The novelty of my surroundings soon wears off when it feels like I have been walking for hours and there is nothing but trees and mountains behind and in front of me. My ears prick up at the sound of water crashing, contemplating whether I should continue down the trek I was using or take a tiny peek at the waterfall, my curiosity wins and I move towards the sound of the water, making sure to leave my scarf around a tree to help me navigate my way back.

The waterfall is breathtaking in the peek afternoon sunlight and I catch my breath even as I take pictures and videos, nothing can immortalize this beauty. After ten minutes, I regretfully have to turn back and go back to the track before it starts getting late.

I find my scarf and head back to the road I was on. I am now tired and thirsty, I should have carried some water, I was too scared to go close to the crushing waters I just left to drink. Surely, it can't be much further from the main road now.

Panting in what feels like an eternity later, I'm still walking when I hear the sound of an approaching car. The precarious nature of my situation hits me a little too late, I am alone, female, unarmed in the thick of a forest that I have no idea of. While the approaching car might help me get out of here, it might also end up with me raped and left for dead in some grove. While still praying that fate is kinder to me, a big black SUV comes to a halt beside me. I try to hide my relief when I see Joshua's annoyed face in the driver's seat.

"Are you fucken insane or just plain stupid?!"

His loud bellow almost has me weeping in relief, as

much as he annoys and irritates me half the time, Joshua makes me feel safe. He has been keeping us safe for the past two weeks. That doesn't stop me from stubbornly lifting my chin at him in defiance.

"You said it yourself, saving Vimbai is above me and I need to get back to work or else I will be fired, if I haven't already been fired already."

My retort has him leaping off the car and banging the door before stalking towards me, everything in me is telling me to run, but I stand my ground. I know he won't hurt me, at least not physically.

"There is a threat against us and you might not even be alive to reach Beitbridge, how do you not understand this? I can't be trying to get Vimbai off jail, trying to get in touch with my boss and also worrying about and babysitting you! Davirai has more sense than you and she is a flipping teenager!" His words make me flinch but I am not going to give

him the satisfaction of seeing me cry.

“The threat isn’t against me, I am a nobody, no one cares about my goings, except for my mother and my sister’s children who are relying on my paycheck to put food on the table.”

He looks down at that and has the decency to at least feel bad. He blows some air as if he is trying to calm himself.

“I will make sure that you get this month’s salary,” his quiet words startle me, he was fuming mere seconds ago.

“That is not the point! Do you have any idea how much I prayed for this job? How much I enjoy it? It’s more than just the money. I love my job and I am at least useful at it. I can’t do anything for Vimbai, nothing!”

I did not expect the shitload of emotions that hits me. I sag, my bag sliding off my shoulders and I start crying. If there is anyone who doesn't deserve all of this it is Vimbai. When will she catch a break? His expensive musky smell crowds me before I hear a grunt and I am being engulfed into warm lean, muscled flesh. I hate feeling this helpless and I can't seem to be able to find the faucet of these bloody tears so that I switch them off! Joshua holds me through the sobs wracking my body until they are all spent and I feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders.

He tilts my face and looks into my puffy eyes, tenderly wiping off the tears from my eyes. The gentleness I did not expect from this mountain of a man with so many rough edges.

"I promise you, we will get Vimbai out and I will make sure your job is secure or that you get another one.

Don't worry about your mother, I'll take care of them. Just please, let me do my job and no more running off."

Something about his gentle tone, draws me to him and I realize that his eyes are like molten chocolate with drips of honey. I stand on tiptoe, placing my lips on his. I wish I was brave enough to do more than just placing my lips on his. When he doesn't respond, I want the ground to open up and swallow me. Just as I'm tearing my lips from his, he groans before plundering my mouth.

There is no other apt description for this onslaught on my lips. His lips are hard but possess a certain tenderness tempered with wild possessiveness. I feel marked by Joshua's kiss way more than Jacob's huffing over me ever did.

When the kiss ends, awkwardness hangs precariously between us and he breaks it by taking



my bag and putting it in the car before he opens my door. It's as if I imagined the passionate Joshua who was just mauling my lips, but I can still feel him on my lips, his smell is all over me and I hold myself before I press my hand to my lips. The drive back is silent, until I awkwardly clear my throat.

“Was I anywhere near the road or highway?”

He looks at me briefly before smirking, a short tilt of the corners of his lips and his top lip curling transform his face, this man is beautiful.

“Not even close, we are just outside Nyanga National Park, the large mountain you see there is Mount Nyangani, the mountain that swallows people, so please don't leave without me again.”

Something has shifted between us, or maybe it's wishful thinking on my part but he seems less

guarded and even a little playful.

“I saw a waterfall inside the woods,” I tell him because it feels good to talk to him without him flowering at me or dismissing me.

“Oh yeah? I will fuck you in front of that waterfall one day, with only the birds and the mountain animals as our audience.”

His eyes meet my startled ones for a moment and the promise in them send tremors throughout my body. The idea of us, naked in the wild, is so wrong, but it has my heartbeat racing, my labia throbbing and I have to press my thighs against each other at the thought. Somehow I just know that when the mountain claims me fully, my world will be shattered in an earthquake.

.....

Good morning family

Preorders are now open for The Princess and the Piper, R300 (including delivery) please text +27620931434 for banking details. Even those in Harare and Bulawayo are welcome to Preorder.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

## Rubies and Rain

### Thirteen

Sometimes, you just have to bow your head, say a prayer, and weather the storm- Unknown

Trigger warning: sexual violence SLN

“You should eat,” there is laughter lacing her voice as she offers me a handful of sadza and beans and I wrinkle my nose in distaste.

“No, thank you. How do you even eat that?”

Vimbai shrugs her shoulders and continues to throw the dollop of sadza into her mouth and chew as if she’s been invited to high tea with the Queen of

England. She has been better ever since my break down or she's trying to act strong and cement her words, "Don't worry Ruby, I will be fine. I've only started using the pills recently and the voices have been part of my life since I was nine."

Only when she was nine, she wasn't in a dark, smelly and damp prison cell but I appreciate how she's trying and coming out of her shell a bit. She's also eating, nonplussed. I am trying to feed off her energy. The left side of my face is still throbbing from the impact of hitting the cell iron bars.

"Weren't you a border? We used to eat beans and sadza sometimes, granted it was cooked a bit better and had salt but still. You can't live on porridge alone."

Even as she is talking she's dipping her hand and only using her two fingers to scoop the sadza because it is sticky and if you make the mistake that

I made of folding it in you hand, your inner palm remains caked with sadza.

“Peterhouse Girls wasn’t that kind of boarding school, we had floating weekends, played Polo and chess, there were more white girls than blacks and that should give you a hint of the menu,” thinking of high school equities thinking of Tendero, bittersweet because I might never see her again.

Vimbai whistles and the sound makes me stop from going down the Tendero pathway to misery and regrets.

“Here I was thinking Regina Mundi was elite, you make it sound like I learnt in the Bundus. What is a floating weekend?”

She is done with her plate and looking longingly at mine, I push it towards her and she smiles, I see the

flash of her teeth before she grabs my plate and starts eating.

“Weekends when our parents were allowed to come and collect us, mom would come religiously and we would go out with Tendero and her mom...” my voice catches as the memories choke me up.

Mom loved Tendero, when Tendero’s parents couldn’t come, she would take us both for whatever date she had planned from kayaking to simple ice cream dates, she always made them special.

“I am sorry about your mom,” her voice is quiet with traces of understanding and pity.

“I miss her so much, it hurts to even think about her so I try not to. She was all warmth and radiated this glow about her. She was the buffer between me and my dad. When she left, we also sort of drifted apart.

Do you want to know what the worst part is? My last words to him," I take a shuddering breath and I am grateful that she doesn't say anything, she's just quietly listening.

"I told him that I wish he had died instead of mom, the kicker is that it wasn't something I thought at the spur of the moment and in the heat of anger. It always felt like life would have been better with my mom in it, you know? Like mom always had a solution, a kind word, a warm hug and Dad was just avoiding me as much as I was avoiding him if he wasn't pushing me towards Chatunga. It got to a point where I hated him, enough to wish death on him and he could be dead by now."

There is somber silence between us as I try to battle with my guilt and force it back into the box where I was storing all my pent up emotions. I'm startled when I feel Vimbai's hand clutching mine and squeezing softly. The little gesture makes me teary



and I look up, blinking the tears away. Even in the dark, I have cried enough tears.

She yawns and tries to stifle the yawn but it's there and I almost smile at how routine she is, she eats and drinks water then five minutes later, she yawns and quickly falls asleep, while I struggle trying to find a spot on the floor that is less hard. Impossible, I know, but a girl can dream.

"You can sleep, I'm ok," I say when she yawns for the third time.

"I must have eaten too much of those beans even though they tasted a bit funny today," the last word is accompanied by another loud yawn. She folds herself on the floor and is out like a light in the next minute.

I sigh because talking to her at least provided me

with some escape, now I have to confront my thoughts.

Happy thoughts, happy thoughts, I try to will my brain.

It takes me to the Chimanimani of 2017, we had gone hiking up the steep mountain and I got tired halfway so Tendero offered to carry me on her back. I remember her smell mingled with sweat, making me dry hump her back while trying not to get caught by teachers with us. I remember her laughter before she snuck her hand up my gym skirt and pinched my clitoris.

I remember the waterfall we stood in front of before taking a group picture for the school website.

Tendero had a thing for water bodies and she stood so close to the water fall that I grew scared that she would fall over the cliff. The water splashed against us, while I squealed in annoyance, she just stood

there with her shoulders straight, taking in the waterfall. Thoughts of being on Tendero's back make the hard floor more bearable.

I'm slowly drifting off to sleep when footfalls sound in the passage, at times the guards patrol. I try to ignore the sound and fall asleep but when the footfall stop in front of our cell, it makes me prick up my ears and when the gate is opened, my heart rate quickens. No one comes into our cell especially not in the middle of the night. I try to locate Vimbai with my fingers but she is just out of reach. I yelp when the blanket is snatched away from me and the guard looks surprised to see my reaction, then he breaks into a sneer, his pudgy face crinkling like a fat cake in hot oil.

"Well this is going to be all the more fun," the sneer in his voice revolts me.

When I feel his chubby hands on my thighs, stubby

fingers and rough nails digging into my inner thighs. I remember uncle Gumburai's teachings and I position my foot right and aim for his nuts. I miss but still get to jab him hard.

"Bitch!" he hollers and I wonder why Vimbai hasn't woken up yet.

"You'll play with her just now, get her out of here in case someone comes," another guard is standing in the opening of the cell and when the pudgy one turns to respond, I try my kick again and this time I catch him straight in the nuts.

This time his scream is louder and yet still Vimbai is fast asleep. I try to call out to her and shake her but nothing. I am torn away from her and lifted kicking and screaming until the guard puts a hand to cover my mouth. His pudgy friend is walking behind us while doubled over. I try to wiggle and break free but none of it works. This guard is much stronger and he

holds my legs just as I'm trying to kick him. We walk down to the corridor until we reach the last cell, farthest from the passage leading out of the cell areas. He pushes it open and tosses me down so carelessly that I hurt my arm and torso.

"Dear God, please don't let this happen," I beg in my mind even as the pudgy officer kicks me in my ribs. The pain is instant and causes me to double over.

"Easy Tawanda," his friend only cautions when he kicks me in the face.

"This bitch thinks that she is special!" I am doubled over in pain but it still feels marginally better than what I know is about to go down.

"You can tame her first, I'm going to man the gate before it's my turn."

“No, my balls still hurt, you go first.”

At this point, I just want to be anywhere but here. The painful part is that I can hear everything above my pain. I hear the rustle of his pants and his zip going down, every sound amplified by my fear. He roughly shoves my thighs apart even as I try to fight, I really do but he’s too strong. My panties are roughly shoved aside.

“It's high time you knew how it’s like to be fucked by a man so that you stop rubbing your vagina against another vagina.”

When he penetrates me without a second thought, I feel my vagina tearing apart and I scream but my scream is swallowed by his hand. I struggle to breathe over his large palm that smells like fish and not the good fish you find in restaurants. His strokes are aggressive and he pushes his hand down harder, the faster he goes and I feel pieces of my soul

tearing apart with every thrust and his other hand comes to my neck and he's choking me.

"You like that don't you? This is what being with a man feels like, you filthy cunt."

Tears burn my eyes and leave a hot trail of despair on my cheeks as he goes on and on, more aggressive with each stroke until he splashes his stinking semen all over my face. I topple over and vomit the minute he gets off me, there is nothing much in my stomach but it still turns at the smell of him that is clinging on to my face. I try to wipe off the semen, mixed with my tears, mucus and vomit but it's fruitless and someone is dragging me by my legs.

I don't even try to fight him, I have no fight left in me, no tears and when he rams his fat penis in my anus, the excruciating pain makes me scream.

“Every hole inside you must be filled by real men so that you stop rubbing yourself against women!”

His friend laughs at his pun. His grunts get louder and I can't block them out. Inside I'm just waiting, waiting for the numbness to take over and when it finally does, I hope for death.

.....

Good morning Fam

I am sorry for the contents of today's insert and any wounds it might open up.

Love and Light



Busisekile Khumalo

Rubies and Rain

Fourteen

"Ain't no human head big enough to calculate misery like that." The devil all the time

Luxembourg City fringes

Tension hangs thick like a fog tinted by the doctor's slight piss and obvious fear. He cowers at the obvious deranged anger of this hideous man before him, made even scarier by the impatient anger reddening his eyes and the vein jumping on his face. The doctor clutches at the metal of the real hospital bed in the makeshift hospital room set up in a secure location just outside the city of Luxembourg. His scattered brain tries to conjure up all the English that seems to have deserted him at the sight of this

man's wrath.

“I did all, no? Yes! I did all but the brain very tricky, very stubborn, so no wake up but patched clean.”

Through his haste to reassure, his statement makes less sense and he prays that the large man in front of him does not snap him into two. The doctor tries another way to persuade the angry man and have himself not killed.

“I patch you up too and look, nice healing, no death,” he is perspiring bullets and convinces himself that the wet warmth between his legs is the perspiration of his testicles and not piss, when it’s actually a mixture of both.

“I don’t care about me, why isn’t my son waking up?” roars Gumburai, causing the doctor to jump in fear, further dampening the spot on his pants, yet his

precious son remains comatose only breathing through the humming machinery.

“There is still activity in his brain as you can see here, no?” he asks while using the respite to put as much distance as possible between him and the angry man.

“We doctors, not understand all that happens in the brain but the bullet pass downward from the left frontal lobe tip toward the temporal lobe and brainstem, very devastating, because it pass through eloquent brain tissue, injure important vascular structures inside his head. Luckily it was a penetrating wound and no perforating wound, but still too much pressure on cranium. Even after performing the craniectomy, first week or two after trauma is the acute and critical-care stage.”

Gumburai becomes even more frustrated by the use of too many medical terms but no clear answer to

the burning question, when will Ian wake up? Will he ever wake up and will he be normal or did the shot leave him a quadriplegic? That's all he wants to hear not this mention of uranium and lobes.

"General, you have a call," bursts in a stocky but less scary man and the doctor is relieved when he is summarily dismissed, he shuffles out of the room trying to shield the damp spot in front of his trousers. Gumburai snatches the phone and grunts into it.

"Our mutual friend said if he didn't succeed in delivering the cheese, we go straight for the head," the line goes dead but Gumburai knows exactly who just called and why they called.

He is uncomfortable with the backup mission that he now has to spearhead alone, but Ian is the one who set up all the pawns, rooks, knights, bishops in this mission and while Gumburai might not agree with his sentiments especially after the ambush in the

Hague, he knows Ian's strength lies most in strategy planning, covering all angles and if there is one person who can get them out of this mess is his son even in a comma. He is running out of time and so is his Ruby.

"Ask that doctor, if we can fly him to South Africa in the state that he's in." Heads are going to roll, Gumburai will make sure of it.

.....

Harare Central Police Station

Vimbai stretches out her arms feeling disoriented, she hasn't slept so long or so soundly ever since she got here but her body feels wrong. It feels like someone was throwing stones at her. She wrinkles her nose at the smell, today it smells worse than normal and the moment the smell settles in her

stomach, she quickly gets up and hurls all the contents in her stomach on the blasted metal bucket. She wipes her mouth with the back of her hand after gurgling some water. A whimper makes her turn and try to locate where it is coming from.

In the dim light, it's hard to make out anything but when the whimper comes again it leads her towards the iron bars in the cell and as she approaches, the smell grows stronger. She covers her nose with the crook of her elbow, but some of the metallic smell of blood mixed with that of faeces still get onto her mouth. The picture that greets her eyes from the sliver of light that comes in from the small opening high up close to the ceiling, is one that turns her blood cold.

There is Ruby with her red and white uniform bundled around her waist, lying at an awkward angle like she was tossed there. Blood and human excretion have caked around her neither region.

Vimbai bits back a scream at the sight and feels her stomach twisting, she moves closer and when she tries holding her, Ruby's whimpers turn into shrieks of terror. Ruby thinks that those monsters have come again and she wants to fight them but her body is numb and her spirit is dead. She closes her eyes against the pain and all she sees is their teeth in the dim light. She can still hear their groans of pleasure, the smell of their sperm as they ejaculated all over her. She wants to scream in agony but all she can do is snap her eyes open and whimper.

Vimbai is horrified and sick to her stomach as the implications of what happened to Ruby are as clear as day, she doesn't know whether to hug her but bile burns like acid in her throat and all that she wants to do is scream and hit something anything.

"Ruby, it's me, Vimbai," her voice is soft coaxing. All she gets in response is a tortured whimper. She doesn't try to touch her again but she keeps talking

to her.

“Ruby, I won’t hurt you but please let me clean you, it’s me, Vimbai, I’m not those monsters,” her voice is clogged with tears that she is trying hard to reign in. This is every woman's nightmare and her heart bleeds for Ruby even as she wonders why they didn’t take her as well and if today is her day.

Thoughts of such violation make her shiver and opens way for the sniggering voice of her stepmother in her head.

“You are worthless, a little piece of rubbish that is only good for opening her legs,” she shuts down the words and it takes all her willpower.

When she finally wins, she moves towards the pitcher of water that they were given and the stub of soap that they use as both bathing soap, cleaning



detergent and toothpaste. She takes her green, chimney jersey and tears part of it and she moves back to where Ruby hasn't stirred and she talks to her as she approaches, the tears now falling unchecked down her face. At first Ruby shrieks painfully when Vimbai touches her and she thrashes her legs, Vimbai steps back and holds her mouth to stop her sobs from escaping.

"It's me, Ruby, it's Vimbai, please let me help you," the voice slowly registers in Ruby's mind and she slightly raises her face to look at Vimbai.

"Vimbai?" the raw emotions choking her voice make Vimbai shove her fist harder into her mouth, unable to respond past the turmoil in her own heart.

"I want to die, Vimbai, they should have just killed me."

Vimbai holds her face, caressing her short, spiky hair and openly sobs for the pain that she went through and the emotional scars that no one can see.

“You won’t die, Ruby, we will make them pay for this,” the ominous threat in her voice contracts with how gentle her touch is as she moves the piece of her jersey down Ruby's face, washing off the sperm that had caked on her face.

“They will pay. They will pay,” is the mantra that she says as she washes her as a mother washing a newborn baby, careful not to hurt her, both their tears mingling with the soapy water. If it’s the last thing she does, Vimbai vows to make them pay.

.....

## Unknown Location

Agent Mamba shuffles his feet dreading the wrath that lies in wait for him behind the massive oak door. He lets out a deep breath before he opens the door and lets himself in, he is the last to arrive the rest of the top-secret team is already assembled and from the grim looks on their faces, nothing good is going to come out of this impromptu meeting. They all sit shoulders huddled like children waiting to be disciplined for their misdeeds. No one daring to look the President in the eye. If they had dared, they would see the red bulging of his eyeballs and the gnarly ridges entrenched deeply around the corner of his mouth and forehead. His rough, callous hands are that of a soldier in the trenches even after years of splendour deep inside the nation's coffers, he remains a ruthless, cold-blooded killing machine.

“Has the body of Shadow been found?”

His question hangs around the room, unanswered until he bangs his stubby soldier hands on the expensive heavy glass table. They all jump, grown man turned into nervous children because they know that beneath the presidential suit lies a trigger-happy soldier who could end their lives in a snap.

“Why am I paying you if you can’t do a simple thing, one simple thing,” his softly veiled words drip of venom and the huddled shoulders dip even lower.

“Our friends in the Hague claim they shot him point-blank in the head and buried him, we found the grave dug but there was also a worrying amount of blood around the grave. Wherever he is he is either dead or incapacitated,” agent Mamba braves the predator and tightens his facial muscles against the backlash. When none comes he releases a small prayer of gratitude.

“What of the evidence he was set to hand in?” the

deceptive calm in the President's voice doesn't fool anyone in the table, they all hurdle even lower and shoot glances at agent Mamba, he started talking and they were going to use him as their human shield. Mamba mops his bald head with his sticky palm, knowing he was in the firing line.

"He gave them false papers, he didn't trust them and they took him out without checking first," the stapler whistles past his ears, missing him by an inch as it goes hurtling to the oak door.

"Useless, the lot of you! I am a sitting duck as long as that evidence is still out there!"

"Sir, we have a problem," the new Fixer, who stepped in for Shadow when he went rogue announces, almost shitting on his expensive Italian three-piece breasted suit. He continues without being prompted, as if he just wants the words to be out there.

“There is growing pressure to release the wife, she is a lawyer and with the growing pressure from her colleagues, human rights organizations that she worked with and world over, plus that leaked video, we can’t keep her for much longer.”

If the President had been fuming before, now his dark face was black and livid, the haggard pores around his face deepening.

“Have you gotten anything from them yet?” Mamba is grateful that the eyes shift from him to the only other uniformed person in the room.

“None, my boys have broken the daughter but the wife is a tough cookie and she isn’t spilling anything,” for a “Shefu,” in his workplace, he has turned into a blustering idiot but no one laughs or snickers at him, they are all men of power in their

fields but in here only one man holds the power and has them by their testicles, he knows it and they all know it.

“Stall the organizations, create a press release, anything and rain terror on those girls, I need to know exactly what he has against me. Knowing Shadow it could be anything from the Fifth Brigade genocide to other much more classified missions. He was the Fixer and that goon of his would be a key witness. Find them! Until they make an appearance, rain terror on their precious women!”

.....

Morning family, yes its a repost, fifteen coming up.

Rubies and Rain

Fifteen ( SLV)

“... heroines are often unlikely people who are dragged into situations without meaning to become involved, or people with a past that has never quite left them. They are often isolated, introspective people, often confrontational or anarchic in some way, often damaged or secretly unhappy or incomplete”. - Joanne Harris

Ruby

My body feels like it was dragged from the pits of hell and dumped in a sewer system. Everything aches from the soles of my feet to the area around my eyes where I received blows. I can still smell them, even though Vimbai did her best to scrub their dirt off me, there was only so much that she could do



with a pitcher of water and a stub of soap. I'm trying hard not to think of the part when my body finally gave in and I shat on myself. That is the single most embarrassing moment in my life. Broken doesn't begin to describe how I feel.

My thoughts are disturbed by the sound of a spoon on an enamel cup and the thin metal plates, at first I'm not sure what the sound is until she picks a certain rhythm that reminds me of mbira, it lacks the deep richness of the mbira chords but comes very close. I lift my head, which requires all my strength and I look at Vimbai. She is sitting cross-legged on the rough and cold cement floor, head tilted slightly as she hums to the melody she's creating with her utensils.

"Che che che

Zvakatanga rinhiko, zvichapera seiko?

Ah woye. Ahh aah woyeeye

Zvakatanga rinhiko, zvichapera seiko?

Zvichapera..."

She is crooning and the sound is soft yet haunting and I'm trying to remember where I heard the song from, it sounds so familiar. She keeps on singing the same verse but with differing tones, each more haunting than the last, she doesn't have a classically melodic voice but it is deep and raspy, perfect for the song that she chose.

"Whose song is that," I ask when she finishes.

"It's Chiwoniso's 'Zvichapera', as a child my mother used to love her music so much that she got a small mbira and on weekends she would play it with me. One of the happy memories about my mother that I had locked away."

That's one pain we share fully, losing a mother but

she usually doesn't talk about her mother or herself, I want to hear more about this mbira playing mother. I have to formulate some spittle in my too-dry mouth, it feels like my mouth is the desert. My lips are cracked and bleeding slightly.

"I think I'm pregnant," she blurts out and I feel my ears overheat.

"Wh-what?" it comes out a dry croak.

"I'm not sure, I might be off but I know my body and it feels different, heavy, then there's the vomiting... I think I'm pregnant."

Silence hangs over us, I'm stunned into momentarily forgetting about the aches and pains in my body.

"Dad?"

A moment passes before she responds to my question, sounding affronted.

“Of course, it’s your father’s child!”

I almost retort that with her record, I had to be sure but she’s been nice to me and there is no use dredging over the past about a boyfriend who hasn’t even come to see me. The police might be keeping the public in the dark about my arrest but there is no way Chatunga doesn’t know about my arrest, his silence and distance doesn’t hurt me like I thought it would. I miss Tendero though, every day the void she left grows such that it physically hurts.

“I can’t lose this baby too,” Vimbai’s tortured voice brings me out of my thoughts, it’s the first time I am hearing any form of vulnerability in her voice.

“The first time was hard enough, even though I wasn’t ready for a child and I didn’t even know I was pregnant, I felt like a part of me had been ripped away from me,” she sounds like she needs to get this off her chest, so I let her.

“Knowing your father has brought me to hell but giving myself to him came so naturally, so quickly and this child is proof of that, I can’t lose this baby, Ruby, I can’t.”

I stretch my hand as far as I can and my fingertips touch her shaking hand.

“You won’t lose my little brother or sister, you won’t.”

A little brother or sister that looks just like me has always been my wish but mom had trouble giving birth or falling pregnant, so they only had me, every sibling of mine never survived and I hope this one

survives. While we are both lost in thought, the cell door is roughly opened and thudding footfalls come into the dark cell, no torch or light in sight.

Suddenly, a whip lands on my arm, the sharp sting making me yelp and then I hear Vimbai's screams as lashes land on her. All I can think of is protecting my little brother or sister, I propel my aching body forward until I cover her, she sprawls back at the impact of my body and I cover her front. The blows keep coming until I feel the skin on my back being shredded and I can't scream anymore, just whimper. Only then is a bucket of ice-cold water dumped on my back, the coldness numbing my flaming back.

My body is close to giving up but I hold on until I hear the footfall receding, the cell door closing and only then do I get off Vimbai. It feels like someone was ramming against me with a chainsaw. Whatever aches I had have now morphed into one ball of fire on my back.

“You took those lashes for me,” she’s crying, I don’t have the strength to cry.

“Not for you, my brother...” then it’s lights out, my body sinks into much-needed darkness.

.....

I don’t know how long I am unconscious for but when I come to, I am lying on a narrow bed on my stomach and someone is working on my back. Whatever balm they are using stings and it feels like my back has been set on fire. The bandages are applied not so gently, but I flinch and clench my teeth, not making a sound. I will not give them the satisfaction of knowing that they have broken me. When I am turned on my side, I see a doctor, in military scrubs and he’s attending to the cuts on my face.

“Is this how you uphold and protect your country?” my words come out in a slur but he hears them and flinches as if I gave him a physical blow before his shoulders set and he looks at me in the eye.

“This all goes away if you just give them what they want,” I laugh or try to laugh in his face but end up coughing until blood fills my mouth and I spit it onto the floor.

“Rot in hell!”

While he is disgusted and taking a mop, I quickly grab the scalpel from the little tray he was using and I hide it under my jersey. I am taken back to the cell and I find Vimbai pacing, wringing her hands and when I’m roughly shoved into the cell, she rushes towards me embracing me fiercely.

“Ouch,” I cry out and she lets go of my back but



doesn't move away, she's sobbing.

"I thought...I thought you were dead when you passed out!"

I comfort her until she calms down, she doesn't need this much stress, in a dark and dreary way, this experience has brought us together, in a way that we know we only have each other. I hold onto the scalpel that I got just how a drowning person holds on to a lifeboat, it makes me feel a little safe as we go to sleep. Tonight both of us didn't eat, fearing being drugged or worse being poisoned. Instead of feeling the hunger, my body is taut with suppressed adrenaline. I just know that they are going to come back. I'm counting on it and I'm not wrong.

In the dead of night, the door opens and tonight only one guard comes in, the short and pudgy one. I slept closer to the door on purpose and his lazy ass only drags me away, leaving the cell door open. I try to

chase away the fear and disgust that feel me by holding onto the cold steel of the scalpel. It gives me a bit of courage knowing that I am going to plunge it into his scrotum tonight.

“Let’s see if you can get f\*cked without shitting on yourself,” he says as he pushes his pistol inside me, the foreign cold metal makes me cringe and when he roughly pushes it inside me, an involuntary scream leaves my mouth and that excites him enough to throw his gun away.

While he’s fumbling with his trousers, I take the scalpel from under my jersey and when he roughly parts my thighs again, I strike, on his neck but before I can take it out he gives me a backhanded blow that sends my hand crashing down, hitting the floor.

“You filthy b\*tch!”

He grabs me with his wet, sticky hands and I try to prepare my mind for his onslaught, without the scalpel I feel empty, naked and without any defence. Tears stream down my face, I don't get it, I was supposed to slice him open but I only angered him more. His panting breath as he comes between my legs make me want to vomit all over him but my stomach is empty.

Then I hear it, a faint click then the clap of thunder, the tearing of flesh, his stunned grunt before he keels over and I move quickly so that his lifeless body hits the filthy floor. It all happens so quickly yet it feels like the moment is suspended in space. His splattered brain is coating the floor and I can't take my eyes off his disgusting pudgy body with his trousers halfway down his thighs, the scalpel still stuck on his almost non-existent neck, no wonder he didn't feel it. Then the adrenaline abruptly leaves my body and I almost scream but a hand covers my mouth.

.....

Preorders are still open and we have a new Promo code, get two people to buy and you get 25% off your purchase order and if you get three people to buy you get 50% off your order, you can make one purchase or tell them to use your name as the promo code.

Ts and Cs apply.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

## Rubies and Rain

### Sixteen

“Life is about choices. Some we regret, some were proud of. Some will haunt us forever. 'Black Rain' was very much about choices. The message - we are what we choose to be.”

Graham Brown

### Vimbai

I killed a man. In cold blood, I killed a man. I have become what they accused me of. The moment that the hammer clicked as it cocked I should have thrown the whole gun away, but listening to him to break her and remembering that he had the same gun shoved inside her like she's some kind of animal, steadied my shaking hand. The flash when high-pressure gases ignited in the barrel, still did not warn

me of the impact of the gun when I fired. It was the crack as a bullet split air into shockwaves, piercing the speed of sound that pushed me off-kilter and I almost fell from the impact of the gun recoiling.

I didn't fall though, I watched in stunned slow motion as the bullet ricocheted, I had hit the wall first but then the bullet bounced off the surface of the wall and when he turned, it caught him dead in the centre of his rubbery forehead. I watched his head explode and his brain splatter. I killed a man and given a chance to go back and choose, I would shoot him again, this time in his pudgy genitals.

I take off my hand from Ruby's mouth when I'm sure she won't scream and I turn her to look at me.

"He's dead," her voice is unbelieving and I nod my head while shaking her shoulders lightly.

“He’s dead and we have to get out of here before his friend comes looking for him,” the adrenaline from the shooting hasn’t faded and my voice carries with it a forceful agency but she’s in shock.

Her eyes grow bigger as she looks at the now faceless man on the floor, with a scalpel stuck on his non-existent neck, khaki trousers around his knees and his penis now shrivelled and limply perched on his surprisingly huge testicles, they’re so big they hang heavily against his thighs.

“He's dead,” she repeats in awe and this time her voice is choked with so much emotion. The shock is taking too long to fade from her brain, we don’t have the time.

I manage somehow to drag Ruby from the abandoned cell and I rush her to our cell where I close and lock our cell before throwing the key towards where we are coming from. In the darkness

we wash off his blood and throw the water into the disgusting bucket that we have no choice but to relieve ourselves in.

“You killed a man for me,” Ruby's voice is still shaky and a bit emotional.

“I didn't do it for you, I did it for my baby so that he knows that his mama protected his sister,” I didn't expect the fierce hug in the dark but I need it because the shivers of shock are starting to set in. I killed a man. Scratch that I killed a monster. Still doesn't make it any less traumatizing.

“You want a boy?” I nod then I remember that she can't see me in the dark and I respond verbally.

“Yeah, I just have this feeling that it's a boy, I hope he looks like your father, I'm angry at him and will probably kill him when I see him but I still long for



him.”

Then it hits me that I killed someone, a prison guard no less and I might give birth to this child while in prison and never raise him. I will have to ask Nosihle's mother to raise him because I don't trust that bitch of a stepmother to raise my child right. Thinking of Mainini makes me think of my dad, is he ok, how did the news of me being arrested affect his health. I know Davirai is with Nosihle because Batsirai said so but I haven't seen them. The reality is that my nightmare might have just begun and I start crying, I have to shove my fist inside my mouth so that I don't make any sound. Ruby takes me into her arms and we rock together, her tears mingling with mine.

Commotion interrupts our crying session as there is panic and boots stomping towards the cell where we left the guard. I motion for Ruby to lie down and I do the same, drawing our blankets over our heads. A

few minutes later there is a light being shone into our cell. Someone tries the door but it's locked and the light retreats and a minute later I hear the next cell door being rattled. This doesn't give me any relief because the other guard must have known what his friend was up to and it's only a matter of time before they connect the dots.

.....

It's like being a sitting duck or waiting for your executioner, every footstep makes me jumpy. It's morning and while there was a flurry of activity at night, now there is an unsettling silence. The aftermath of my actions is dredging the voices from the trenches of my soul and it's taking everything in me not to give in to the voices. Not to scream and act out of character because that will be the final nail in the coffin I brought on myself. I've been biting my nails until I drew blood. Now, I am pressing my fingers down the palm of my hands to stop the

bleeding.

When the sound of the baton stick being dragged on our cell bars comes, it feels like someone is screeching inside my eardrums. My heart is racing and Ruby whose eyes look like they will swallow her whole face, that's how big they are now, holds my hand and I gain a little strength from that.

"Vimbai, get out!" I'm surprised that it's a lady guard today but I scurry up my feet and gently pries Ruby's hand off mine, she doesn't want to let me go.

"I'll be fine," I try to assure her but my voice lacks any resolve and is gruff with punished tears.

She wants to say something but I shake my head, she must not implicate herself. The banging on the gate makes us both jump and Ruby lets go of my hand. I rush to the door and I am dragged not at all

gently down the corridor. I want to ask how they got the key, if she knows or heard anything but I keep my lips pressed shut and my fingers are digging into my palms.

You are going to rot in jail, Mainini's voice rings in my head.

That's where smelly whores like you belong, chorus the voices of the children who would laugh and snicker at me in primary school.

That's all you have amounted to, sneers Tafadzwa's voice

I close my eyes trying to push away the voices, the guard behind me pushes me and I trip, almost falling and that has my eyes flying open and I almost fall but I balance on the wall. When we pass the interrogation room, my heart beats a little better and

when I see Batsirai's beaming face, I almost pee on myself in relief. I walk towards him on shaky legs and when he embraces me, as smelly as I am, the guard only grunts but doesn't tell us to separate. This is new.

“Vimbai! Finally, I bring you some good news. The pressure that we, with the help of the Law Society, Zimbabwean Lawyers for Human Rights, ZWLA, World Organisation against torture, Amnesty International and a whole lot of other organisations and the media houses especially BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera, have put on the government due to that video of your arrest going viral has made them drop all charges today, you are free to go!”

The words hit me hard, my knees give in and I sink on the floor and I sob. I expected him to tell me that he's here to represent me for the murder that I committed and I didn't even think of the possibility of coming out of this shit hole. When I finally get my

emotions under control, I get up with the help of my boss and sit on the chair that he opened for me.

“How? When? Oh my God! Tell me this isn’t a dream?!”

The words excitedly tumble against each other even as tears still freely flow down my cheeks. I’m not going to stop them after this nightmare that I have been living in for what feels like an eternity. Batsirai laughs, a joyous, relieved sound that echoes the joy in my heart.

“It’s been a process and they were fighting it for weeks but they finally curved in because the media and organisations weren’t letting up, you are a free woman as of today, I’m here to take you home.”

I’m so happy that I want to cry on top of the tears that I’m already shedding, I must look a sight but I

don't care, I'm free!

“Wait until I tell Ruby! Wait...is Ruby also coming out with me?”

The change in Batsirai's face is all the answer I need, all the joy in my heart evaporates.

“Her situation is a bit more complex because the police deny taking her, citing that she was in SA when she went missing and no one from their department was authorised to go and fetch her, I am hoping that if you come out and tell the world that you have been sharing a cell with her then they can put the same pressure on the government to release her,” I'm shaking my head even before he finishes talking.

“That could take days, weeks or months even, I can't leave her behind boss, I won't leave her behind,” my

resolve makes Batsirai confused.

“I understand that it’s not ideal but Vimbai we don’t have another alternative, she’s my niece and like a daughter to me. I promised my late sister that I will take care of her but you are of no use to her on the inside.”

He doesn’t understand and a quick glance behind me tells me that the guard is keenly listening into our conversation even though she is pretending not to be. I ask for a pen and paper, Batsirai even though sceptical, hands me his pen and tears off a slip of paper from his notebook. Hovering over the paper like that student who is stingy with their knowledge during exams, I quickly write.

Ruby was being raped by our guards. It almost happened last night again and I shot the guard, he’s dead but if I leave her I’m afraid they might kill her.



I pass the note over to him, folded. He opens it and when his eyes scan my little message, his face becomes pinched and he crunches the paper with more force than necessary before popping it into his mouth and chewing it. He takes another piece of paper and writes.

Then you are both in grave danger, how will you help her while inside?

I respond on the same piece of paper.

I don't know but the odds are better for her with me inside, the world knows I'm here and they are watching.

Batsirai sighs after reading my response and I see the tears in his eyes before he reaches over my hand and squeezes it.

“Thank you,” I only nod and stand up to leave before I give in to weakness and walk away from here with him.

I can't in all consciousness leave Ruby alone, that would be feeding her to the wolves. He hands me some plastics and I take them before turning to the guard, waiting to be taken back to hell so that I can dance with the devil again. I don't look back at Batsirai, I have made my choice, I'm going back to face death.

.....

Morning Family

What choices have you made that you don't regret and would choose them again and again?

Mine are turning my love for reading into writing.

Preorders are still open.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

Rubies and Rain

Seventeen

Rain symbolizes darkness but also represents an essential part of rebirth.

Sabrina Claudio

I have not prayed in the longest time, not since my mother passed on even after my many long prayers but when that guard took Vimbai out I prayed,

“God, I know that you’ve probably forgotten my name and voice but it’s me, Ruby, I don’t know why you allowed all that is happening to us to happen. If it’s your will then I accept it but please, please protect Vimbai and my baby brother. They are the one patch of sunshine in this hell, don’t allow her to be tortured,

let me take her place.

Yours

Ruby,”

Then I added Our Father prayer just to cement it and a couple of Hail Marys. I felt ashamed, I have been nothing but a brat to Vimbai but yet she killed a man for me. Had he gone through with his sickening actions, I would have killed myself after. I had made up my mind when the scalpel didn't work, I would have ended my miserable existence and just go join my mother.

My body is throbbing, but my tolerance to pain has been doubled in this place, I just set my teeth and wait for the wave of pain to pass. I try to sleep on my left side but then the pain shoots through from my right side of the neck way down to my battered ribs.

I'm glad there aren't any mirrors in this place, I don't even want to know how I look like. Footsteps. I hold my breath and only expel it when I hear Vimbai offering the guard to choose whatever she wants from the plastic.

"You don't have to my dear, but I'll have the chocolate. Thank you," parts of her torchlight filter through to where I am as she ruffles through the plastics and takes the chocolate and then she leaves the rest, locking behind her.

Vimbai dumps the plastics close to me and lowers herself to the floor while sighing wearily, she's tough but this experience is taking a toll on her, more than she would like to admit.

"What kind of chocolate was it?" I ask once I'm sure that the guard is gone.

“Lindt truffles,” Vimbai states and I fake groan in misery and that makes her laugh a little, I can feel that she’s tense over something.

“Uncle Batsirai?” I prompt when she has been quietly contemplative for over a minute.

“Yeah, he brought us some stuff, I think I spotted some pads in there,” that is a relief to hear, I had to tear part of my uniform and fold it to provide me a pad, I washed it as much as I could but without much soap, it began to smell like a rat had died inside my vagina.

“Did he say anything about us getting out of here? Did you tell him that you are pregnant? I don’t think you should be here in your first trimester,” I ask even as I ruffle through the plastics until my hands land on a box of Lil-lets, I’m a tampon girl through and through but I’ve never been more relieved to hold a box of pads in my life.

“No, he says they are still working on it, we should just keep our heads down,” there is something that she isn’t telling me but I decide to let her be.

“You should eat, you haven’t eaten in a day and that can’t be good for the baby,” I’m shoving the plastic to her and I try to painstakingly get up and change into a pad. I move to the furthest corner in the cell and get the now stiff cloth out of my panties and I put on a pad, I almost weep at the soft, silken feel of the pad against my irritated and inflamed labia.

After washing my hands with the soap that uncle Batsirai bought for us and sanitizing my hands, I also dog through the plastic and I grab a pie, juice and an apple. We eat in silence, savouring the food. I don’t know what she digs into next but I hear Vimbai moaning as if she’s having an orgasm and I can’t help but laugh.



“You laugh but this is hands down the best steak and kidney pie that I’ve ever tasted,” it probably isn’t but I get her, the taste of everything is enhanced by the tasteless food we've been subjected to in this place.

“If we were outside, what would be your cravings?”

“Mmmmh let me see, cake from Pistachio, pizza from Casa Mia, sushi from Organikks and all kinds of meat especially braaied and grilled.”

“That’s a very specific list,” she laughs lightly and admits that she has been having cravings already and I make a mental note to ask uncle Batsirai to buy all of this, the next time I see him.

“I’m sorry for being a brat when Dad introduced you,” she stops eating as if the change in topic has caught her by surprise.

“I would have reacted worse had the girl who slept with my boyfriend was introduced as my new stepmother, I shouldn’t have slept with Chatunga in the first place.”

Talking like this has lifted a huge burden off my shoulders. It’s crazy how it took us being in this hellhole to finally resolve our issues.

“Yeah, well you weren’t the first one and I’m pretty sure that he hasn’t stopped. He hasn’t even come to see me in prison, that should tell you everything,” it doesn’t hurt me anymore.

“What was your deal with him anyways? Love?”

“We were an arrangement before his father died, Dad was always pushing that if I wanted to be safe then I had to be with Chatunga,” saying it makes me realize

that this was one of the scenarios that he was talking of.

“Did you at least like him?”

“I loved his dick,” we share a laugh but it’s true, I never loved Chatunga not how I loved Tendero at least.

“I’ve had better,” Vimbai says and I hope she’s not about to tell me about my father’s genitalia, “so you are like bisexual?”

“I am but those guards might have taken care of that.”

Just thinking about them makes my blood boil, I don’t realize I’ve clenched my teeth and hands until Vimbai puts her hand over mine.

“Don’t let what they did to you define you, don’t give them that much power and hold over your life. You are bisexual and what they did doesn’t change or erase that. You are still the same person,” only I don’t think I’m the same person I was when they took me from my apartment nor is Vimbai the same person she was before they falsely accused and got her arrested.

Something about this place hardens you, it changes you even in a matter of days, add the inhumane treatment and you come out a brand new person. I mean I was almost weeping at putting on a pad, a pad! I will never walk around the streets of Harare and feel safe again, I will not hear or read about people talking of police brutality with a passing interest because now I know and I have experienced it first hand. I went from benefiting from the system to being almost swallowed whole by the same system. I know things about my father that I was gleefully in the dark about.

We are almost drifting to sleep when footfalls make us wake up and I feel a bit better when Vimbai's hand finds mine and holds on to it. The loud jarring sound of our cell door being opened makes me tighten my hand around Vimbai's. The flashlight momentarily blinds me and I have to close my eyes to shield them.

“What is the other one still doing here? Didn't Shefu say that she was released to go?” one hoarse voice says and I'm not familiar with it.

“How should I know? Do you see Shefu written on my forehead, let's just do what we were told to do,” a deeper voice responds and I try to open my eyes but the flashlight is still trained on us.

“I don't like this, we are only supposed to take this one, not both of them!”

I'm trying to make sense of their words, what do they mean one of us was freed to go? Vimbai? While I'm trying to make sense of it all, I am roughly being hoisted to my feet and I have to clench my teeth at the pain that shoots throughout my tattered back.

"Let's transfer the both of them and if there was a mix up, Shefu can always remove the other one from Chikurubi."

What?! Chikurubi as in the maximum prison? I try to dig in my feet and resist but my body is too weak and we are dragged off into a waiting police van and thrown into the back. The door is locked as soon as we are inside.

"Vimbai, what do they mean one of us was released to go?" She doesn't turn to look at me, she's hurdled near the window looking at the moon.

“I have no idea what they are talking about,” her voice is monotone, it doesn’t carry any surprise or hint at knowing anything.

Chikurubi is still running around in my mind, that’s one of the most notorious prisons in Zimbabwe. From what I’ve heard, Central is a hotel compared to the conditions in Chikurubi. We are driven in silence both of us lost in our own thoughts, did Vimbai give up her freedom to be with me? Did she know something like this would happen? Screeching tires bring me out of my thoughts and shouts before a big crash sends us flying. I hit my head on the metal bars in the window and I lose consciousness

.....

Morning Family

Preorders are still open, get yourself a signed copy of any of my books. Text me on 0620931434

Love and Light

Busisekile

Rubies and Rain

Eighteen

Rain is grace; rain is the sky descending to the earth; without rain, there would be no life.

John Updike

Every inch of my body hurts when the vehicle we are in, hurtles over a rather deep pothole, it feels like someone is poking a thousand sharp needles in my body. I fight to raise my head and crane my neck, I am looking for Vimbai. She's a stone throw from me, lying at an awkward angle like she was just dumped there like I was but she's unmoving.

The vehicle lurches and I wince at the aching of my body. Teeth clenched, I hoist my body up and crawl



to where Vimbai is, her lack of movement is worrying me. Her shallow breathing assures me but her weak pulse and the caked blood on her forehead are concerning.

Gingerly, I touch my forehead and I have a mound the size of an egg on my temple, which explains my pounding head. My body hurts as I try to put Vimbai in a more comfortable position, satisfied I lean against the canopy of the truck we are in.

It's a military truck, one of the older models and there isn't much space for us at the back, there are cartons of supplies stacked in front of us that hinder me from seeing the door or anything beyond them. We have nothing else apart for the two blankets, one of which I've covered Vimbai with and the other myself. There isn't a glass partition, so I can't see who is in front and the only window there is high up, I have to stand on my toes to see where we are. The mere thought exhausts me.

I snuggle into the blanket, it's coarse and hard but I don't think it has any lice unless we brought some from our cell with us. A sudden bubble of hysteria fills my chest and I find myself chuckling, the chuckling turns into tittering that ends on a sob. This is what my life has become, being moved from the behind of a police van to that of a military truck. I yearn for sunlight, even though the brief glare from the sun before we were shoved into the police van hurt my eyes, but I still yearn for its rays on my skin.

"Blackbird singing in the dead of night," my voice is raspy, I try wetting my throat and cracked lips before I continue singing.

"Blackbird singing in the dead of night

Take these broken wings and learn to fly

All your life

You were only waiting for this moment to arise."

Hot liquid spills over my cheeks, this was Tendero and mine's song, well more of Tendero, she loved Boss Baby and she had us look up the song on YouTube and learn the lyrics. After our hushed lovemaking, we always had to be quiet at school, at my home, at her home until her parents left her in the apartment. We could be loud in the apartment but maybe we had become used to stifling our pleasure so we would moan lowly, something about it, in hindsight, was more intimate than the dirty words that Peaches would rasp at me, I don't want to think about Chatunga because that part of sex has been tainted for me.

Anyway, my point is after making gentle love to me, Tendero would croon the song to me until I fell asleep, one hand in my curly hair and the other on my boob, always. It grew familiar and stupid me thought that meant boring but I would give anything to be back in that time when we would do Boss Baby and Tim's dance on the day they went to Puppy Corp.

I would give anything to drift off to sleep in  
Tendero's arms as she sang for me.

“Blackbird singing in the dead of night

Take these sunken eyes and learn to see

All your life

You were only waiting for this moment to be free”

I miss Tendero and the ache in my heart is worse than the pounding inside my head and aching of my whole body combined. I try to cling on to the memory of her smile but it's tainted in my mind, corrupted, I can't see it clearly, I try to remember my mother's smile but all I can remember is her tired, sad little smile at the height of her cancer. I'm trying to remember even the last time my father and I genuinely laughed but that too is marred by the angry, bitter words I would throw at him after my mother's death.

I wasn't always a brat but sometimes pain changes you and I realize that I became selfish in my grief, I acted like my father hadn't lost a wife too and that he hadn't been thrust into playing the role of mother and father to a sullen teenager. I took Tendero's familiarity and love as a crutch but disregarded her feelings. There has been little more I've been doing for weeks except for introspection. I just hope that I will at least get the chance to right my wrongs.

"All your life

You were only waiting for this moment to arise

You were only waiting for this moment to arise

You were only waiting for this moment to arise"

My voice cracks at the last verse and I bow my head, sobbing gently, feeling this gaping hole of emptiness widening in my heart. I cry myself to sleep and when I wake up it's dark in the truck. For a moment I think I'm back in the cell and those pigs are having their

way with me, I coil into a ball and shield my body, crying out.

“Ruby?”

Vimbai’s groggy voice filters into my night terrors as if I’m inside a tunnel and all I can hear is the echo of her voice but I still cling onto it like a lifeline.

“Ruby, are you awake?”

I sit up too quickly and wince when pain shoots throughout my body, my back is still tender from the lashes I received.

“I’m awake, when I woke up in the afternoon you were out like a light. Are you in any pain?” My voice is brighter than I feel, masking the pain that I’m in.

“My lower back feels like it’s on fire and my head feels like someone was burgeoning it with a blunt object but other than that I’m swell.”

It’s a good thing that she can still mock my private school lingo right? Yeah, I’m going to take that low show of humour as a good sign.

“Where are we?” her voice is still drowsy and she’s not panicking which is also good

“I don’t know, but we are in the back of a military truck. I don’t know where it’s taking us or who is taking us.”

Silence briefly envelopes us, each of us lost in our thoughts only the drone of the engine reminding us that we are on the move. Vimbai is the first one to break the silence.

“Do you know what happened to Joana, Cecilia and Netsai?” I frown then I remember that it’s dark and she can’t see me.

“Who are they?”

“Activists, Joana is or was an MP under MDC,” impatience coats her words, I have never made Zimbabwean politics my business so I don’t feel any shame for not knowing Ministers of Parliament.

“I’m telling you this to prepare you for anything Ruby, not to frighten you, ok?”

Well, she’s doing a great job at scaring me but I still give my yes and she sucks in some breath before continuing to narrate.

“They said that they were stopped at a police



checkpoint in May, as they were returning from a small protest march that they had organised. Two men in police uniform but an unmarked car told them they were under arrest for flouting lockdown. They were then escorted in a convoy to a police station where they were told to get out of their car and into another vehicle as they had gone to the wrong place. In the other vehicle, two men got in and pushed their heads down and they drove out.”

I don't want her to continue with her story but this is Vimbai and if she wants to tell the story, she will so I let her continue.

“They were driven to a location about 120km north of Harare, thrown into a pit, subjected to hours of beatings and sexual assault by five men. They kept them there for twenty-four hours and then they were later thrown on the side of the road in Bindura. I won't get into the details of their experiences but I just need you to prepare yourself, mentally for

anything. Let's cooperate with whatever they tell us to do and maybe we'll get out of this alive."

My heart is beating at an abnormal rate at the mention of sexual assault, the sound of my heart beating is so loud it drowns everything else out.

"You can never mentally prepare yourself for rape," my words come out clipped and angry.

"I'm sorry, Ruby, I didn't mean..." her voice is contrite but I cut her short.

"I know what you meant but having gone through it, I know that nothing prepares you for the helplessness, the violent shredding of your soul. I knew it was coming you know, when they took me to the other cell and when he was fiddling with his pants. I knew it was coming. I tried to steel my mind, to block it out, or fight it. Still, still, it felt like my soul was being

ripped out of my body, I felt everything, every grunt, every thrust into my dry body, it's imprinted in my brain. When I close my eyes I can see them, smell them and when the other one forced himself into my annul hole, when I shat on myself, it felt like I had died a thousand deaths. Don't think you can prepare yourself, because you can't. It's like dying inside your body yet you are still alive."

Her sob brings me back from reliving that scene and I'm surprised that my eyes are dry, talking about it didn't make it lighter or go away it only left me feeling hollow, empty and cold.

"So what happened to Joana, Netsai and Cecilia?" I ask to steer away from my experiences which are only depressing both of us. Vimbai clears her throat.

"The police arrested them, the State claimed that they made up the abduction story to get away from breaking the law. They are facing charges of

breaking lockdown restrictions, trying to incite violence, and making false accusations of abduction, torture and sexual abuse. The last I heard Joana was to undergo a mental evaluation at Chikurubi. She's been in and out of hospitals, the kicker is being told you are faking mental illness."

The bitterness in her voice lingers in the air, I can taste it in my mouth as well. Our silence is broken by a sharp command to get down. Without question, we both lie flat on the floor covering ourselves with blankets. I'm even afraid to breathe. The truck comes to a shuddering stop and from the talk, it sounds like we are at a roadblock.

Old Ruby would have tried something brave and stupid such as screaming for the police to help because they are being abducted. But prisoner Ruby knows that the police are not the protectors that she always thought they are and she knows any stunt may lead to her death. So, I flatten myself as much

as I can to the floor and make a short prayer that we don't end up dead.

"...mind if we have a look Shefu?" comes through as the door is flung open. Traces of a flashlight reach the area around our feet from the tiny crack between the boxes.

"Do you need for me to open cartoon by cartoon so that you can see that I'm carrying provisions for our platoon?" the disdain in the other person's voice is loud and clear.

"That won't be necessary..."

"Was this stop in itself necessary?" funny enough the one who was stopped is the one who sounds in charge and also irritated at the same time.

“Sorry, Shefu it’s just that we are following strict orders from above, sorry Shefu,” the police tries to placate our new captor.

The door is closed and I can finally breathe. After a minute or two, our truck coughs and grunts to life, and only when it has been moving for a while do we remove our blankets. A little moonlight is streaming in but the window is too small and too high up to allow us to see it.

“That was weird, are we being smuggled by the military?” Vimbai voices one of the thousand questions in my head.

“At this point it could be anyone, I just want this nightmare to end.”

Silence hangs over us and when we turn into the dusty road, the truck lurches and Vimbai lets out a

short scream and I see her clutching at her back. Alarm rushes through my mind and I ask her if it's the baby, the only answer I get is another short scream. Ignoring the pain in my limbs, I stand up and bang on the truck wall.

"Please, she's pregnant and I think something is wrong with the baby. Please, help her!"

I shout without stopping my banging and I hear a shout that I can't decipher and the truck comes to a shuddering halt. There are thudding football before the door is flung open, Vimbai is now writhing in pain and sobbing piteously. I haven't seen her so broken even when we were in the pits of hell.

"Don't leave me, baby, stay strong for mommy," she keeps saying over and over again while the cartoons are being lifted and whoever is on the other end is trying to get to us. I feel helpless but I still crouch and take her clammy, cold hand in mine.

“Don’t cry Vimbai, this baby is going to make it, we are all going to make it,” I make promises that I have no way of keeping, hoping and praying that on top of all we’ve been through she doesn’t have a miscarriage, that we aren’t being taken to a pit somewhere to be further abused. We are beyond broken as it is.

.....

Morning family

This insert is almost two inserts long as a treat, please I don't need choruses of "short insert" when we go back to the normal length from Friday.

The story of Joana, Cecilia and Netsai unfortunately is not fiction, it's real and their abduction happened in May last year. There are a lot of political prisoners



in Zimbabwe, those who have managed to come out with their lives, those still locked up inside and those we lost along the way, my thoughts and heart go out to you, may your suffering not have been in vain and for the lady who reached out and told me her story, thank you for giving me the strength to not deviate from the horrible truth of the deep anarchy in our African justice system.

To all the women and men who have suffered some form of sexual assault or abuse, I'm sorry for opening up your wounds.

I hope as a continent, as a people we heal and know true liberation some day.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

## Rubies and Rain

### Nineteen

“I am the daughter of Earth and Water,  
And the nursling of the Sky;  
I pass through the pores of the ocean and shores;  
I change, but I cannot die.

For after the rain when with never a stain

The pavilion of Heaven is bare,

And the winds and sunbeams with their convex  
gleams

Build up the blue dome of air,

I silently laugh at my own cenotaph,

And out of the caverns of rain,

Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the  
tomb,

I arise and unbuild it again.”

– P. B. Shelley

After what feels like an eternity the cartons are finally moved aside, with the light coming in from the flashlight, that’s when I see it, blood. Vimbai is bleeding and while it makes my heart and eyes sting, I still hold her and tell her that the baby is fine, that she will be fine. Internally I am freaking out but I don’t want her to stress more than she already is.

“I am wet, Ruby. Why am I wet?”

When she tries to put her hand I hold it and assure her that it’s just sweat. I ask for God and my mother, her mother, any spiritual help we can get to save this baby, my sibling is the one good thing that we have now.

“Let me see,” a controlled voice says and I turn to

look at a man in military uniform but he must be of some rank because of the stars shining on his beret.

I was so focused on Vimbai that I didn't hear or see him come in. I try to step aside but Vimbai won't loosen her clutch. He still checks her with militant precision, detached and silent. I watch carefully and when I see him taking out a syringe and putting on one huge arse needle I speak up.

"What is that? How do we know that isn't something that will kill her?"

His eyes would have made me shrivel and back down before but right now I just boldly stare back at him.

"Well, would you look at that, mini Shadow has the same balls as her father," he chuckles at his own joke and I just look at him, ready to spring and tackle

that needle out of his hands if I have to.

“Relax, it’s a sedative that contains some progestogens that may help her with the threatened miscarriage.”

“Why should I trust you?”

If there is one thing that my mother always said I inherited from my father, it is my stubbornness and honestly, I don’t know this man, he took us from a police vehicle and we are in the middle of nowhere.

“Because I am your only option, without the shot, she will miscarry and it’s no skin off my back,” he doesn’t sound like a very patient man and I have a feeling that he isn’t used to being questioned, at least not by a girl as young as I am. He looks to be around uncle Gumburai's age, grey hair, wrinkles and all.

“We don’t have time for this, OK, hold on,” he takes out one of those olden Nokia phones with a little antenna thingy. Even when on his ear, I can hear the dial tone ringing until it’s picked up.

“What do you want?” I would know uncle Gumburai’s voice from anywhere and right now he sounds downright hostile.

“Malou, is that anyway to greet your old captain who comes bearing you gifts?” This man has an inflated appreciation of his sense of humour.

“I said, what do you want?”

“I have Shadow's little family here, his wife and his feisty daughter, I might just have a little taste of them myself,” shivers go down my spine because when he says it he looks straight into my eyes.

“If you dare touch my Ruby...!” Uncle Gumburai’s voice booms over the phone and the military man laughs.

“Come, I know you are just the muscles and your brain is currently incapacitated. That’s not why I called, the wife is going through a threatened miscarriage and I want to administer something that will stabilize her. Tell mini Shadow to trust me,” there is a silent pause before uncle Gumburai's voice comes over the phone.

“Ruru, he is a trained army doctor among other things, he won’t harm you. Shefu what do you...”

The man hangs up while uncle Gumburai is talking and raises his eyebrow at me, I step aside and watch as he lifts Vimbai’s bloodied prison uniform and checking something on her thigh before administering the shot. She flinches before her grip slowly loosens on my hand and her body grows limp.

I can still hear her shallow breathing though.

While muttering under his breath, the man goes out of the truck then comes back with another man holding a narrow but thick mattress, the likes of which you find in haulage trucks cockpits. The man wearing a lower rank uniform places the mattress and carefully, they lift Vimbai up and place her on the mattress then the one who administered drugs on her covers her with a huge blanket then they get out and start packing the cartons back in place and close the door.

My mind is running with the many possibilities but I shut them down, at least Vimbai and the baby are safe to now. I wonder where uncle Gumburai is and why they didn't come to rescue us. Who is this man, this Shefu and why has he taken us? I settle back onto the blanket that Vimbai had on then I put on the one I had on and I try to fall asleep. My last thought is that Vimbai and I are pawns in their sick games.



.....

It feels like I barely slept a minute when the truck comes to a stop, I check and Vimbai is still out like a light. The door opens and the offloading begins afresh. When the boxes are gone, they come inside to carry Vimbai. I follow them, my eyes take a while to adjust to my surroundings but we are in the neck of the woods with only a medium house or is it a cabin?

I follow them inside and there isn't much in terms of furniture in the first room that we get to, they move Vimbai into the door on the right and all I see is a bed that has already been set up and before I can get in the door is shut in my face. Ok.

I turn to the left and there is a kitchen with a middle-aged woman with her back to me as she stirs

whatever it is that she is cooking. It smells nice, no lie. As if feeling my presence she turns and she has the most gorgeous smile, she also looks familiar.

“Hey, you must be hungry, the food is almost ready, let me take you to your room,” I’m still trying to place her face but she’s already turned to lead me to another room right next to the kitchen. It’s also sparsely furnished with just a bed, chest of drawers and a mirror. There is a towel laid on the bed and a dress that looks two fashion seasons late.

“I thought you would like to bath and change before dinner,” she is soft-spoken and seems nice but I still have my guard up. Anything can happen.

“Thank you, where is the bathroom?”

“Oh, yes, it’s on your left, the last door down the corridor.”

Then she leaves, I'm relieved to find a key in the bathroom, I lock myself in before I turn and strip off the ugly green and white dress that I had on and for a moment I am struck dumb by the face looking back at me from the mirror.

I have streaks of dirt and blood stuck on my face. My eyes are hollow and now deep sunken, my face is lean, no longer having that cute plumpness that my father said I took from my mother. A lump the size of an egg on my face and my hair is a nest of coarse blanket bits and probably a handful of lice. My lips are cracked and cut, I have a tiny scar on my left cheek running from under my eye, from the time I was slapped and hit the iron bars.

There is another mirror on the opposite wall and it shows the congealed skin on my back from the lashes I got, my once smooth back is now a map of welts and protruding bones. I look like a junkie going

through withdrawal.

The water is now almost full. I pour in a liberal amount of the bubble bath wash. I sink into the hot water and I almost weep when my back starts stinging. I scrub every inch of my body yet I still feel dirty, tainted. I want to wash again but my stomach grumbles reminding me of dinner. I drain the water which is now murky with my dirt and there's a whole layer of dirt left in the tub. I wash it before I dry myself.

When I look in the mirror, I look even worse. The dirt had camouflaged the blue-black patches on my fair skin, I look like I have been in a match. I need to cut my hair. I quickly finish up, the dress hangs over me but I synch it with a belt and walk out.

"There you are," the older man says cheerfully and isn't fazed by the sullen look that I throw at him, he motions the seat next to the lady and tells me to sit.

“Why did you bring us here?”

“Now, now, that’s no talk for the dining table. Let’s eat first, you look like you will drop dead at any moment now,” I huff at his response but I still accept the plate that is handed to me and I dish up for myself.

The creamy samp is cooked perfectly and the oxtail is hanging from the bones, everything smells and tastes divine. They let me have a second helping and no one is talking much just the scrapping of utensils on the plates.

“How is Vimbai and the baby?” I ask while the lady is clearing plates, she refused my help.

“They are fine, she’s still under the sedative, it should wear out tomorrow, the baby’s heartbeat has grown

a little stronger.”

That brings me so much relief, I was sure if Vimbai lost that baby, she would loose her mind.

“Why did you take us?”

He smiles at my question, a malicious little side smile.

“You are my bargaining chips.

.....

Good morning Family

Sorry for posting a bit later than usual. Happy Friday and don't forget to order your copies of my books.

0620931434 is my number for orders only not

asking for PDFs.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

Rubies and Rain

Twenty ( SLN)

“Heroism doesn’t always happen in a burst of glory. Sometimes small triumphs and large hearts change the course of history.”

Mary Roach

In a cabin a little north of Mount Inyangani

Nosihle has been steadily pensive as the days turned into weeks and nothing materialized in terms of her

friend's freedom. Her whole life on hold, her job and the only consolation is that somehow Joshua, the brooding mountain who makes her burn hot in one moment and manages to ice her out in the same breath, sent some money to her family for their upkeep. She was also allowed to call her mother and she almost wept when she heard her mother's voice, thanking God that her mother didn't listen to the news on the radio, her mother would be stressed if she caught a whiff of what is happening to Vimbai.

“Why haven't they let her go yet?”

Davirai asks during breakfast, her explosive question makes Nosihle stop mid-chew and cast her a pitying look while her sister's guard cannot look her in the eye. Davirai feels like this is all somehow her fault, she came to Harare and her sister's life was turned upside down. She still dreams of the way her sister was roughly dragged from her apartment. Studying is hard because all she wants is for Vimbai to come



back and teach her something, anything.

She gets to call home too and besides her mother bitching about everything, she is worried about her father's health. He sounds frail on the phone and not knowing what is happening with his first daughter is taking a toll on him. At least uncle Joshua arranged for him to be placed in Claybank, a private hospital in Windsor, Gweru. He is receiving the best medical care but it does not make up for not being able to speak to his daughter, not knowing if she is fine, if she has eaten or not. Davirai could feel his helplessness over the phone.

There is no internet and social media to save her either, uncle Joshua made sure to take her phone the minute they got here. When she's tired of reading, which she is most of the time, she can't watch the tv, for there is none, they only play board games in the evenings. There is a library stocked with many varying titles from Romance to Political Manifestos

and Davirai sometimes gets lost in the pages of Nora Roberts and has discovered a love for reading for leisure.

While love blossoms in the pages of the books that Davirai is engrossed in, it has also been blossoming right under her nose but she remains blissfully unaware of the shared smiles between Joshua and Nosihle. The secret walks at night when she has fallen asleep. The cuddles as they talk through the night. Nosihle has never been with a man who is so invested in her, who never tires of listening to her talk about her family, her passions and yet he reveals very little about himself. She understands that the job he does is not exactly nondescript or by the book so she doesn't prod.

There are times when she's telling him about her mother's many episodes, like the time she snatched Vimbai's stepmother's wig and slapped her to hell, that the mountain throws back his head and laughs,

a rumbling, full-on guffaw that makes him look younger and carefree. She loves those times when he laughs and the moonlight walks in the woods, she feels safe with him.

Then there are times when he turns cold and locks himself in the study or withdraws into his mind while they are at the breakfast table and she knows to leave him well alone when he does, like now during breakfast, he has barely looked at her nor smiled, his face is set in frown lines. His phone rings and instead of going off to answer it like he normally does, he answers it as of he's been waiting for this call.

"Talk to me, Sekuru," his one hand is holding the phone to his ear while the other's fingers are drumming on the breakfast table.

"The girls were being transferred to Chikurubi Prison and their van was hit by Shefu, he currently has

them,” Gumburai's voice on the other end of the line sounds weary as if he hasn't been sleeping well in months.

“The Defence Forces Minister? Why?” he stops drumming on the table and pinches the bridge of his nose as if combating against a migraine or nose bleed. Nosihle watches him in fascination wondering who the person on the other end of the line is and what they are saying.

“He hasn't said why, he only called me because the Mrs was about to have a miscarriage and Ruru didn't trust him to attend to her. He cut the call while I was talking and he hasn't called since.”

Joshua blows out air and looks like those women in labour doing breathing exercises. He wants to ask if Gumburai thinks the girls will be tortured but he knows Nosihle and Davirai are listening in to his side of the conversation.

“What’s his deal?” he asks instead and Gumburai grunts, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“He's power-hungry and has been the President’s lapdog for years now, figures that he wants out of under his thumb and he probably wants to call on a favour from Shadow. But he’s a slimy little worm, he could also use them to win favour with his master.”

“Should I check out his location?”

“I already have a couple of the guys on it but he’s gone dark. The call was traced to somewhere near the A10 highway. They could be anywhere in Manicaland from Ngundu to Tanganda.”

Joshua elicits some expletives before banging the breakfast table, scaring Davirai. Nosihle wisely takes Davirai to her room, makes her settle down with one

of those novels that she loves so much.

“Do you think the call was about sis Vimbai?”

Davirai's questions halts Nosihle just as she is about to get out of the bedroom and she takes a fortifying breath before she turns back and gets on the bed with Davirai, holding her hands.

“It could be but it could also have been about work, but either way, I trust Joshua to take care of the issue.”

There is a tiny sniff followed by silence as both of them become lost in their thou.

“I miss her,” Davirai admits and Nosihle hugs her, she misses her friend, sure they had drifted apart as life and adult responsibilities crept in but getting

random texts or calls from Vimbai always made her days.

When Nosihle goes back downstairs, she finds Joshua with his head bowed and Nosihle hesitantly moves towards him.

“Are you ok?”

Hearing her sweet voice almost makes him sob but he takes a shuddering breath before opening his arms for her to come into. Holding her and sniffing the scent of the wildflowers in her hair. It calms the storm raging inside him. They had been working on getting a team to go and bail Vimbai and Rub out of their cell. Things had spiralled out of their grasp yet again, it was as if these people were one step ahead of them. Almost as if they had a mole in their midst. Trying to smoke out a mole with all these threats popping up against them lately.

“I’m ready to go and see the waterfalls again,”

Nosihle’s gentle words get him out of his thoughts and he looks down at her in confusion.

Understanding dawns on him and he lifts her chin.

“I’m not in the right frame of mind, I might hurt you,” he’s not ready for her eyes to shine and her chin to lift a notch in resolve.

“I want you whichever way I can get you.”

He growls and his lips crash down on hers hungrily, in an onslaught that holds back nothing from his frustration to his need. He wants to scare her off with the kiss but she matches him with a ferocity of her own, grinding against him and causing his growl to deepen. He lifts her without breaking a step in their tongue duel and her legs go around his waist.



He moves them to his study and kicks the door shut before pinning her against it, she hasn't let up or shied away as he thought she would, if anything her fingernails are dragging into his collarbone.

He puts her down and she mewls her protest when he tears his lips away from hers. He drinks in her bedroom eyes with that wild, wanton look, her bruised and thoroughly kissed lips which are pursed in annoyance. She looks thoroughly fuckable. He tugs at the hem of her close and removes it in one swift movement while she's shrugging out of her skirt. He unhooks her bra in one smooth movement and her black semi-hardened nipples thicken crying for his lips and he bends his head suckling hungrily while Nosihle throws her head back enjoying the lavish attention on her breasts.

He picks her up again, her wetness brushing against his arm and he grunts at the pain of longing that shoots through his still confined penis. He puts her

on the desk, opening her legs wide so that he can look at her core while he quickly strips naked. When his penis springs free, Nosihle gulps down some saliva, that is one angry looking penis with popping veins.

The way he's stroking it while looking at her makes her run her hand down to the core of her need. She has never touched herself down there, always thought it was dirty but now she is driven by seeing him scoop the drop of precum and smear it across his tip and down the hard length of his thick circumference. She whimpers when her fingers find her sensitive nub and with his encouragement she strokes herself, feeling a ball of need unfurling in herself.

"Stop."

She whimpers at his command because she was so close but she moves her now wet fingers away and

watches him longingly as he grabs a foiled packet from his wallet. When he is fully sheathed, he stalks over to her and kisses her briefly to ease up her sudden frigid shoulders, she is intimidated by his left, when his fingers feel her wetness, his engorged penis thickens even more. He parts her legs even more and slowly eases into her, clenching his teeth because his baser urges are telling him to just ram into her wetness. When she opens her legs wider and arches her back, he loses whatever control he had and he rams into her, causing her to whimper.

Their pace is fast and hungry, Nosihle's bare ass barely touching the mahogany desk as she meets his thrusts with a hunger and desperation of her own, their cries of pleasure contain in the blistering kiss that pushes her off the edge first and in the throes of her passion, her walls tighten around him and he shudders his release, half-shouting at the potent feel of her. He has found his new addiction and she has found a portal into dirty pleasures. While above them Davirai is locked in the tumultuous romance of Cam

Rafferty from Devine Evil.

.....

Morning Fam

Hope you have a great week ahead, chasing deadlines but I'll try to post on the stipulated posting days.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

## Rubies and Rain

Twenty-one

“Though outwardly a gloomy shroud,  
The inner half of every cloud  
Is bright and shining:  
I therefore turn my clouds about  
And always wear them inside out  
To show the lining.”

— Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler

In a secret location:

The President is fuming, everyone on the table kept throwing nervous glances at each other, no one saying anything and no one had dared to be late to this meeting. The President’s big, stubby fingers are curled in a fist because no one is forthcoming with

information.

“Does anyone know where Shadow is, whether he’s alive or dead?”

Silence meets his question and in frustration he points to the CID Commander, the burly man with grey hairs on his temples and beads of sweat as well looks at the President his Adam’s apple bobbing up and down with nerves.

“Nothing, our operatives have reached a dead end, it’s either he’s dead or he has gone dark.”

That response gets him a stapler thrown his direction and he ducks and the staple hits the Minister of Police who winces but doesn’t dab at the wound created. Any sign of weakness in this table either leads to you being eaten alive or being replaced.

“The van which had his wife and daughter was overturned by a military truck,” at this revelation all eyes turn on Shefu and he also exhibits a hot of nerves that he tries to cover with a smile.

“We all know that Shadow's soldiers also operate under the ammo of the Military. That truck isn't registered under us, we checked. I have deployed some men to search for them though.”

The President bangs his fists on the table, he is working with a bunch of bumbling idiots, considering the sensitivity of the information that Shadow has against him, he is a sitting duck should the file fall into the right hands. The thought was giving him ulcers. Looking at the President blow up, Shefu shares a secret smile with another on the table, this is going easier than anticipated, the President is aligning the support of his men all by himself.

.....

Ruby

She's awake! Groggy and a bit disoriented, but I'm relieved to see her awake and the first thing that she does when she fully regains her wits about her is to touch her stomach and I see the panic in her eyes.

"He's fine, the baby is fine. He's a fighter just like you," I assure her and I see her eyes shimmer with unshed tears.

"You have your heart set on a boy," there's a smile in her voice as she rubs her stomach lovingly.

"Of course, I want to be the only princess, may I?"



Without responding, she takes my hand, places it on her belly. It's still mostly fat but hard. I can't believe I'm finally going to be a big sister, this baby is our silver lining. I see her eyes take in the makeshift sickroom that we are in and the dress I'm wearing and the nightgown that she is wearing.

"Where are we?"

"I have no idea, we were taken by an army man and brought here. Yesterday, he called us his bargaining chips."

I want to tell her about the lady who seems familiar but what if this room is bugged or has cameras. I'm now paranoid considering how we've been living a whole conspiracy this past month. I don't trust how I'm allowed to freely roam around the house and the door wasn't locked. I realised why when I tried to peek outside. We are in a heavily guarded safe house in the woods. I couldn't leave if I tried and

even if I somehow managed to overpower the guards outside, I wouldn't know where to go. Vimbai's sigh brings me out of my thoughts.

"I'm just tired of trying to be strong, thank you for what you did for us yesterday, Ruby. I could have lost the baby," I see it in the weary lines around her mouth and eyes. She's very close to cracking and I'm just in awe of how she managed to keep it all together until now.

"You don't have to thank me..." mid-sentence Vimbai flinches and I panic thinking something is wrong with the baby but it's only because the pleasant lady just came in with a tray of something steaming.

"Argh, you're awake, perfect. I brought you some food, I heard that you are low on iron and sugar. Not good for the baby."

She tuts and makes Vimbai sit up properly and puts some pillows against her back, fluff them before handing her a bowl of soup.

“I made sure to include kidney beans, chickpeas, black-eyed peas, tinned tomatoes, onions, red peppers, and garlic, topped with cheese and a dollop of yoghurt. I brought your iron and folic acid supplements.”

Vimbai although a touch stiff, manages to smile and thank her. She stays for a moment, when Vimbai starts eating, she leaves and we wait until her footsteps recede until I ask.

“You recognised her? She looks familiar but I couldn’t place her,” I murmur lowly so that no one can hear me.

“Yeah, she’s the wife of the Minister of Defence

Forces,” Vimbai talks between clenched teeth before putting another spoon in her mouth.

Of course! Now, I know where I knew her from. My mother used to hold a whole bunch of crowd funding galas especially with the wives of the cabinet and Mary Zvakavapano, used to grace those events. This woman used to dress up in those big fancy hats, and Italian suits and come to my mother’s high tea. I remember that I wasn’t allowed to attend I would be forced to dress up and paraded around those cabinet wives and that’s why her face is familiar. I tell Vimbai about this and then I tease her.

“I can already seeing you taking over the high tea drive, you’ll need one of those peacock hats.”

She shudders and pulls a face but also chuckles when I laugh.

“All those women are probably around my mother’s age,” a stark reminder of the age gap between her and my father. Awkwardness hangs over us until I decide to change the topic.

“Why would the Minister of Defence Forces go to such lengths to kidnap us?”

“Power. Whatever intel your father has that the government needs and arrested us for, he wants in or needs your father’s backing.”

It’s weird thinking of my father as some political magnet, he always seemed like a tech whizz to me, a very rich tech whizz. He used to run in the circles of the President, but that is normal in Zimbabwe the rich people's club is very limited and the inner circle is even more well-guarded. After eating and taking her pills, Vimbai’s eyes are drooping, so I leave her to sleep. Not sure what to do with myself, I wonder throughout the rooms and I find a library.

There are weirdly a lot of political literature in the shelves, Seizing power by Naunihal Singh, The year of living dangerously by Christopher Koch, My first coup d'état by John Mahama, Coups and army rule in Africa by Samuel Decalo and many such books. The one book is open, Overthrow by Stephen Kinzer. Whoever furnished this library with books means business.

And so a week passes, my bruises and scars are slowly fading but I have night terrors, I always wake up drenched in sweat and tears, reliving the horror of that prison. Vimbai slowly recuperating, but still under bed rest and I spending most of my time restlessly walking around the house and I always end in the library. I have even begun reading some of those scary coup books.

“A traitor only becomes one if their plot is discovered. The imposition of guilt means nothing to

those who feign loyalty. More skilled conspirators wield treason as a clinical tool of regime change and political expediency. Then, with their own hand writing history, such traitors may wear the clothes of patriots.' I've always liked that Stewart Stafford," I almost drop the book when he starts speaking, I haven't seen the man since that first dinner.

"My apologies, I didn't mean to startle you," he pages through the book I'm reading and then sits across me, his fingers stapled as he looks at me, more like weighing me.

"How would you like to have the Military, one of the strongest in Africa, under your thumb and all the power in this country," Eeeuww I would never want to be with this man, reading my reaction he laughs, a loud booming laugh that sets my teeth on edge.

"I'm flattered but I am not a cradle snatcher like your father, I meant for my son, a fine strappy young lad."

Looking at him I doubt that very much, he is an ugly old man and I can bet all my trust funds that his son is just a younger version of him, hawk nose and all. He doesn't mind my rejection, in fact he finds it amusing and shrugs his shoulders.

"Your loss, now go and get ready the chopper will be here in about," he looks at his gold watch, "an hour, so go eat then bath."

"Where are we going?" I ask without budging.

"It's a surprise," when I raise my eyebrows he laughs again, weird old man, "you are no fun. Fine, I'm taking you to your father."

"Just like that?" I don't want to be prematurely happy, I don't trust this man.



“Just like that, you would have gone sooner but his missus wasn’t strong enough for the journey and now she is. Now go before I change my mind.”

I don’t need to be told twice, I get up and run, his booming laugh chasing me.

.....

Evening Family

Thank you for your understanding, please be reminded that preorders close on the 30th.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

## Rubies and Rain

Twenty-two

Storms draw something out of us that calm seas don't.

Bill Hybels

I barely ate and rushed through the water, I am done in thirty minutes and I go and check on Vimbai. She looks worn out, ever since the near miscarriage, she looks frail and her feeble smile doesn't reassure me. She's still struggling to finish eating her soup so I take the spoon and feed her. She doesn't have an appetite but for the baby, she has to eat. She manages to eat most of it and I have to assist her to go and bath which is difficult with the drip on her hand.

"I thought he said you are now fit to travel, we can

stay some more until...”

“No!” her refusal comes out strong and it takes some of her strength because she has to take a deep breath before she can continue, “I just want the uncertainty to end. We can’t stay Ruby, it’s a chopper ride, I will be fine.”

I’m sceptical, but she has a point staying here can’t be good. We are still prisoners just in better conditions. I help her dress up, she’s gained weight but still looks frail. It’s her listless eyes, she looks like she can snap at any moment. The Minister finds us ready, saying our goodbyes to his wife and tells us that the chopper is outside. A part of me is happy but the greater part of me is still scared that this could be a hoax.

I expected a military chopper but this is a bigger, Fixed-wing aircraft, it has room for Vimbai's narrow bed. It looks like one of those air ambulances and

when I check the other side there is some health organisations logo. I watch anxiously, hovering as they strap her in and I make sure that she is strapped in right before I take my seat.

The old man is coming with us, it is weird seeing him in civilian clothes, without any military gear. There is no mistaking him for an ordinary man though, cruelty is embedded in the lines across his face, he's a hard man and even while perusing through his iPad, he looks ready to pounce.

When we lift off, I keep expecting someone to start shooting at us, but we lift off smoothly and the forest looks beautiful from up here even the static over the radio can't take anything away from its beauty. We keep rising until the house in the forest is a small spec and it feels like my intestines are twisting so I stop looking down.

A chopper is so much noisier than a plane or jet, I'm

grateful when he hands me an iPod with headphones. 'Towards the Sun', by Rihanna seems fitting as we soar above the clouds.

"Turn your face towards the sun  
Let the shadows fall behind you  
Don't look back, just carry on  
And the shadows will never find you"

It's sunset and it looks glorious from up here, it looks like we are flying in a whirl of fire, the amber colour of the sun has lit up even the clouds are a raging, fiery colour. Breathtaking. I try to fight sleep but as the light leaves the clouds and darkness creeps in I find myself falling asleep too.

I am woken up by a cold current sweeping in and I shiver then sit up, rubbing my eyes. I realize that we've landed and that they are taking Vimbai's gurney out.

“Where are you taking her?!” I cry trying to quickly unbuckle my straps but failing miserably in my panicked state.

“Ts! Ts! Such little faith in me, I told you that I’m taking you to your father. Welcome to Cape Town, should I help you with your straps,” I growl at his sardonic reaction and he laughs before shrugging and stepping down.

Finally, I get the blasted things off and I quickly rush off the chopper, almost tripping in my haste and the General or whatever position he holds, steadies me and helps me get down. We are next to a beach and there is a house next to the cliff and we are moving towards it. I’m closely following Vimbai's gurney. She is fast asleep, sedated for the journey. I wonder if the sedative will affect the baby.

Before we even reach the door, it opens and uncle Gumburai comes out. His shoulders are not as broad as they used to be, that's the first thing I notice. He looks thinner and he has squared his shoulders but he still looks like he carries the world on them. I want to run and throw myself at him and sob but Vimbai's words stop me, I will not show them my weakness and something about the way uncle Gumburai is stiffly holding himself up, tells me that he doesn't want to show any weakness himself.

He is not the uncle or practically grandfather who dotted on and spoiled me my whole life. He isn't my Gum-Gum who would pick me up and throw me over his shoulder as I asked him to whirl round and round until I threw up. His eyes are cold, killer eyes, he barely glances at me and Vimbai. He is playing the role of Shadow's assassin right now and I shiver at the realisation. This is a man I can believe cold-bloodedly kills and that helps me keep my distance.

“Ah, old friend!” the old man says cheerily and uncle Gumburai grunts his response.

“Still a man of few words, I see, not to worry I come bearing gifts,” he is in his element, talking with laughter bubbling beneath his words while uncle Gumburai scowls something fierce.

Any lesser man would have fled from uncle Gumburai's scowl, not him, he slaps uncle Gumburai on the shoulder.

“I thought Shadow would be here for this oddly not touching family reunion,” he hums trying to look beyond the door but uncle Gumburai stays firmly on the doorstep.

“Shadow sends his regards,” uncle Gumburai says not budging from his position.



“Never mind, there will be plenty of time to talk to Shadow when I come and collect on my gifts reward. As you can see both of the are fine, without a scratch except for those that they got before I took them.”

There is no longer any laughter lacing his words, the cold edge is at the fore as he stares down uncle Gumburai. It’s a pissing contest and only Vimbai stirring gets their attention. Uncle Gumburai reluctantly moves and allows those pushing the gurney to push her in.

“Ruby, go inside,” a part of me wants to rebel and hear exactly what is being said. One look from uncle Gumburai and I move. When I get to the door, I turn back and look at our cryptic saviour.

“Thank you, for everything,” he salutes me, a short sharp salute and I tip my head at him feeling like some heroine of a badly scripted Hollywood, African

war movie.

Uncle Gumburai gently pushes me in and closes the door firmly so that I don't even think about eavesdropping on the conversation. It still feels surreal and I keep waiting for the other shoe to drop. It all seems too easy, too smooth. I keep expecting to hear the sound of guns going off, something but I'm left with the sound of the waves crashing against the boulders. The ocean is very close to here and the sound is strong and soothing.

There are uncle Gumburai's men milling all over the place and I see one of them with a sniper standing by the window and another on the small ventilation. That makes me feel less paranoid, they are expecting everything to go south.

Nothing much or untoward happens. After about ten minutes I hear the chopper engine screech and uncle Gumburai comes in. He opens his arms and I throw

myself at him. When he wraps them around me, the terror of the past month, the pain and humiliation all swamp me and I finally allow myself to break down.

Sob after sob wrecks through me as the images of the beatings and rape all flood my mind and I cry for my lost innocence. I wail and hit uncle Gumburai's chest, they should have rescued us sooner. They are the reason we were taken in the first place. He lets me be until my tears are spent and my energy is depleted.

“I am sorry, Ruru,” remorse and weariness intertwine in his voice and he suddenly sound so old and desolate, nothing like the cold mercenary outside.

“I am so sorry that I wasn't there to protect you, what did those bastards do to you?”

I ease myself out of his arms, his sorry doesn't take

away any of the pain and suffering we have been through in their stead. I wipe my eyes and clear my clogged throat.

“I don’t want to talk about it, where is my father?” my husky voice isn’t giving any room for further probing.

Uncle Gumburai sighs and I realise that his hair which had streaks of silver before is now almost fully white, his face is gaunt and has more than his usual share of harsh lines. Whatever they were going through has aged him, the same way our ordeal aged us and that softens me somewhat.

“He’s not here, we thought Shefu might be planning to ambush us so he’s in another location, a quiet town a bit far from here.”

Relief floods me, as angry as I am at the both of them, knowing that he’s alive somewhere gives me

hope.

“Did she really almost have a miscarriage?” uncle Gumburai nods towards the room that Vimbai was taken to.

“Her name is Vimbai, and yes, she almost lost my baby brother, not once, not twice but three times. I saw her masking the pain while we were in prison.”

Uncle Gumburai's eyebrows rise at my defence of my stepmother and I don't blame him, before all this I couldn't stand even the thought of her but I guess when you go through the coals of hell with someone, you can't not change. It alters some intrinsic part of you.

“We have a doctor who is looking at her right now, should I also get one for you? And those doctors for feelings, will they help?” I can hear the anxiety in his

voice and how he hovers around me is cute but I don't want to go back there just yet, not even in conversation.

"You can get Vimbai's psychologist, she hasn't been on her meds and I worry about her state of mind," uncle Gumburai scowls at me.

"What about you, Ruru? I can see how haunted your eyes are, you need to..."

"I'm fine uncle Gumburai, all I need right now is to see my father," I interject and at the mention of my father I see his face blanch.

"About you father, Ruby," with those four words I feel my ears ringing and my heart drenched in fear and a nagging feeling of doom.

.....

Morning Family

Happy weekend ahead, see I told you to trust me. A reminder that preorders are closing on the 30th, please share as much as you can.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

## Rubies and Rain

Twenty-three

“Strength isn’t about how much you can handle before you break. It’s about how much you can endure after you have been broken.” Unknown

It feels like we have stepped out of South Africa and taken a dive into Wessex, rural southwest England, what with the rolling lofty hills and the occasional sheep and stacked hay. I feel like I have been physically transported back to the idyllic backdrop of Far from the Madding crowd, I’m half-expecting to see Bathsheba galloping on horseback trying to catch Gabriel Oak before he leaves for America.

The occasional Springbok leaping through the fields dispels the England farmlands feel, reminding me that I haven’t been transported to the set of a British



romantic drama. Watching the movie was one of my mother's many, many attempts to get me to love Historical fiction, after watching the rather nice movie, if a bit horrific twist of fate, I took one look at the leather-bound book and never looked back.

Caledon is quaint, yes, I think quaint is the perfect word to describe it. The blossoming yellow canola fields, give it a romantic feel that captures my interest and deviates my thoughts from my father. Not for long though, Vimbai nervously stiffening beside me, reminds me that we don't know the state that we'll find him in.

Uncle Gumburai, bless his gruff heart, tried to prepare us. He said my father was shot in the head and he's currently on life support. I had and still have so many questions, how was he shot, who shot him, where was uncle Gumburai when he was shot, is he brain dead, will he come out of the coma?

I had to hold in the questions because upon hearing the news, Vimbai became even frailer, like she was slowly losing the will to fight. I can only imagine how traumatic her pregnancy has been from prison, to a threatened miscarriage and now learning that the father of her child is on life support. I wanted to schedule a meeting with her therapist to maybe prepare her for seeing him but she didn't want to wait another day or two. I'm worried about her and that gives me a purpose and something to focus on other than my struggles.

"Should we stop somewhere and get you something to eat?"

I see uncle Gumburai eyeing me in the rearview mirror, I know that Vimbai isn't his favourite person nor is he hers, but he will have to deal, she and the baby are my priority now.

"I'm fine," she lies feebly. We left the beach house

soon after breakfast and have been travelling for over a hundred kilometres and if not the food, she needs to stretch a bit.

“We have to think about the baby, the baby is hungry, he told me so,” my little quip has her smiling weakly, I’m getting really worried about her.

“There is a restaurant slash farm stand, the Van Brakel Stoor, it’s along this route. We can stop there,” uncle Gumburai offers and I know it has everything to do with me mentioning the baby.

The building is tucked away in the rolling fields, its name stamped on its face and when I get in I’m met with curious stares. I’m the only black person inside, Vimbai is stretching her feet outside and I’m glad I asked uncle Gumburai to stay in the car and keep an eye on Vimbai. The lady behind the counter would have probably called the police on us.

I ask for one of their outside tables, it would be a crime not to enjoy the outdoors. I'm shepherded there and handed a menu, Vimbai joins me and says Gumburai said I should order for him.

"I'm not really hungry but I'll have the pie, chips and smoked chicken salad. Oh, and maybe add the Quiche," I stifle my laugh and order their lasagna and tripe and trotters to go for uncle Gumburai.

"Are you scared?" Vimbai asks me and I let my eyes sweep through the lush greens dotted with yellow.

"I am, he's the only parent I have left and we didn't exactly part on good terms." She slurps some of the homemade ginger beer that she ordered then burps.

"I understand, hearing my father breakdown yesterday as I called him was so hard to hear. He

couldn't talk through his sobs but it filled me with so much warmth, knowing that he's there, crying for me, "her eyes also fill up and she dabs the tears away, laughing at the same time.

When our food arrives, I leave to go and hand uncle Gumburai his tripe while it's still piping hot and I find Vimbai done with her pie and now attacking the Quiche. Pregnancy can miss me, I got a check-up yesterday and fortunately, I'm not pregnant. I would have terminated the baby without a doubt. After eating then storing up on some homemade ginger beer, rusks, preserves and baked treats that I can't pronounce, we head back to the car.

We drive for another thirty minutes before we pull into a long winding gravel road and tucked behind a hill is a fortress, if the high walls are anything to go by. There are guards at the gate, guards milling around the property and guards at the door. I knew my father was rich, but I didn't think he was rich

enough to afford a small army of his own. We are let inside and the intimidating house on the outside has a warm, homey feel to it on the inside.

“This is Natsai, she is the housekeeper and she will show you to your rooms,” uncle Gumburai introduces the elderly lady who is smiling warmly at us.

“May we see Ian first,” Vimbai talks directly to uncle Gumburai for the first time since we landed in Cape Town, “please.”

Uncle Gumburai grunts but he still dismisses the housekeeper and ushers us to the furthest wing of the house. The floor is carpeted in a rich burgundy rug, there is art on the wall and I wonder if this is one of Dad's properties or they rented it. Either way it's an impressive building.

Uncle Gumburai hesitates at the door as if he wants to say something but he checks himself and throws open the rich oak doors. I go in first and shock makes me abruptly standstill and Vimbai bumps into me from behind. When her eyes register what made me stop, a broken whimper comes out of her mouth.

My father is a shadow of his former self, he's lost a ton of weight and he looks so small on the bed with the machines dwarfing him. He has a large bandage wrapped around his head like a mini turban. I stay rooted to the spot while Vimbai steps forward until she reaches the bed. I watch silently as she traces her hand along his face, he doesn't have a beard, I think someone shaves him. Her hand goes tentatively to the bandage on his head, hovers there before going back to his face. She's now using both her hands, like a blind person trying to imprint his face using her hands.

"Ian," the way she says his name is broken and when

he doesn't stir or even move a finger, an ear-splitting wail escapes her mouth and her hands are now frantically going up and down his face, wiping off her tears and trying to wake him up.

When uncle Gumburai steps towards her while growling, it's as if the invisible strings holding me back has snapped and I reach her before he does.

"Ian wake up, we are going to have a baby. Ruby says it's a boy, I hope he comes out looking like you," the vortex of words burst out of her mouth hurriedly and she keeps muttering other things before letting out another wail.

"No, you won't take him too, I'll be good. You can lock me in the toilet Mainini, but don't take him too. Please," when she couples into a ball on the floor it shreds my heart into pieces.



“Shhh, it’s ok Vimbai, he is going to be ok,” I might as well be talking to myself.

She emits another cry, this time a whimper and she starts thrashing around, fighting whoever is taking her Chitekete. Just as I fear, Vimbai has finally snapped and the voices are taking over. I want to hold her and assure her but she’s thrashing around, arms flailing violently and all I can do is watch her with tears in my eyes. I didn’t notice uncle Gumburai slip away but he comes back with a frazzled looking doctor in a white coat.

“Give him back!” Vimbai shrieks and I can’t help the sob that escapes my mouth.

She’s been so strong throughout this ordeal, she killed a prison guard for crying out loud but I guess this is her hard limit. Watching her fight against the doctor and uncle Gumburai breaks my heart, she’s kicking and scratching them. She somehow

manages to slip through them and she goes to the bed and slaps my father, hard, twice.

“Wake up Ian, you don’t get to abduct me, make me fall in love with you, impregnated, send me to that hell and then you just die. Do you hear me?! Dammit, Ian wake up! Wake up! Wake up!”

She lets out another piercing scream and this time uncle Gumburai and another guard manage to pry her from my father and hold her down while she fights.

“I’m not scared of you, you vile student beater,” she’s fuming and wriggling until the doctor manages to shoot some sedative into her arm and she dissolves into tears. She slips into unconsciousness mid-sob.

“She has schizophrenia,” I explain to the doctor who nods thoughtfully and jots it down.

Vimbai looks frail as Uncle G carries her to what I assume is our rooms. I'm left with my comatose father. I gingerly move towards him until I am right next to the bed. Close up, his wounds appear even worse. He had swelling around his eyes and head, it has gone down but left a lot of bruises behind.

Like uncle Gumburai, he looks like he has also aged prematurely. His lips are chapped, I take the lip balm next to his bed and I softly apply it to his lips.

"You have to wake up Dad, I know when you left things were kind of intense," I swallow the lump in my throat and clear my throat before I continue.

"All of that doesn't matter now, Vimbai is carry my little brother, your baby. You have to wake up and be the best daddy to my sibling."

There is no movement and I hover around his bed, hoping against hope that he wakes up. He has to wake up and avenge us. He has to wake up!

.....

Morning Family

You are reminded that preorders close in 2 days time.

Happy week ahead

Love and Light

## Rubies and Rain

Twenty-four

“Colors shone with exceptional clarity in the rain. The ground was a deep black, the pine branches a brilliant green, the people wrapped in yellow looking like special spirits that were allowed to wander over the earth on rainy mornings only.” – Haruki Murakami

I crank my neck, trying to relieve the strain on my shoulders. If I didn't drink sleeping pills yesterday, I doubt I would have fallen asleep. I am dreading getting out of this bed because it means I'll have to be strong again. Who do I even see first? My father? With all those pipes feeding him and keeping him alive or do I see Vimbai? Yesterday, they had to end up restraining her because when she regained consciousness she became even more violent.

I want to sleep here and pretend that how bitchy the International Relations, which happens to be my major, lecturer is my biggest challenge. I want to dream about Tendero and stalk her with one eye open while I'm 'sleeping'.

I don't even get any solace in pretending, I sigh deeply and throw away my covers before getting up and making my bed. The shower slightly rejuvenated me, I feel less Zombie and more Walking Dead. I avoid the mirrors at all costs and I dash down to breakfast, I find uncle Gumburai with a mountain of food piled up on his plate.

"Morning, Sekuru," I only add homemade granola, plain yoghurt, honey, strawberries and pineapples to my bowl.

Uncle Gumburai grunts and puts toast, bacon, eggs

and muffins on a plate and slides it to me. I make a face just how I used to every morning at primary school before I went off to boarding. He remembers too if the nostalgic almost smile, more like a grimace, is anything to go by.

“I found a reputable neuro-oncologist, he comes highly recommended and the best part is he’s in Cape Town, I’m going to give his office a call,” uncle Gumburai is staring at me but I just shove some granola in my mouth and pretend I can’t see his surprise. I’m not that little girl he knew anymore.

“I spoke to Vimbai's therapist Camilla, she agreed with me that online sessions wont work so I’ll need you to fetch her from Harare. She’s agreed to come and work with Vimbai until this episode passes,” uncle Gumburai puts down his fork and I brace myself for the argument.

“The doctor in Cape Town, I can understand he is a

bit close but Harare...”

“We need someone who is already aware of her history and Camilla was recommended by my father which makes her the best for his wife, who is also carrying his child who might be his heir.” I put some emphasis on wife and heir to put my point across.

“We don’t know that Ruru, that girl...” for the second time in my life I interrupt my uncle mid-sentence.

“That girl, Sekuru, killed a man who was about to rape me for the second time, that girl stayed in that hellhole with me even when she was released and if it weren’t for her, I’m not sure I would be seating here and stuffing my face with bacon. Whatever issues you have with her, fix them she’s part of the family now and you always told me that we don’t skimp on family. Make sure that that girl's therapist gets here as soon as possible, please.”



Uncle Gumburai is looking at me as if I'm a bomb that is about to denote, then my rape bit registers in his mind and he looks like a wounded bear that is about to wreak havoc.

"When I get my hands on those bastards they will pray for death," I know that he means it and before the violence would have scared me but now it makes me stretch my lips in a twisted smile.

"Vimbai killed the mean one, after I stuck a scalpel on his pudgy neck, she shot his brains off," I gulp at the memory, feeling the wetness of his blood on me.

"That's why I need to get her that doctor, she didn't deal with killing that man and I feel like it's my fault, in a way. I need to make amends."

Uncle Gumburai closes his eyes and when he opens them, they are red shot.

“I will get her doctor and a gynae too,” that’s all I needed, his support.

.....

I expected an ageing, short Indian doctor with a receding hairline and wrinkled skin when I read up on Dr Pacou and his portfolio. I did not even consider this Instagram looking dream that just stepped out of the helicopter, making me forget that I am sworn off men for life.

He is tall, so deliciously tall, bulky too like he lives at the gym not operating on people’s skulls, his melanin popping skin is without blemish and when he says something to the driver, his teeth gleam in the sunlight. When he gets closer, I notice his meticulously groomed beard and thick dark lips but what makes him different is his hair and eyes.

His hair is gently tousled, thick hair that has a gentle curl to it and is stylishly cut into an asymmetric side sweep. Its texture starkly contrasts with his black skin as do his eyes, sparkling brown, almost honey gold eyes. My uncle's grunt makes me stop my perusal and when I accept his firm handshake, I notice that his left hand has a marriage stamp, bummer, figures that all this yumminess is snatched.

"Thank you for coming out here so quickly Dr Pacou," I say leading the way to my father's room. Uncle Gumburai lets me take the lead.

"You are lucky you caught me this week, my family and I are relocating to Johannesburg soon. When I received your father's file, I was intrigued," his voice is deep and its warmth, especially when he talks about his family, wraps over me.

Coming into my father's room and seeing him lying so helplessly still brings a lump to my throat, my father has always been larger than life not this shadow of Death. Dr Pacou, mutters something under his breath as he reads his file.

"Was the MRI I requested carried out?" he asks after about thirty minutes of careful perusal of the files and checking the machines for my father's vitals.

I don't know how uncle Gumburai did it but there was a portable MRI machine and a radiographer with an iPad performed the MRI next to my father's sickbed yesterday. Dr Pacou is comparing the results from the CT scan and the recent MRI scan.

"See these hyperintense basal ganglia areas, that may indicate an ischaemic stroke, we won't know for sure until he wakes up," I don't understand a word he's saying but my interest piques when he mentions a stroke.

“Stroke?” the alarm in my voice is clear as day.

“The bullet injured important vascular structures inside his head, around this area see,” all I can see is white and grey matter around a black area and yet I nod.

“The internal capsule is also a very common area where vascular lesions appear. The good news is there is still activity in his brain and that means he is not brain dead, his brain is just adjusting to the trauma. The swelling has gone down and now all we can do is wait and pray.”

Disappointment crushes me, I thought that he would say there was some miracle that he could perform or that the first surgery wasn't done right and my father needs something, anything except waiting and praying. He must see my downcast face because he

puts the files down and takes out his phone.

“Look, I know firsthand how disappointing and depressing it is to wait for the unknown, so I want you to meet my wife,” respect for my elders is the only thing stopping me from snapping that I want nothing to do with his stupid wife. My father might never wake up and he’s making a video call to his wife.

“She was in a coma a few years back after being tossed out of a car while in labour with our firstborn,” I want to ask so many questions but his wife's face appears, she’s just as exotic as he is. Cat-like green eyes and curls that are currently running amok in her face as she looks like she was coming from yoga.

“Hey mí alma, did you travel well?” her voice is gentle even a tad tired and he looks at her with stars in his eyes.

“I did baby, look there’s someone I want you to meet, her father is in a coma,” he thrusts the phone into my face and my eyes widen while she only smiles at me, revealing dimples.

“Hi,” I say awkwardly and her response is warm and she encourages me to ask anything.

“When you were in a coma, could you hear everything around you?” her smile doesn’t leave her face but it has turned a bit wistful.

“Not everything, no, I was weirdly in between two worlds, I got to meet my parents who died before I was born and it felt like it should have been easy to just cross over. But when they placed my baby on my chest, the connection was instant and I wanted so badly to come back to him and saying goodbye to my parents was hard.”

Her honesty and her speaking so openly makes me feel at ease and I keep asking her questions about how she got into the coma, how was life after the coma and she answers every question until she has to go to collect Liam, their son from preschool. I feel much lighter after the call.

“She was in a very bad way, Liam had to be put in an incubator because he was so tiny. She stayed in the coma for months and we were about to switch off the machines when she came back,” his eyes have this haunted look like he is reliving the traumatic past.

“I thought I had lost her and yet she came back. We are having our second baby soon,” that glow again when he talks about his family. He clears his throat and blinks away the tears rapidly before continuing to speak.



“I am telling you this because, there are some conditions that science can’t cover or fully understand, especially the brain. I can not operate further on your father because the bullet was neatly taken out and everything seems to be fine except for my fear of ischaemic stroke. You know your father better, use whatever he holds dearest to try and get him to come back. He’s not dead but not really alive either,” I might have expected a medical miracle but he has given me so much more, he has given me hope. And a mustard seed of hope is all it takes, right?

.....

Good Morning Family

Preorders end tonight at midnight

Love and light

Busisekile Khumalo

## Rubies and Rain

Twenty-five

“Life is not always fair. Sometimes you get a splinter while sliding down a Rainbow,” Terri Guillemets

Nosihle

This is so wrong, yet it feels so deliciously right! Adrenaline pumps through my blood as I look back, trying to see if no one is following us, it is just miles and miles of trees and rocky terrain. No human in sight. The Mou...Joshua, Joshua doesn't seem bothered about the possibility of a tail. He is walking confidently, dragging me by my hand as we go deeper into the forest. I'm having second thoughts, this is a bad idea! What if someone records us? It is the middle of the day.

“Let's go to the waterfall,” is all he had to say and one look into the twin pools of molten chocolate and I left Davirai alone in that big house. She is having online lessons and here I am trudging through mini boulders.

I stumble and he catches me hauling me to his massive chest, where our heartbeats merge and I no longer know where mine begins and his ends. All the doubts and second thoughts that were lingering in my mind disappear and all that I see and feel is Joshua, my Mountain. He smiles, a wide smile barring his teeth and I would swoon if I wasn't already in his arms. I do feel a little light-headed. Instead of setting me on my feet, he scoops me up in his arms and I squeal.

“Joshua!”

My laughter intensifies when he kiss-tickles my neck and the area just above my tummy. He doesn't let up

until I have tears in my eyes.

“St-sto-stop!” he doesn’t heed my bursts of laughter but downright grins when I snort-laugh. I only get a short reprieve when he takes his mouthing me to ask,

“You are thinking too much, no thinking today, ok?”

I have no choice but to agree and he lets up. He doesn’t put me down though, he continues striding purposefully with me in his arms and I’m loving the view. Mostly Joshua view, not the view of the forest because I’m startled when he unceremoniously puts me down. We are here, at the waterfall that made me catch my breath but even more so the promise I got after mentioning seeing the waterfall.

“...I will f\*ck you in front of that waterfall one day, with only the birds and the mountain animals our

audience.”

Thinking about it now turns my legs to jelly, a host of butterflies in my stomach and suddenly I find myself almost digging the ground with my big toe. Sex with Joshua is earth-shattering, mind-numbingly orgasmic. I can't believe I lost my womb over bad sex. I consider it a sign of healing that I can now think of losing my womb without tearing up but it has everything to do with thinking of Joshua's sexual prowess.

Where Jacob was selfish and disappointingly fast to ejaculate, Joshua takes his time, imprints himself, whether it's a hard f\*ck in his office or that slow, steady morning glory that makes my toes curl.

“Are you going to strip or will you be standing there all day, drooling over my dick?”

I snap out of my lustful memories and I realise that Joshua has stripped naked and he's standing proudly, feet slightly apart and his weapon of mass destruction dangling deliciously against his thigh.

"Aren't you going to help me out of my clothes?" I ask demurely, biting my bottom lip.

I finally understand Vimbai's jabs, she used to tell me that Jacob had a weak sex game and when I got defensive, she calmly folded her arms across her chest and told me point black.

"There is no way, a woman can get premiumly dicked down and remain a prude, good sex turns even Pastor's wives into sirens."

Joshua is smirking at my attempt at being a seductress, the sight of his smirk makes me feel heated, all over my body.

“If I take off even a single item of your clothing, we will end up not swimming to the waterfall,” the way his lips pout and form words has my ovaries jiggling. Wait, what?!

“What do you mean swim to the waterfall?” his smirk widens into a grin.

“I promised to f\*ck you in front of the waterfall, not so far from it,” I should be protesting, I should be finding the thought too sinful and not practical but I’m here quickly stripping out of my dress. When I’m left with only my panties on, I hesitate.

“Come on baby, bring out that Gwanda girl who used to skinny dip in the setting sun, ”the way he says it makes me laugh and he’s not even being funny. He doesn’t mind, he looks like he enjoys making me laugh and being a giggly mess.

“We don’t have all day, baby,” he says stroking himself, when he hardens a bit, I cannot strip out of these panties fast enough. I almost trip over them in my haste. Joshua openly laughs and he takes my clothes, folds them and hides them with his under some rock.

“Ready?” he asks holding my hand and I nod, taking a deep breath and leaping off the boulder that we climbed on.

The water is so cold when my body hits its surface, but as I continue going deeper into its body I adjust to the temperature. Joshua tugs me towards him until our limbs are mashing together in the most undignified manner and he gives me a quick smooch underwater. While I’m settling into the kiss, he breaks it off and untangles our limbs before swimming off, his one hand firmly clasping mine.



The swim to the waterfall is a bit of a stretch but I don't feel it because we play along the way and my heart keeps digging a deeper hole for me to fall into. The water becomes a little rougher as we approach the sprays and the roar of the waterfall but I feel safe as long as my hand is inside Joshua's. We break into the surface and I take in deep greedy gulps of air.

When Joshua has had his share of air, he goes back under and I feel my legs being tugged and then his hot tongue duels with the cold waters. There is this unexplainable pressure on my nub and just as I am about to reach my peak, he pulls away and breaks back to the surface again.

After he's taken in some air I maul him with kisses. I've never felt more alive. We approach the waterfalls and their spray is rejuvenating. We step out of the water and Joshua tugs me towards the waterfalls, I try to resist and he looks into my eyes. Something

about the heat in his keeps me transfixed, safe.

“Trust me,” it’s not a question or command yet I nod my head and follow him meekly.

Behind the curtain of the harsh current, lies a small, dry cave. I marvel at its warmth, at the blue light from the water and sky that illuminate it making the cave look warm and magical. There are shiny stones, maybe quartz cluttered around the cave. It’s just like a mini haven.

“How did you know of this place?” I ask as I try to run my hands up and down my arm to try and generate some warmth.

“I have my ways,” he rumbles stepping closer to me, emitting heat and I crowd him to get some of that warmth.

“I thought you said you will quote, f\*ck you in front of that waterfall one day, with only the birds and the mountain animals our audience,” I’m tilting my head so that I can see his eyes.

“Oh but we are going f\*ck in front of the waterfall and the animals will hear your screams of pleasure,” he doesn’t give me a chance to make a comeback he plunders my lips.

"I decided that nothing gets to see you in the throes of passion not even mountain animals, your pleasure is mine," the possessiveness in his voice makes me shiver.

He aches my back, making me face the curtain of the waterfall, its silvery glimmer makes the sky look bluer and the rainbow peeking from beneath it is gorgeous. I exclaim as I feel him impaling me from behind, filling me up and stretching my vaginal walls.

"All mine," he hisses and all I can do is whimper in agreement.

"Do you see any animals?" he grits out and when I murmur my answer, he hisses and angles me in such a way that he goes even deeper.

"No!" I cry out when he stops moving and he slaps my butt, the sting is sharp.

"No? Tell me what you see, little one," I gulp and try to focus beyond the fullness, the sting in my butt and the silvery curtain of the waterfall.

I catch sight of some fish frolicking in the water and a couple of mountain rats circling the river banks looking for a kill. I tell him and with each animal I disclose, he rewards me by pumping into me. It feels like heaven and hell all blended into one explosive

moment.

“Rainbow!” I scream desperately wanting him to hit that spot that only he has reached in my life.

“Do you want to ride the rainbow, baby?” I whimper as I almost buckle under his pounding but he holds me steady and when I say yes, he rewards me by pounding on the spot, hissing that I shouldn’t take my eyes off the rainbow. I am overwhelmed by the sudden urge to pee.

“Let go, Nosihle, ride that rainbow for me,” splinters of light shutter behind my eyes and just as the avalanche hits my body, I let out a scream of pleasure as my whole body starts shaking and I hear his wild roar above the roar of the water as he follows me over the rainbow.

“That was epic,” I finally manage to speak after 5

minutes, warmly encased in his arms. His hand is drawing patterns on my spine and I can't help the shiver of need that escapes me.

"You are epic, as beautiful as this waterfall." I feel the heat on my cheeks dip into my neck and chest.

"I came here to tell you something, Vimbai and Ruby were smuggled out of Zimbabwe. They are safe in South Africa now," I twist my head and look at him in shock.

"When?" he doesn't stop drawing patterns and he evades my question.

"I have to take Davirai and the therapist to Vimbai, we'll drop you off at Beitbridge. Don't worry, your work situation has been handled. There are papers showing that you were temporarily transferred to the ZIMRA office in Harare."

“Oh,” I can’t hide the crashing disappointment in my voice.

This is goodbye. I try to keep the tears away but they stupidly fill my eyes. I should be happy, Vimbai is free, my debt to her paid and I can go on with my life now.

Of course, he’s going to go away and leave me it’s not like we are dating or anything and I practically threw myself at him and like a man, he took what I offered and now he is going to go back to his life.

“Nosihle, say something, anything.”

I have so many words trapped in my heart but all I can do is ask him when he is leaving.

“Tonight,” a single word has never broken me more than this. I don’t know what I expected.

This is why I came here, to try and get Vimbai out of prison and look after her sister. I did all that and now it’s time to go back to my life. Joshua never made me any promises but it still hurts. He’s not even asking if I want to go with them, what am I even saying, that sounds stupid.

“Let’s go, so that I can help Davirai with her packing,” I have already scrambled to my feet and I am heading towards the waterfall, his cum dripping onto my thighs and trying very hard not to break down.

“Nosihle!”

I ignore the urgency of his voice and shield my eyes from the rainbow, now it’s just a kaleidoscope of broken dreams, unmade promises and gapping



Loneliness.

.....

Morning Family

Have a beautiful weekend, know that this admin holds you close to her heart.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

## Rubies and Rain

Twenty-six

“It’s ok to cry when you have too much on your mind.  
The clouds rain when they get too heavy too.”

Unknown

Vimbai’s therapist couldn’t come fast enough. Things are looking pretty grim, it’s like overnight Vimbai has lost her grip with reality. In the morning, when I was trying to get her to eat breakfast, she called me Nosihle and told me that she hadn’t wanted to leave Tafadzwa but that my father blackmailed her by using my abortion. Then she recoiled and called me her Mainini and she started screaming and throwing the food at me.

Her palms are bleeding from where she was scrapping at herself using her fingernails until her

hands were bound. Her eyes are wild and vacant. The gynaecologist who came to see her yesterday was worried about her spiked blood pressure, weight loss and dropped around the term preeclampsia, a lot. It made my mind spin.

I'm afraid. For her. For my baby brother. For my father. I'm very afraid. I pace up and down outside her room as her therapist assesses her. Her sister and her guard are being shown to their rooms. The little sister looked as scared as I am, especially when she was told that she can't see her sister yet. I know Vimbai wouldn't want her to see her in that state.

I wring my hands and realise that my wrists are too exposed, fragile as if they can snap at any minute. I try not to meet my sunken eyes on the reflection of the glass of the frame, just across from where I am pacing. The bedroom door opens and the therapist, she said her name is Camilla, comes out with a

pinched look around her eyes.

“How is she?” I pounce without giving her a chance to collect herself.

“She's in the throes of a psychotic breakdown, she couldn't recognise who I am,” she sounds drained and I don't blame her.

I almost chickened out from giving her breakfast. Seeing someone at war with their mind is emotionally taxing.

“Isn't the medication helping?” we started giving her the medication after her initial breakdown.

“Not yet, it's not,” her shoulders sag a little and I realise that this is personal for her, it goes far beyond patient and doctor relationship.

“There are a few psychoactive drugs, like mood stabilizers that most pregnant women should avoid due to their risk of birth defects. I’ve had to take her off the mood stabilizers so I will have to get through to her via good old fashioned physical therapy.”

“The gynaecologist who came to see her said she’s at a high risk of preeclampsia,” I tell her hoping that she will refute it.

“She's right, women with schizophrenia have increased risks during pregnancy that other women do not have, including preterm deliveries, other obstetrical complications and preeclampsia. It was always going to be a high-risk pregnancy, but couple it with the trauma that you both had to go through and then the father of the baby being in a coma...” she draws a deep shuddering breath and I feel a lump in my throat.

“I’m sorry, I know I should be giving you hope but I need you to understand that the journey ahead is going to be rocky, at best. We need a maternal-fetal medicine specialist,” when she sees the blank look on my face, she explains.

“These are doctors that help take care of women with complicated and high-risk pregnancies.” I’m sure we can get one of those for Vimbai, at least we are in South Africa, their medical care is better than Zimbabwe’s.

“What else does she need?”

Camilla attempts a smile and her facial muscles relax a bit.

“I’m glad to see that your relationship has improved, one of her fears during our talks was becoming a horrible stepmother to you just as her aunt is to her.

What with the way she came into your life,” I never thought that she cared, at least not enough to talk to her therapist about me.

“She'll need a healthy diet, good sleep patterns, maybe plan some hikes or mild Zumba, yoga, any fun physical activity. I will set up some stress releasing techniques that she can do, meditation should be good for her.”

Now it's time for my shoulders to sag in relief, planning and making sure there is something I can do keeps me sane and lessens my guilt.

“Hey, you don't have to carry the burden alone. I'm here to help,” her kind smile makes me close my eyes until I've gotten my emotions in check and I smile my gratitude to her.

“I know that both of you underwent a lot of trauma

and even though I'm here for Vimbai, I can also set up sessions for you as well to unpack the last month and whatever else that needs unpacking."

I don't want to go back to that prison even if it's just in my mind. I don't want to relive that hell and I'm already shaking my head before she even finishes with her suggestion.

"I'm fine, I just need to be strong for my father and Vimbai now," Camilla looks at me like she wants to say something but she ends up just squeezing my hand and asking for her room. I square my shoulders and lead her to her room. I'm fine.

.....

Only I'm not fine. As the weeks progress a routine of some sort develops, I wake up, take a quick shower, visit my Dad, pamper him and update him about



Vimbai's progress. Make sure that I wash his face, apply some lip balm on his lips. After that, head to the kitchen to grab Vimbai's breakfast, make sure that she eats at least half of it. In the afternoon, I do my assignments and try to catch up with others, making up for the lost time is hard! I also help Davirai with her schoolwork.

I do anything and everything during the day, to try and exhaust myself so that I don't feel the night terrors. They still come anyways. Prancing unwanted into my dreams. I always wake up sweating, with tears running down my cheeks. At breakfast I ignore Camilla's knowing gaze. It will pass, I have to be strong for my family.

I am in my father's room, filing his nails while telling him one of my favourite stories. Just as I'm about to put away the filler, his machines start going haywire and his body is jerking. His doctor, nurse and Uncle Gumburai come running in and uncle Gumburai

drags me outside.

Ten minutes pass and I'm pacing.

Twenty minutes later and I feel like pulling my hair.

Thirty minutes later and I am ready to storm into the room and demand answers when the room. The drawn and haggard lines on their faces make my shoulders sag.

"I don't know what tell you, the movement could have been a neuron or reflex that triggered the machines. Whatever it was, your father hasn't changed, he's still in a coma."

Whatever hope had quickly taken root in my heart is quickly extinguished. It all becomes too much. The waiting, taking care of them both and I run to my

room. Something is burning in my chest. Breathing has become labour.

I log into one of my burner accounts on Facebook and I Facetime, wait I mean video call Tendero, praying that she picks up. After what feels like an eternity and when the line is about to get disconnected, she answers.

Her eyes widen when they see who I am and I see her about to end the call.

“Wait! I know you are setting boundaries but I could really use a friend right now,” I don’t know if it’s my breaking voice or the desperation in my eyes but she doesn’t hang up.

“Thank you, it’s just... I don’t know everything is all happening at once. My father was shot in the head and he’s in a coma. He got married again and she’s pregnant and has to be closely monitored to avoid

preeclampsia. It's all one horror movie that I don't know if I can go on."

I can't bring myself to tell her about me being in prison, the correctional rapes. But seeing her beautiful face and the warmth in her eyes, allows me to break down and I sob. I let it all out, the pain, the fear, the uncertainty, everything. I cry until I have a migraine and I'm thankful that Tendero doesn't hang up, that her face with tears streaming down her cheeks is the last thing I see before drifting off to sleep.

.....

## Morning Family

I know, I know this story is heavy and as much as I would like to lighten it, I can't. I'm sorry but on the flip side we have passed the halfway mark and the

story after this won't be as heavy hopefully.

In the midst of this pandemic, please check up on your loved ones.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

P.s Lola and Dr Pacou can be found in Lola's Heart

## Rubies and Rain

Twenty-seven

“A rainbow is a promise of sunshine after rain, of calm after storms, of joy after sadness, of peace after pain, of love after loss.” Unknown

A week after my meltdown and the sun rose a bit brighter today. I needed to cry, it helped but I still walk around like I'm carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders. Dad hasn't moved or anything else since that afternoon and Vimbai has been fighting with her demons. Tendero calmly shut me down when I tried calling her the next day. The conversation is etched in my mind, verbatim.

“Ruby, I know you are going through stuff and it breaks my heart to see you crying like that but for my own sanity, I can't be your shoulder to cry on...”

“Tendi...”

“No, Ruru, let me finish,” the quiet resolve in her voice made me shut up.

“I’m trying to move from that phase in my life where your tears meant that I had to drop everything and be there for you. I didn’t have an identity past you, Ruby. I was whatever you needed at that moment and when Chatunga came along, you had a new shiny toy and I was discarded until he hurt you and I had to help you pick up the pieces. Do you even know what that did to me? To my self-esteem?” I couldn’t answer her past the lump in my throat.

I had to blink so that her face could come into focus, she was also teary and her voice wobbly.

“I can’t do that anymore. I can’t go back to that space of being your emotional crutch. I can’t!”

Each word felt like a dagger thrust into my chest, grazing my heart over and over again, causing me immeasurable pain without the reprieve of death. I hadn't realised the damage I had done, I was so selfish, so stupid to not see what I was giving up. It took a minute for her to get her emotions under control.

"My therapist says that it's going to take me ten steps back and I agree, you're hurting and I will want to try and fix it for you, to carry your hurt for you, yet I'm also spiralling. I'm sorry Ruby, I know you need me and I want nothing more than to help you carry your load, but for my sanity, I can't go down this road with you again."

But I need you, I haven't even told you about prison! My inner being was screaming yet outwardly I only nodded my understanding and forced a smile.



“I’m sorry Tendi, for... for everything but mostly for taking you for granted. You are nothing short of a miracle. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, baby.”

It was my turn to watch her cry like my words finally freed something that had been caged in her heart. Seeing the person you love that broken up over your actions, is a kick in the gut. Although it sucked, it made me realise that she needed that closure and for once I had to stop being selfish and let her heal. I hurt her more than I thought and if it means staying away from her, I will.

“You should talk to someone, a therapist or someone. I know how you tend to bottle things up and let them pile up,” those were her parting words, “goodbye, Ruby.”

I smiled and blew her a kiss and I deactivated four of the five burner accounts that I had set up to stalk her. I couldn’t let go of the last one. Looking at her

picture and following her videos on Tiktok is keeping me from spiralling.

A week, later and it still stings, especially when I woke up to the sun shining and news of Chatunga's new girlfriend. It doesn't hurt that he moved on, it was kind of obvious that we are through. It hurts that I let my confusion cost me a great thing with Tendero.

Feeling morose, I step out of my room and go downstairs for breakfast. I stop in my tracks when I see Vimbai sitting in the dining room. She's bathed and looks gorgeous, even though she's still on the thin side, considering she's past her first trimester. She has this glow and she's laughing at something that Davirai said. She hasn't come down for breakfast ever since we got here. There is hope, after all, one less burden to carry on my shoulders.

"Hey, Ruby! Come join us," she sounds chirpy as she

pats the seat next to her. I smile and go sit next to her.

“Morning sis Ruby,” Davirai greets with a wide smile on her face, this is the first time that she’s seeing her sister and it’s like someone lit a fire inside her and she’s glowing with happiness.

Breakfast is a lively affair. We eat and laugh as the sisters tell outrageous stories of them growing up. I can’t stop laughing and my sides hurt. I feel lighter than I have in a while. I slip away and go check on my Dad. Vimbai doesn’t come and I understand, her frame of mind is still very fragile.

“Hi, Daddy, Vimbai is better today, she came down to breakfast and she was laughing, you chose well. I know I gave you grief over being with someone who is almost my age but you chose well. She’s a fighter and after what she did for me in prison, I am forever in her debt.”

Everyone has been saying I need to talk to someone, who better than my father. I have been talking to him as if he's my human diary. After Tendero had that talk with me, I came to his room and I told him everything about my relationship with Tendero. I don't know if he heard me or not but I bet if he did, he would have jumped up and said no, my daughter can't be gay.

"They raped me, the guards in the prison, they took turns, there were two of them. One did it to my anus. It was the most painful thing that I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy and the shameful part is that I messed on myself. Blood, faeces, sperm and all, Vimbai tried to clean me the best way she could but the smell lingered. At times I still smell it, no matter how much I bathe. They put drugs in our food. The next time, I was ready with a scalpel that I got from the prison infirmary but I couldn't kill him. It got stuck on his neck but instead of killing him, it angered him more. I don't know what he would have

done if Vimbai hadn't blown up his brains. They were plastered everywhere, on me but I didn't mind, I felt free. She freed me..."

I swear I see his fingers move but the movement is so tiny and his machines don't spike so maybe I imagined it but it's all the sign I need today. Today is a day riddled with hope. When I'm done filing his toenails, I kiss him and head out.

"How is he?"

Vimbai's quiet question almost makes me jump out of my skin. I sag against the door when I see that it's only her.

"Same, but I think I saw his finger move, more like a flutter," she smiles but her smile is tinged with sadness.

“Do you want to go in and talk to him?” I’m taking a chance but she shakes her head no, her eyes are swimming with tears that she rapidly blinks away.

“Let’s go hiking instead,” the fire in her eyes is back, we agree to change and meet up in five minutes.

When I get down, Vimbai is already waiting for me. We have to take our details with us, at least they walk at a respectful distance behind us. It rained last night, the sun is lazily climbing over the dewy trees. The ground is still a little wet but we trudge on.

“Camilla told me you turned her offer of therapy down,” I roll my eyes, doesn’t she realise that them talking about me cements the idea that I shouldn’t share my secrets with a stranger.

“I asked her if she could give you sessions and she told me that you already declined,” as if she read my

thoughts, she sets me straight.

I don't respond, I pick up a stone and hurl it as far as I can and I watch it bound from a tree and whirl past a squirrel startling it into a run. There are wildflowers of pink, purple and yellow bursts of colour in all their glorious Spring splendour.

"Ruby, you don't have to be strong anymore, we've passed through hell and I know that mentally we are still in that hell. I have dreams that are so lucid, it feels like I'm still there. Talk to Camilla, just three sessions and I will stop being on your case."

I close my eyes and breathe in the salty air, there must be the ocean on the other side of this mountain. I try to listen for the sound of waves or concentrate on the chirping birds, anything to block out her insistent voice.

“Ruby, this baby is going to need you, there is a high possibility that I might sink into postpartum depression, it’s common in women with schizophrenia. This baby will need at least one of us to be in the right frame of mind.”

I stop and look at her, did she just? The sly smile on her face tells me that she knows exactly what she’s doing. Using my baby brother to blackmail me into going for therapy. My father has found his match, I don’t know who is more manipulative between the two. I laugh at the sheer audacity and she joins me.

“Fine, I’ll go. Three sessions only.”

“You have to actually talk in those sessions and carry out the activities,” she saw right through my bullshit. I was just going to go and stare at Camilla.

“I don’t want to remember,” I finally concede defeat



and she looks at me with understanding laced in shared pain.

“But have you forgotten?”

I shake my head no, hating the tears that spring to my eyes. I don't think I'll ever forget.

“Camilla will help you with healthier coping mechanisms, the fact that you are standing here today means that you won, Ruby. You didn't crumble at their abuse but you still carry it within you and therapy will help you let it go so that the healing process can begin.”

We are now at the top of the small mountain that we are on. The view is breathtaking, Vimbai points towards the sun and I have to shield my eyes to see what she's point at.

“It’s a rainbow we are going to be alright, Ruby,” she clasps her hand in mine and puts them both on her slight belly.

There are tiny flutters and I can’t stop the smile that stretches throughout my face. He’s ok in there and we are going to be alright too.

.....

Morning Family

How has your week been so far? How is this pandemic affecting your mental health? Loss after loss is slowly making me numb but I will cling on to the hope that this too shall pass. That it gets better.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

Rubies and Rain

Twenty-eight

“I am a collection of thoughts and memories and likes and dislikes. I am the things that have happened to me and the sum of everything I've ever done. I am the clothes I wear on my back. I am every place and every person and every object I have ever come across. I am a bag of bones stuck to a very large rock spinning a thousand miles an hour.”

Macaulay Culkin

“Are you nervous?”

Her voice prompts after a minute of me fidgeting around the chair that she welcomed me to sit on, it's too squishy, too comfortable. I'm not nervous, I'm terrified. I smile back at her and shake my head, no.

“Have you ever been to therapy?” I nod then when she tries to stifle her smile, I clear my throat and try to unstick my tongue from the roof of my mouth.

“I have, when my mother died someone suggested that my father should make me go and talk to a professional to deal with all the pain that I had bottled inside.” Impressive, Ruby, I didn’t think I had it in me to say two words let alone a whole coherent response.

“How did that go?” she is smiling encouragingly but my mouth has become stiff at the memory.

“It was horrible. She kept telling me how I should feel, how I should grieve and it only made me withdraw into myself more.”

Where does Camilla get her smile rations? It’s like

her smiles come from deep within her and portray every emotion that she's channelling. Now her smile is sympathetic with a hint of an apology.

"So then how did you deal with the grief of losing your mother?"

"Tendero." My smile is genuine this time, tapped into my deepest memories of my one true love.

Camilla wants to know who Tendero is and how she helped me deal with my grief. I tell her and it's like chatting with an old friend. The memories come tumbling out, one after the other and I don't realize that she is slowly easing me into tapping into the ones that are so painful, I locked away in the darkest recesses of my mind.

"Which is the most prominent feeling from your experience in prison? I don't want you to think about

it, just say the first feeling that pops into your mind.”

“Guilt,” the admission startles me and the feelings of guilt flood me making me want to curl up into a ball and hide.

“What do you feel guilty of?” she prompts after a minute has passed and I haven’t expanded on my admission.

I’m relieved that Camilla isn’t writing down any of this, she only listens with her head slightly tilted, giving me all her attention.

“I feel guilty about the last words I said to my father the last time I saw him. I said some pretty hurtful things but the kicker was when I told him that I wish he had died in my mother’s place.” Camilla does not say anything or react and that gives me the courage to go on.

“I feel guilty because I turned Vimbai into a killer, that man as vile as he was he probably had a family, children that now don’t have a father to send them to school. Maybe if I hadn’t had freaky sex with Peaches, they wouldn’t have felt the need to ‘turn me’,” I feel a lump lodging itself in my throat, maybe if I wasn’t so confused about my sexuality a lot of things wouldn’t have happened, I would be with Tendero in Australia by now.

“Ruby, you can’t blame yourself for those men raping you, they knew they were fathers but they still violated and desecrated another man's daughter. Do you think they felt any guilt raping you? Of course not, that’s why he came for the second time,” her words make sense but they still don’t assuage this guilt that I feel.

“Is that all that you feel guilty of?” the question makes me snort-laugh.

“Far from it, that’s the least of my guilt,” she nods at me to continue and I clear my throat again, not wanting to go there but knowing that I’m already there, that my subconscious resides there now.

“I feel guilty that in accepting my Dad and Vimbai’s relationship, I am somehow betraying my mother,” Camilla doesn’t say anything, she nods thoughtfully for me to continue.

“I feel guilty for what I did to Tendero. All she ever did was love me, she loved me even when I didn’t love myself and what did I do in return? I chose a guy over her,” I’m getting more fired up and Camilla still hasn’t said a word.

“I feel guilty because my whole life has been so far removed from the realities of my country. I benefitted from the same system that has been



crippling my people. My boyfriend, his father was the former President, he took me to Dubai just to buy me an expensive car after he slept with Vimbai. My father and mother used to host most of the people in power, politicians and their families are part or were part of our circle. To know that those same people are the ones inflicting immeasurable pain on innocent people makes me sick.”

The prison experience was a rude wake-up call and it made me realise how far removed I am from the way Zimbabwe works, beyond the news and social media.

“Do you want to know what I feel most guilty of? I don’t feel guilty that a man died because of me, if Vimbai hadn’t shot him, I would have died trying to kill him. I feel guilty because if it hadn’t been for me, Vimbai wouldn’t have almost had that miscarriage. She ate my food that was drugged, she was offered to be let go but she stayed for me and it almost cost her, her life and that of her baby. I wouldn’t have

forgiven myself had she miscarried.”

Camilla hands me a box of tissues and I dab my eyes. She lets me calm down before she talks.

“I hear you and your feelings are valid but Ruby, Vimbai once lost a baby and she didn’t even know you then. Her condition, schizophrenia, leads to high-risk pregnancies, I know this because I’ve had five miscarriages Ruby, five and none of them was my fault or anyone’s fault. It took a lot of work and therapy, for me to understand this. I had the best care but they just happened. Some things are beyond our control,” her eyes are now glassy and I hand her the box of tissues and she smiles at me, the movement making a lone tear trickle down her left cheek.

“I'm sorry, I think we should end here today. I want you to do an exercise for me. Write down your memories and sort them in accordance to the

memory that hurts the most. Can you do that for me?" I nod my head dubiously, this seems like a mammoth task.

A lot of things have hurt me in my life, although most of them now sound like the tantrums of a spoilt kid. I leave Camilla in her office, sniffing and trying hard not to break down in front of me. I give her some privacy and head outside. I just need a little air.

As far as first sessions go, this one got intense pretty fast. Turns out this well-guarded fortress with the gorgeous fountain that I am dipping my hands into, belongs to my father. There is so much I don't know about him, I wonder if my mother knew. I wish I could go to her grave.

There is so much I want to tell her, so much that I need to offload. I miss her today more than I have ever missed her. Droplets of rain join the tears on my face, I was so lost in thought that I didn't notice the

quickly gathering stormy-grey clouds.

The downpour is immediate and intense, by the time I get to the door, I am soaked to my bones and I can't stop shivering.

“Ruru, are you trying to catch pneumonia? Go upstairs and change then come back and see your father.”

Uncle Gumburai! When did he come back? He's been gone a week but he doesn't seem very happy with me right now so I quickly dash upstairs and do as told. I drag my feet as I approach my father's room. I'm already feeling a bit raw from opening up about my feelings. I sigh and breathe in deeply before opening the door. I almost scream when I'm met by my father's eyes, they are red-rimmed, sunken and listless but they are open! When he sees me, his eyes widen in recognition and tears spill down his cheeks.

“Daddy! Daddy!”

All the guilt, all the pain melts away as I rush to his side, I throw myself at him and I cry my little heart out. He lets me and his one hand is gently trying to soothe me but it's shaking.

“You're awake! You're awake!”

When my excitement has finally gone down a bit, I get off him and I see him wiping his tears. I have never seen my father cry before, even when my mother died, he stoically stood there and even carried her coffin to her grave. Seeing him this emotional makes me emotional too.

“I'm so sorry Ruru, I...” I put my fingers over his mouth that thanks to me isn't chapped anymore.

“It doesn’t matter anymore, you’re awake and that’s all that matters.”

A curdling scream breaks our moment and I have to leave my father to go and see what just happened. The screams are coming from Vimbai’s room, when I open the door, a pillow misses my face and hits the door instead. I watch in fascinated horror as a shoe catches Uncle Gumburai straight in the face.

“Get away from me, you monster! Who sent you? Why did you bring me here,” she’s puffing from the exertion of throwing things but she still throws another shoe at him and I can see that Uncle Gumburai is getting pissed so I quickly step in.

“Vimbai, it’s ok, it’s me, Ruby. Put down that perfume, he won’t hurt you,” she looks at me and her eyes are bewildered, glazed and have a crazy light.

“You! You’re the girl from the club with Chatunga!  
Why did you people bring me here? Who are you  
people?!”

Uncle Gumburai and I share a look before looking at  
Vimbai who is still wielding a perfume menacingly  
and she’s dead serious. What in the schizophrenia is  
happening here?

.....

Morning family

Happy weekend ahead

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

Rubies and Rain

Twenty-nine

Trigger warning: may contain sensitive remarks.

“I foresaw my life unfolding as an interminable stretch of nothingness and so I spent my years on Tinos floundering, feeling like a stand-in for myself, a proxy, as though my real self resided elsewhere, waiting to unite someday with this dimmer, more hollow self. I felt marooned. An exile in my own home.”

Khaled Hosseini

Vimbai

Freaky Friday. That’s what my life feels like at the moment. It feels like I swapped bodies with the



future me or me in an alternate universe where I'm pregnant. I wake up and the first thing that freaks me out is being in an unfamiliar room. While trying to acclimatize to the room, I try to get up and realise that my body feels different, a bit heavier. I lift my pajama top to see why my body feels so different. That's when my horror worsens. A slightly rounded, hard belly with the black line more pronounced. My breasts also feel heavier, with darker areolas. I scream in shock!

When I went to sleep last night I was in our room at Swinton. After my episode, hearing my stepmother's voice took me into a dark hole that even my father on the line saying I should go and stay with uncle Ben while I look for a job, couldn't snap me out of. Nosihle was there, she called Tafadzwa and he managed to bring me out of that dark hole. I pretended to be asleep until fatigue took over and I fell asleep with Tafadzwa cradling me in his arms.

I don't understand how I could then wake up in a huge room with the biggest bed I have ever seen, everything is expensive and has my favourite earth colours. Where am I? Nosihle, where is she? Where is my phone so that I call Tafadzwa? Argh, maybe it's still a dream, I pinch my arm and yelp at the pain that shoots through my arm. The splotch of red on my arm indicating that I am not dreaming, I am here in flesh.

A brisk knock takes my attention from the portrait of art I am glaring at, hoping that it can spark some memory but I draw a blank. There is another knock when I don't respond, at this point, I don't even trust my voice, what if it's not mine? The door opens and my worst nightmare comes in. It's the ugly man with the scar made up of congealed skin across his face, but he looks older, haggard. Yet all I can see is him looming over Tafadzwa with his boot finding Tafadzwa's face into the dirt.

“What do you want from me?” I hate how shaky my voice sounds.

“Ian is up and he wants to see you,” I can hear the contempt in his voice but I’m also puzzled, Ian?

He takes another step into the room and I can’t stop the scream of terror that burst from my belly. He looks startled but he still moves into the room. All I can think of now is protecting myself. I pick up the above-average teddy bear that is sitting on the dressing table and I throw it at him, it only hits his chest and falls onto the floor.

“Are you crazy?!”

I will show him crazy, I pick whatever my hands can lay on and throw it at him. He keeps ducking but makes no further move towards me. I’m screaming and throwing and this drains all my energy. I pause

to gather my strength and he seizes the opportunity to come closer. I scream at him to not come any closer and I throw a shoe for good measure. Why am I so weak? Every throw is so taxing.

The door opened sometime between my screams and then a voice, a female one this time disturbs me. She's placating me, it takes a moment for me to place angel face because she is fully covered unlike the night at the club with her tattoos out to play.

"You! You're the girl from the club with Chatunga! Why did you people bring me here? Who are you people?!"

I see them share a look as if I'm the crazy one while they abducted me, heaven knows what they did to make me pregnant.

"It's ok, Vimbai, we won't hurt you. I promise," I don't

trust anything that comes from her mouth so I tighten my hand on the perfume.

A screeching sound inside my ear, buzzing insistently, makes me scream and hold on to the perfume tightly, until the glass breaks into a thousand splinters, some of them digging into my hand. The rest fall onto the floor drenching the whole room in expensive fumes. I bring my left hand which isn't bleeding to my ears to try and cut out the noise, but it feels like my eardrums have been blast and my ears are bleeding.

There is blood everywhere, I bend over and retch all over the plush cream rug, which now also has crimson splotches from my hand and feet.

I feel strong arms lifting me, I look up through the haze in my eyes and I don't know the person but he's younger, tall with wide-set shoulders and he looks like he lives on cement and gym. His face is kind

though and his eyes look pained, as if seeing me like this is causing him pain. Maybe he can help me.

“Please, help me. I don’t know these people. That one almost killed my boyfriend and I think he was sent to abduct me by the girl because I slept with her boyfriend. I didn’t mean to harm anyone, please I just want to go home, my father will be worried. I have to finish my exams and graduate, please,” I feel lightheaded but I still plead with him. I see him clench his teeth, as if he’s trying to keep in whatever emotions that are building up inside him.

“Vimbai!” I turn to the familiar voice and it’s Davirai, only she looks older and looks just like me, even her voice.

“What are you doing here, Davirai? Did your mother put you up to this? Is it not enough that she killed my mother, her blood sister and moved into her sister’s house and treated me like scum? What do you want

from me?! Just kill me, please just kill me!”

Why is she sobbing as if I've hurt her? They've hurt me all my life and I didn't break down, I wasn't allowed to. Crying meant more beatings. The lightheadedness has given way to a dizzy spell and I feel like the world has turned on its axis and I see my mother on her hospital bed.

She looks like a shallow version of herself, her lips cracked and she coughs, a wrenching cough, then spits out blood. I know my father said I should say my goodbyes to her but I can't.

“Mama musandisiye kani, endai neni kwamurikuenda,” I beg her not to leave me behind, for her to take me with her where she's going.

At this point death feels kinder because I know what awaits me when she dies. She smiles at me and

calls me her brave, smart girl and I see the life leaving her body, I see her coffin going down the ground and I scream. A blood-curdling scream that makes my ears bleed more. I want to get out of the mind that is torturing me with all these memories all at once. I wish I could step out of this body and leave, follow my mother.

Something stings my arm and it feels like I'm floating, floating on a cloud. Then the cloud dissolves into blood, the blood I lost during my miscarriage and I'm floundering, drowning in my blood until merciful darkness drags me under.

.....

"I don't know what happened, she was fine during our last session, the most lucid I've seen her since I came here. The disillusions I can understand, her mind is in turmoil but the lapse of memory, I don't know."



I don't know this voice and when I try opening my eyes, it feels like they are glued shut. I can't move. It feels like I'm experiencing sleep paralysis but I'm wide awake with my eyes tightly shut. I feel out of sorts with my body, like it's my body but it's not mine to control.

"Do something, get someone who knows, I can't lose her and I can't lose my brother. Fix this!"

What does angel face mean, her brother? Who is her brother and what does he have to do with me? I want to hear the response but the darkness pulls me under again and it feels like I'm adrift.

Alone in a dark room, there are bars around me and I almost choke on the smell. Cries, I hear cries of a baby and when I get up to go and see why my baby is crying, I see a man, a fat pudgy man, he's huffing and groaning on top of a girl, enjoying himself. She plunges something sharp on his neck and he hits her,

hard. I don't hesitate I take a gun and I am at his head and I shoot, her scream wakes me up and I'm panting. I realise that I'm in pain, my lower back feels like it's on fire.

"Save my baby! Save my baby!" I'm screaming on top of my lungs but it feels like no one is listening.

"What about me Mommy, why didn't you ask them to save me?" I turn and I almost scream a little girl with my big eyes but her father's lips and his dark skin. She's like a beautiful porcelain doll but she's only half-formed, the rest of her head isn't showing.

"You forgot about me, Mommy, or you didn't want me?" her tiny, sweet voice breaks my heart and when she starts crying, blood tears, I feel her pain. It's short, sharp and intense.

.....

I don't know how long I've been out for but when I wake up, this time my eyes do open. It's still a bit dark but I can make out a bed next to mine and the blinking lights from the machines attached to me and whoever is on the other bed. I touch my belly and I'm relieved that it's still round and hard. The effort of moving my head and my arm is a lot though so, I drift off to sweet, dreamless sleep and when I wake up, the sun is high in the room.

I turn my head and I am met by warm, chocolate eyes, I blink and when I open my eyes again, his eyes are still open but they are gleaming with emotion, nothing like the cold and ruthless eyes that I saw that time at the house party I crashed. Something in these eyes tells me that I'm safe but I am so confused and so tired from trying to put the pieces of my fragmented mind together.

I feel like a shadow of myself, my body is here and if

it wasn't for this pregnancy that I don't know how I got, I wouldn't want to be in this body anymore.

"I know you, from the party," every word is taxing and I don't know why but he sobs.

Gut-wrenching, pain-filled sobs. I have never seen a man cry so loudly and openly before and his cries cut deep, deep into the parts of me that still feel like they belong to me. I want to hold him in my arms, cradle him until he stops crying. His pain, I feel it even in this hollow version of my heart, it washes over me, connecting with parts of me that are adrift.

"It's ok, don't cry. It's ok," instead of calming him, my reassuring words make him break down even more and I move my hand.

It takes everything in me to reach his hand, everything in my body aches from the soles of my

feet to the tips of my swollen fingers. I hold his hand and he clasps mine painfully while his sobs subdue and I don't feel adrift anymore, somewhere in the shell of my body and mind, he found my soul and his pain is bringing back fragments of my being.

.....

Morning family

This is probably the hardest chapter that I've written in this story. In the turmoil surrounding us, I hope you all stay safe.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

## Rubies and Rain

### Thirty

“Sooner or later, everyone sits down to a banquet of consequences”

Robert Louis Stevenson

Hearing my father's sobs breaks my heart into a million pieces. I was about to go in, but hearing his sobs makes me stop turning the door knob and I rest my head against the door. I have never heard him break down like this, even when my mother died and the thought somehow leaves a bitter taste in my mouth.

The door is open by a crack and I see her struggling to stretch her hand until she reaches his hand and takes his hand in hers and then sigh and close her eyes. His sobs and her effort to try and comfort him

even when moving her hand brings a pinched look on her face, shows me a side of their love that I never witnessed between my parents.

My father although strict, forever working was never unkind to my mother and I. She was the perfect wife and he doted on her almost as much as he doted on me but we never got to see this raw and vulnerable side of him. Maybe it was his near-miss with death or Vimbai just brought out that side of him but he is no longer aloof and I am grateful. When his hand moves to her little bump, it feels like I am intruding on their private moment, so I carefully step away from the door and move as soundlessly as I can back to the kitchen.

“Are they awake, should the chef send food up?”  
Camilla’s question brings me out of the unfamiliar feelings that are swamping me.

“No, they are still sleeping. Maybe after 30 minutes,

we'll wake them up," I lie and take my seat.

They need a moment alone, I'm not sure if Vimbai has regained her memory yet but the past couple of days after her breaking down have been intense and filled with hallucinations.

I was sceptical when my father asked for her bed to be brought into his room but seeing how calm she seemed with him maybe it worked out for the best. Davirai looks ashen, she has barely touched the croissants on her plate and she is mindlessly sipping on her tea. She has been reserved ever since Vimbai lashed out at her. I tried to explain that it wasn't her, that it was her sickness but she hasn't been the same since.

My heart goes out to her but I also feel like I'm flying on autopilot. It's a lot to take in. My only saving grace is taking on the assignments that Camilla gave me. Uncle Gumburai also isn't saying much, but



that's nothing new he's not very chatty unless he's with me alone.

Breakfast passes in a blur, Camilla leaves to go to her office and Uncle Gumburai goes to wherever and it's just me and Davirai. Both of us mindlessly sipping on our tea, mine has grown lukewarm but I can't bring myself to stop.

"I grew up seeing her being mistreated, at first I thought it was normal that she wasn't allowed to eat with us. Her ill-treatment made life easier for me, for us. You could do something, break a glass or mess up and it would be blamed on Vimbai and she would get beaten for it or denied food. We all saw it and didn't do anything about it," her voice is rough like she's been going heavy on the bottle but it's just her emotions making it raw.

"When I started school and I was being bullied by some other girls, I began to realise that that was

exactly what was happening to Vimbai but only I had teachers to report to and she had no one. Everyone was scared of my mother, even our father. When she went to boarding school, the bad treatment fell to me because I looked like her, like my aunt, Vimbai's mother and my mother hates her sister with her entire being," I don't understand how one human being can be able to hold such hostility against her blood. I wonder what it is that Vimbai's mother had that her stepmother wanted so badly, for her to take it out not only on Vimbai but also on Davirai.

"Mine wasn't as extreme as Vimbai's torture. I never went to bed hungry nor was I denied bathing water or pads but the beatings were just as brutal. I began to understand just a little of her pain but still, I always counted down the days until she came back from school and I would get some reprieve. I was relieved that for a month or so, I wouldn't get beaten." She whispers the last part shamefully and I can't blame her, she was a kid probably in Primary School. I squeeze her hand and she continues

talking.

“Do you know how guilty I felt when she came back to Harare after years of not being home, after years of my mother taking out her frustrations on me and she was nice to me?” she pauses and looks at me as if she expects an answer but I let her be and watch as her lower lip trembles.

“She was so nice! After I had prayed that she comes back and take her rightful beatings, she was nice to me! She bought us stuff, gave me her old phone to use for research and she gave me my first laptop a month after that, it was hers but still almost new and in mint condition. After that visit, I gladly took the lashes meant for her, with a smile and that made my mother angrier but I didn’t care. Vimbai is my sister and it breaks me to see her fall apart like this.

Knowing that we could have done something, told someone or anything to help her but we didn’t. She was always so strong, she took everything in and

still passed, still became a success. I had no idea that she's this broken."

I feel her guilt and I know, better than most how guilt can erode your spirit. I watch her look up and try to blink back the tears and I tilt her chin so that she looks at me and the tears fall freely.

"You were a child and unfortunately, we don't choose our parents or the demons that they carry. We have no control over our parents. Sure, you could have been kinder but that would have gotten you into even more trouble. You can't take away yesterday, Davirai. You can't undo the wrongs you did in the past. You can make up for it to her by being there for her now, she feels alone and scared, she doesn't trust us but you are her sister and she will lean on you more. Be there for her, try to understand that she is struggling with her mind, she's fighting it not you."

I didn't expect the fierce hug that she gives me and

she mumbles against my neck, “Thank you, sis Ruby.” My chest tightens before warmth spreads across it. I squeeze her and let her calm down before releasing her. I hope I lessened some of her guilt.

.....

It’s weird to see my father looking so frail, Vimbai is either sleeping again or unconscious, the doctor told us that the sedatives will make her sleep or lose consciousness a lot. My father is sitting on his bed with pillows that I propped behind his back, watching the doctor take note of Vimbai’s vitals, I am standing at the foot of his bed while uncle Gumburai is leaning against the door.

None of us is saying anything, just tersely watching the doctor. I see her hands shake a little and I feel sorry for her but my anxiety won’t allow me to say anything to loosen her fear.

“We've known this was a high-risk pregnancy from the start but I'm afraid that the recent spike in her blood pressure has turned the situation into a dire one. If her episodes continue, spiking her blood pressure this may lead to advanced preeclampsia. I will have no choice but to advise termination of the pregnancy otherwise we could lose the baby, the mother or both of them.”

My father blanches and I'm afraid that he will burst into tears again but he doesn't. He just looks like death. The doctors looks at all of us apologetically, but all I can do is blankly stare at her. Losing this baby will kill Vimbai, the baby isn't even inside me but I feel something inside me die at the thought of losing him.

“We do have some good new, it's a boy,” that could have been the worst thing that she could have said, I hear my uncle growling and the poor doctor looks

like she's going to collapse. I quickly usher her out of the room and I come back to my uncle placing his hand on my father's shoulder.

"Son, I know how hard this all is to you and it breaks my heart, one thing you must know is that some things can never be fixed by these western doctors, zvinoda chiVanhu, they require African divinity. The doctors aren't offering any solutions, we are not losing that child and as much as I didn't feel anything for her at first, we are not losing that girl either. A diviner might help."

Poor dad should be resting but I see the hope in his face, I just know that he won't be able to deal with the death of either Vimbai or his son. He isn't saying much, he looks like he's been through the cleaners but at least the swelling around his face has gone down.

"In one of her episodes I heard her being tormented

by the child that she lost. Did she cleanse after that miscarriage? There is a rite of passage for every death even of those who never get to see the world. Death demands to be honoured even though it has no honour, there are things that need to be done otherwise these doctors will keep on twiddling their thumbs but they won't see anything," the veins around my father's temple look like they are about to burst but he doesn't say anything. He just listens as Uncle Gumburai speaks in riddles.

"I know that you don't really practice that but before you are Shadow, before you are the man that you have grown to be, you are a Barwe. We are spiritual beings, there are so many spirits at play here and if you don't do something about it now, you will lose both of them. Do what needs to be done or carry out their burial rites, it's all up to you," with a final pat on the back, Uncle Gumburai steps back to lean on the door as he had been.



My father looks at me and I see the sorrow in his eyes, the helplessness. I hold his hands, just the same way he held mine when he sat me down to tell me that my mother had passed on. He drove to my school just to tell me and collect me, back then I didn't realise how much it must have taken on him. He should have been grieving but he put me first.

“The one thing that kept both of us from growing insane in that prison cell is that baby, he was our hope and he brought us together. She killed a man for me, so I will not let you choose one or the other. Save them both. Cheat Death if you have to, just make sure Vimbai and my brother are ok.”

I see his jaw ticking when I'm done speaking, resolve setting in his eyes and his shoulders set. He looks at Uncle Gumburai and nods once. Sekuru leaves and my father pats the space next to him on the bed and I sit next to him and lay my head on his shoulders.

“Tell me everything, from the moment they took you from your apartment,” I hesitate and raise my head to be sure that he can take what I have to say.

“I am your father, Ruby, you don’t have to worry about me anymore. I know how much you worried and cared for me, I can not thank you enough and I’m so proud of you but give back the worrying to me. Let me try and fix my mess,” he sounds stronger but I can still see the shadows behind his eyes.

I sigh and lean back, I tell him everything, from the beatings, the ill-treatment, the rapes and being transferred. I even tell him how I almost ratted out Vimbai. He listens attentively, not disturbing me until I’m done retelling everything. He takes out a folder and there are pictures of people, he wants me to identify them.

“Those are the two officials who drove with me from South Africa to Harare,” I point them out and he

circles them and I even point out the prison guards. We go on until the file is done.

“Their families better be ready for the funeral rites. Death is about to come knocking on their doors.”

I should feel remorse for them but I don't, I wonder how many people they have ill-treated all in the name of their work. We weren't the first ones and not the last ones that they torment. I just settled against my father and he absentmindedly stroked my back, thinking of ways to avenge us.

.....

Morning Family

Sorry I'm a bit late I just wanted to make today's insert a bit longer for Thandi Manyatshe,

appreciation for all that she has done for me.

Are you all safe?

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

## Rubies and Rain

### Thirty-one

“Death is the most common reality; the most profound being of all beings. It is an ineluctable contradiction ineluctable which confronts every person, group and nation; that most incommensurable and incomprehensible reality of all realities. In putting an end to human life, death leaves its impression on human personality. Before this inevitable necessity, one cannot help but feel that life, so ardently desired, is but a fragile and fugitive good. In Africa, no rite or event demands so much ceremony, luminosity and dread as does death. The obsequies are celebrated with utmost grandeur and solemnity.” Berry Muchemwa

### Vimbai

I open my eyes after another battle between reality and the twisted confines of my mind. I feel like hell and I blink before taking in my surroundings. What am I doing in Ian's room? I turn to my right side and I find his eyes, pulling me in with the heat of emotion shimmering on them. I close my eyes tightly, no, my brain is teasing me again and I won't allow myself to hope and then get crushed with disappointment. I open my eyes again and he's still looking at me like I'm the most precious stone in the world.

"Chitekete," his gruff voice washes over me and I can't help the tears that flood my eyes and fall, mapping a burning trail down my cheeks.

"Say that again," I huskily demand and his chuckle makes me briefly close my eyes and shudder.

"Chitekete, open your eyes so that I can see you," I keep them tightly shut because I've never done we'll taking orders from him. His thumb wiping off my

tears makes me open my eyes again.

“When did you wake up? Why didn’t you call me?”

He clears his throat and I see his eyes darkening. The brooding look is so brief, I might have imagined it because he’s smiling, eyes crinkling at the corners.

“You were sleeping so peacefully, I didn’t want to disturb you so I had them bring your bed to my room. I wanted my face to be the first thing that you see when you open your eyes,” I reach over and run my hands over his face to make sure that I’m not dreaming or hallucinating. The warmth of his flesh and the way his beard grazes my fingers assures me that I am not dreaming, this is my Ian.

“I thought you were going to leave me like my mother,” I confess in a whisper as if talking louder will bring my fears to life.

It hits me, the fear, the pain and the memories of being locked in the dark and the confusion when I was being dragged by the police. I can't stop the sobs that wreck my body, I want to so badly but they have been pent up for so long. I try to stop when I see him struggle to get up from his bed and slide into mine while grunting in discomfort. Seeing him struggle only makes me sob louder and a wail breaks out. He drags me to his chest and my sobs become muffled.

"I'm sorry, I put you through all of this. If it weren't for me, you wouldn't have gone to jail." His words make me cry harder at the unfairness of it all.

If there is anyone I would go to jail for, it would be him and it was nothing compared to seeing him with that bandage on his head, a growing spot of blood on it and those hideous machines attached to parts of his body, including the head. I could brave



everything else, except that.

“I'm here now and I won't leave you again,” I know he can't promise that because death can only be cheated for so long but it calms me and I bury my face in his neck breathing in his scent. He smells like home. I feel a flutter in my stomach, a very strong one at that and when I look up into Ian's eyes, I can tell that he felt it too.

“Did you feel that?” the wonder in his voice makes me giggle, how could I not feel that when the baby is in my stomach. His hands are now cradling my slightly swollen belly and the flutter happens again. He leans down and I don't fully catch what he's saying but there is an answering flutter then the baby settles down.

“That's my boy,” he kisses my belly then comes up to kiss me gently on my mouth. I want a deeper kiss and more but we are both too weak to do anything.

“Ruby also thinks it’s a boy, we should do an ultrasound now that you are awake,” he clears his throat and avoids my eyes before stating that he can feel it in his bones that it’s a boy.

“What is it?” I finally demand when he keeps avoiding my eyes and sighing. He looks at me, surprised at the sharpness of my voice, “You are hiding something from me, you won’t meet my eyes and I want to know what it is.”

He clears his throat and scratches his peppered beard. I fully study him and I realise how much he has aged, he still has a bandage on his head but it’s not as bulky and there is no blood. His beard is groomed, he must have taken a shower after waking up. He’s lost weight and there are bags under his eyes, his cheekbones are sharper but it makes him look more distinguished. Maybe it’s the lines slashed across the corners of his mouth.

“You had an episode, your blood pressure skyrocketed and the doctor said that there is a possibility of advanced preeclampsia and advised that your pregnancy should be terminated before both you and the baby die.”

My hand instinctively goes to my belly and I cradle it as if I’m protecting it from him. I feel the panic rise and I take deep breaths just the way Camilla taught me, until I feel my calm returning.

“Then I would rather die with my baby in my womb, no one is taking this child from me,” I’m impressed by how firm my voice is. I will not allow him to bully me into giving up my baby.

“Chitekete...”

“No, Ian!” I cut in before he finishes talking, “I have

lost so much already, I cannot, I refuse to lose this baby too. You would rather kill me first.”

He closes his eyes as if my words are a physical punch to his gut and I see his Adam’s apple bobbing as he takes a shuddering breath. My hands tighten around my belly, nothing is going to happen to this child.

“I know, Chitekete and most of it is on me, I’m sorry. I’m sorry that I blackmailed you into being with me and all I have managed to bring into your life is pain and chaos. I’m sorry that you had to stay in the pits of hell because of me, you had to kill a man because I wasn’t there to protect you and my daughter. I’m so sorry,” his voice cracks at the end and my hands tighten, this time from emotion. I can’t stand to see him beat himself like this.

“You also managed to get me to go home and fix my relationship with my father and siblings. You helped

me put a name to the voices in my head. You gave me the most precious seed, and I am willing to lay my life down for this baby,” his Adam’s apple is bobbing so fast as if he’s gulping down his emotions and he closes his eyes tightly. When he opens them, they are bloodshot and swimming with emotion.

“There is a way, Gumburai brought in a diviner and she said that infants, that is, those who died prematurely, during childbirth or shortly afterwards, require special attention. You didn’t relay the message of your miscarriage to your family or its family and you also killed a person while pregnant and didn’t cleanse. ”

I feel my skin stretch into a frown. When did this divine come? How long have I been out?

“They cleaned me at the hospital and we, Tafadzwa and I, did a little letting go ceremony for her in Kariba. We named her Tanatswa. I’ve been dreaming about

her lately, she's always crying in my dreams." Ian's big, warm hand cups my face and his thumb clears the tear from the corner of my eye.

"It's ok, Chitekete, we will fix this, together, ok?" I nod with a ghost of a smile gracing my lips.

"What else did the diviner say?"

"She said that there is a ceremony called chenuro or cheneso which is conducted by the elderly women that you were supposed to go through after your miscarriage. It's a cleansing ritual undertaken after a miscarriage involving ibwe remusarasara( quartzite), the bark of chidyambanje, munhuwanhuwa and mafunga roots. The purpose of the bark and roots is to cleanse both your body and the spirit of Tanatswa, setting it free so that it doesn't cling to you and interfere with your other pregnancies. Then there has to be another cleansing from the soul that you took, she will fill you in on that one."

When he finishes explaining it feels like my head is spinning from all this information and guilt lingers, trying to push its way to the foreground.

“I didn’t know, I had no one and I had to keep it a secret otherwise, I would have lost my sponsorship. I would have had to go home in shame. I didn’t mean to neglect my baby’s spirit and it’s not that I don’t care, I think about her from time to time and I wish she hadn’t left,” the guilt comes pouring out and he is embracing me so closely, I can feel his steady heartbeat and it’s soothing.

“It’s ok, there was no way you would have known the rituals and rites of death of an infant when you were barely out of teenage good yourself. I only heard of it when she spoke about it,” he chuckles briefly but there is no mirth to the sound. “I don’t want to see you beat yourself up you were brave, but you are not alone anymore. We are going to do this together. Do

you want to go through with the rituals?”

“If it’s a chance for my baby to make it then I will take it,” he squeezes me and for a moment comfortable silence passes between us and all that I can hear is his shallow breathing and the steady thud of his heart.

“Ian?” I call out tentatively and his grasp tightens around me.

“Mmmh?” I clear my throat, suddenly unsure if I want to know.

“Who had you shot and why were we imprisoned?” he sighs as if he was expecting my question but he still dreaded it.

“I would rather you didn’t know about that part of my



life but since it has put your life in danger, I owe you some answers," damn right you do, I think but don't say anything.

"I wanted out of my gig as a Government shadow but you don't just wake up and tend in your resignation in this life. I had a plan, the plan went up in flames when I realised it was a set-up. It was already too late for me, they had bundled me into a car, shot me in the forest and left me in a shallow grave for dead. If Gumburai hadn't found me when he did, I would be dead. They took you to try to get me to hand over some highly classified files that I have on some of the most influential men in Zimbabwe. I am sorry I put you in the middle of my shit storm."

I'm trying to piece together what he just revealed to me and it feels like some conspiracy theory alternate reality but I was in jail and I know that we were held to fish him out. It's a lot to take in but his arms are my safe space, so I sigh and snuggle even closer to

him and he tightens his arms around me.

.....

Happy weekend Fam

I hope you are all safe and well.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

## Rubies and Rain

### Thirty-two

"When the storm rips you to pieces, you get to decide how to put yourself back together again."

- Bryant H. McGill.

"Take me through the murder of the prison guard," Camilla says calmly tapping her pen and resting it on her chin.

I've gone past the three sessions I initially agreed to and now we have two sessions per week and the sessions have made me realise how much inside of me is broken. But I'm slowly picking up the pieces and slowly building myself up.

"I don't want to talk about that night," I staple my

hands together so tightly that my knuckles appear shiny.

“Come on Ruby, you’ve been doing so well but holding back on this will hinder your progress,” Camilla presses gently and she puts her pen and pad on the table in front of her and leans forward in a ‘lets gossip’ kind of stance. I sigh, maybe she’s right. Maybe if I go into that night in more detail then maybe I won’t feel as much guilt.

“It wasn’t the first time you know,” I confess while hitting my fingernails which are already way too short, so I end up biting into my soft flesh.

“First time what? That someone got killed in your presence?” I look at her puzzled for a moment because my mind isn’t here anymore, it is back in that stinking hellhole.

“What? No! I mean it wasn’t the first time that guard violated me. The first time, they drugged our food or mine I’m not sure but Vimbai ate my portion so she was out of it when they came into our cell and dragged me to another empty cell. There were two of them the first time, a tall, skinny guard and a short pudgy one. The tall one got straight to business and it felt like he was in a rush for it to end and I thought I could take it. After all, I had had sex before then the second one, he was cruel, he took me from the back until I shat on myself,” the memory still bring me so much shame.

"It was the most humiliating, demeaning moment in my life. They just dragged me back into the cell. I was a soggy mixture of faeces, blood and semen. I remember Vimbai’s sobs as she tried to clean me,” my voice sounds hoarse and hollow to my ears like I’m here but I’m not here.

“The second time, I was prepared, after a beating I

collapsed and I was taken to the infirmary and stole a scalpel. In the dead of night, the door opened and that night only one guard came in, the cruel one. I slept closer to the door on purpose and he took me, leaving the cell door open. I tried to chase away the fear and disgust by holding onto the cold steel of the scalpel. I had it all planned in my head, I was going to plunge it into his scrotum.

‘Let’s see if you can get fucked without shitting on yourself,’ I still remember his words and the pain of him pushing his pistol inside me. The foreign cold metal made me cringe and when he roughly pushed it inside me, an involuntary scream left my mouth and that excited him enough to take it out and throw his gun away,” I pose and take the proffered tissues and water from Camilla.

My throat has suddenly gone dry and so my voice kept dropping. My hands shake lightly as I drink the water. Camilla doesn’t say anything, she waits for

me to get my scattered thoughts and emotions under control.

“While he was fumbling with his trousers, I took the scalpel from under my jersey and when he roughly parted my thighs again, I lunged, embedding the scalpel on his neck but before I could take it out and plunge it in again, he gave me a backhanded blow that sent my head crashing down, hitting the floor. Past the screeching sound from the blow in my ears, I heard him scream;

‘You filthy bitch!’

I just knew then that he was going to kill me. He was like an angry bull. He grabbed me with his wet, sticky hands and I tried to prepare my mind for his onslaught, for his wrath to rain on me. Without the scalpel I felt empty, naked and without any defence,” I remember everything my tears, his panting breath as he came between my legs and his stinking breath.

“Then what happened?” Camilla prompts and I take a shuddering breath, fortifying myself.

“I lay there helplessly, thinking ‘He’s about to kill me’, when I heard it, the faint click of a gun. Then the clap of thunder, the tearing of flesh, his stunned grunt, his eyes sort of bulged out, you know, showing the veins clearly before he keeled over. His splattered brain coated the floor and I couldn’t take my eyes off his disgusting pudgy body with his trousers halfway down his thighs, the scalpel still stuck on his almost non-existent neck. Every night I dream of him but in my dreams, he’s lying face up, his eyes, bulging empty vessels and the gapping hole where the bullet went out decorated by his pink gooey brain.”

I am breathing heavily when I’m done retelling the story and it feels like my chest is about to burst out of my chest. My loud breathing is the only sound in the room and when I look at Camilla, I see the



understanding in her eyes and it feels like a boulder has been lifted off my chest.

“So Vimbai shot him? How did that make you feel?” I thought we were done but it seems like today we are ripping the Band-Aid off.

“Vimbai shot him, yes, and at first I was horrified. I had never seen a dead body before but then what he did to me came back and I felt relief. I was so relieved that he couldn't be there to hurt me anymore. For a moment I was so out of it but somehow, Vimbai dragged me out of there and back to our cell and she locked us in then threw away the key.”

This reminded me of my first confessional. I went to a Catholic primary school and for some weird they made us all take catechism and also attend confessional every week. My first one was the most nerve-wracking but at least the priest was kindly, old and a bit of a snooze fest but kind. He let me

stammer for a minute before gently correcting me,

“Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned,” I had forgotten this memory along with many others of my childhood.

I wonder if I should tell Camilla about that memory but she’s already tightening her files and collecting her pen from the little table between us.

“You did great, Ruby. Let’s stop here for today and there aren’t any activities to be carried out today. We’ve unpacked a lot, maybe let’s let it set in then we will take it up on your next session.”

I leave her packing and I take a walk towards the property ground. I just need a distraction.

.....

“You smell horrible,” I tease, wrinkling my nose and all I get is a shoe thrown at me for my troubles. My grin widens while Vimbai’s eyes narrow.

“It’s these herbs that I have to bathe with, they have such a strong smell,” as she stretches on the yoga mat, the beads around her waist tighten. It’s amazing how big her belly has grown in just a space of a month.

“How much longer are you supposed to use them?” my voice is a bit muffled as I stretch as well.

“Until the beads fall off or break,” she scowls and I stifle my laugh least I get her other shoe thrown at me.

“Look on the bright side, at the rate your stomach is growing it’s going to be soon.”

Tears well up in her eyes and I immediately stop teasing her and sit up, worried. I hand her her towel and she sniffs as she dabs her eyes.

“I was just teasing,” she nods and giggles waving her hand. Pregnancy hormones!

“I know, it’s just that I didn’t think I would make it past the first trimester and here I am now with a huge belly. I feel so fat!”

The last part comes out as a mini-wail. I should have let Dad do the yoga with her. Davirai managed to duck her way out of it and my father suddenly had pressing work emails. It’s not only the belly that has grown but her hormones have also kicked in and she cries often or shouts whichever that little monster wants her to do.

“Ouch!”

I jump up and go to her checking if she’s ok. She’s fine, the baby just kicked for the first time. She places my hand on her belly and we wait, sure enough, after a minute I feel the little kick. Tears again. But now it’s me getting emotional, my baby brother is ok. I know my father will be royally disappointed that the baby kicked for me first. Serves him right for his shadiness.

“He's really growing in there,” I’m still a little emotional, “Vimbai?”

“Mmmmh?” she looks at me a bit worried maybe because of the sharp change in the tone of my voice.

“How do you do it? You’ve moved on from the prison saga and you are glowing. It still haunts me, every night when I’m alone,” she smiles but it doesn’t

reach her eyes.

“I had to bury it so that my child gets a chance to grow. I had to let go of my anger at them, at your father and focus on the here and the now. I’m having a baby! I think you should just have something that occupies your mind, something that you will look forward to and it makes you want to wake up every day.”

I don’t think I have anything akin to having a baby. School is ok but it’s not a reason to wake up enthusiastic every day. My father and I are slowly mending our relationship but I don’t have anything to be excited about every morning. I stalk Tendero but I feel guilty about it so I stalk her less and less.

“I am not strong or passionate like you Vimbai,” she frowns and stares at me as if I’ve grown two heads.

“Ruby! You are still standing after all that they put you through. You had to be there when I was having my episodes, almost losing the baby and your father was in a coma. You are stronger than you think. Of course, you were a total brat when we first met but now, if anything happens to me, I will rest assured that my son will have you.”

My chest burns when she says that. I will figure it out as I go along but Vimbai is right, after the storms that we faced, I’m still here. I am still standing and slowly picking up the pieces. I just have to find my passion and purpose in life.

.....

Morning Family

Happy week ahead.

I would like to thank Vie Mbai and Anna Jasmine for

helping me with the research on rituals for miscarriage and Claire Hondo for making me aware how women aren't really allowed to grieve for miscarriage in the Shona tribes. Your help is deeply appreciated ladies.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo



## Rubies and Rain

Thirty-three

"When you come out of the storm, you won't be the same person who walked in. That is what this storm is all about."

- Haruki Murakami

Laughter rings out on the table as we eat, a far cry from the first supper that my father forced Vimbai, Chatunga and I to have back home. I don't know who said a joke but Vimbai has her head thrown back, hand on her tummy as she guffaws, my father is wiping the mirth from his eyes, Davirai is grinning wickedly, Camilla is doubled over in laughter, only uncle Gumburai and Vimbai's guard, whatshisname, are keeping straight faces. It feels good and I soak it all in but I can't help the niggling feeling of sadness

underneath my laughter.

“I have some casework that I need to go through before turning in, I have to love you and leave you,” Camilla is the first to excuse herself.

Uncle Gumburai grunts and nods at the other burly guy at the table and they stand, the latter looming a bit over Uncle Gumbs.

“Davirai, let’s go and prepare for your paper tomorrow,” Vimbai says looking pointedly at Davirai who doesn’t catch the warning in her eyes.

“What paper?”

“That paper, get up and follow me,” I see Davirai thin her lips and secretly roll her eyes while Vimbai is kissing my father on the forehead. I also see her muttering a few choice words. It takes everything in me not to laugh again. That would just get Davirai

into more trouble.

“Remember to talk,” Vimbai’s parting words to my father are filled with warning as I caress her belly. As always the case since that first kick, the baby excitedly kicks when he feels my hand. My father hates that the baby never kicks for him.

“You went ahead and married the female version of you,” I tease and Vimbai shouts from the staircase,

“I heard that!”

My father and I share a look before quietly laughing, not daring to laugh out loud least she comes back and boxes our ears.

“She's so tiny and yet even I am a little afraid of her. She straight out told me that she doesn't recognise

our marriage because I tricked her into signing,” he admits in a stage whisper, I love the twinkle in his eyes whenever he talks about Vimbai.

There is no denying that she makes him happy and takes away some of the years from his face.

“Let’s take a walk, Ruru,” Dad hasn’t called me Ruru in a while and it makes me nervous.

He takes my hand and I’m relieved by how steady his hand is. He has gained back some of his weight and he looks stronger but he still experiences migraines and at times his hands shake of their own accord.

It’s a beautiful night, cold, but the sky is clear no cloud in sight and a million stars twinkling happily. I pull up the hoodie in my bomber jacket, I thought my father was being dramatic for taking it out and my gloves to boot. I should not have refused the scarf,

it's cold! It was hot in the afternoon.

"I owe you so many apologies mwanangu," Dad starts and I can feel the emotion in his shaky voice.

"You don't have to keep apologising, Daddy, I forgave you, it wasn't your fault," I don't want him to keep beating himself up.

Camilla has made me realise that some metals and stones have to be forged through a raging furnace to bring out their beauty. I am a Ruby after all.

"Let me finish," my father's voice brings me back and I look at him under the starlight and it's amazing how much like him I look.

"I thought I was protecting you by linking you with Chatunga, I didn't realise that I was hurting you

instead. I didn't know about you and Tendero. Or maybe I knew but I didn't want to admit it to myself and that was very shitty of me. I shouldn't control your life, mwanangu, I worked so hard for so long to give you the best of life but then I ruined it by making you pay. I'm sorry that I made you live a lie just because of my bigoted view of the world. I can't make it up to you, I can't undo the past but I do want to right my wrongs."

Tears make their way, silently, down my face. Their heat contrasting the sharp whip of the crisp night air. I thought he was talking of the prison saga. Never in a million years did I think that my father would ever openly acknowledge my sexuality. My sex tape with whatshername, ah yes, Peaches, is one topic we have actively avoided but I noticed that it had been taken down and there were no traces of it on the internet.

This has Vimbai written all over it and I am grateful

for her. I lived in an agony of not being with who I wanted to be with because I wanted to please my father. His acknowledging my sexuality AND apologising for forcing Chatunga on me frees another boulder off my chest.

“Even though you forced Chatunga on me, I kind of fell for him too. I think it was lust or exploring my sexuality...” he coughs uncomfortable and I almost laugh at his discomfort but he started this and he must see it through.

“So no, you didn’t break Tendero and I up, my greed got me here,” it hurts admitting it but it’s the truth. My father did not send me to sleep with Chatunga, I did that on my own.

I wanted, no I lusted after him.

I was selfish, wanting my bread buttered on both

sides. I lost a precious stone while chasing pebbles. That is all on me, not my Dad, not Chatunga. Me.

“That is very mature of you to admit, but coming back to my apology. Now that I am getting better, so is Vimbai and your sessions can be virtual, I was thinking that it’s time we move on,” I look at him quizzically. He sighs heavily and his shoulders stoop.

“We are moving away from Zimbabwe, as far away as we can. There is no way I am putting either of you in danger again.”

I know how much it took for him to utter those words. Dad loves his country. He loves it with every fibre of his body, he always says Zimbabwe pumps through his blood.

“For how long?” I ask gently and he stops, like he can’t carry on and I feel so terrible.



“For as long as it takes, even permanently. It’s only fair that you choose the country we go and live in. Maybe Australia huh?\*

Different emotions flood me, relief, sadness, happiness, anger, everything.

“Anywhere?”

“Anywhere you want to go,” he is grinning down at me and I can’t help but grin back.

“Definitely Australia but before we go. I need us to go back to Zimbabwe. I need to see my mother, visit her grave. Please,” I beg when he’s already shaking his head no.

He sighs again and I know he’s thinking so I look at

the stars and there is one shooting across the sky.

Please, let my Dad agree, please.

“Fine, but we have to be careful and we are in and out Ruby,” he warns and I throw myself into his arms

.

“Thank you, Daddy!” his hands tighten around me as I call him Daddy and I feel some of the sadness in my heart melt away.

.....

Morning Fam

I think I'm coming down with the flu, words were now swimming in front of my eyes, sore and patchy throat so I couldn't continue writing. I will make the

next insert a bit longer.

Thank you.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

Rubies and Rain

Thirty-four

“Do not fall in love with people like me.

I will take you to museums, and parks, and monuments, and kiss you in every beautiful place, so that you can never go back to them without tasting me like blood in your mouth.

I will destroy you in the most beautiful way possible. And when I leave you will finally understand, why storms are named after people.”

Caitlyn Siehl

Nosihle

He ruined me for other men. There I said it, not out loud but out loud in my brain. Am I making sense? I don't feel like I'm making sense, not since he let me

walk out of that waterfall and out of his life without putting up any fight. I have played out that scenario from that day so many times that every moment, every breath is etched in my mind.

“Nosihle wait, I don’t want you to leave. Not like this,” he could have said and I would have gone barreling onto his chest, weeping secretly in relief and telling him that it’s ok, I would follow him to the ends of the world if I had to.

“Nosihle, I love you. Come with me,” would have been the perfect way to my heart but did that stupid man, the size of a mountain and with the emotional intelligence of a caveman say that? No!

When I heard him calling out my name I stopped. I didn’t turn back because I didn’t want him to catch the anguish in my face and the hope when I heard my name falling out of his mouth. I am pathetic. There I said it, pathetic. I waited, not turning back but

eagerly waiting nonetheless, for the words that would assure me that I hadn't imagine those weeks by the mountains, that my world wasn't the only one rocked in that cave behind that waterfall. Waiting for any little sign that he felt a quarter of what I felt for him.

"Be careful, the rocks here are slippery and people have been known to disappear in these parts of the woods."

The famous last words. He might as well have nailed the last nail on the cross were our relationship lay in tatters coughing out a weak "it is finished." Oh, no, now he even has me blaspheming!

Maybe I need to go back to church, mend my relationship with God and find a devout brother who won't mind my barren Mary Magdalene status instead of Mary the virgin, I can even claim secondary virginity and we'll live a nice, peaceful

Christian life.

You know what f\*ck this, f\*ck Joshua. What is it that Vimbai said about getting over a guy? Getting on top of one, so instead of frying my brain trying to think of what I did wrong, let me get out there and get Joshua out of my system. At least he took me out of Beitbridge for the rest of this year, I'll be going back in January.

How he did it, remains a mystery to me. I work in the Large Client Office, which means specialised services to Zimra's biggest clients, I'm talking international operations.

Work in Harare isn't as full of customs clearances from individuals, which means that the "thank you" tips aren't as much but the pay is way better so it's a win. I get to rub shoulders with corporate bigwigs and it's definitely a step up from my tiny box match office filled with stuffy files and dust.

I love the airy office that I have that has a view, it's not a glamorous view but it's a view! There is air conditioning and we get lunch, bottled water and medical aid that actually works. I am not sure I want to return to Beitbridge but who do I tell that to? The person who got me the gig has ghosted me. Seven weeks, four days, twenty hours and forty minutes of silence. Argh, again f\*ck the mountain!

Where to go? I need to make new friends.

Vimbai only called me once to thank me for coming to take care of Davirai and telling me that they are out but she sounded out of it. She admitted that her episodes were back and she was battling through stuff that she couldn't go into detail on. That she won't be able to call often because they are kind of on the run.

It all sounded hectic and if I hadn't had to go under the radar myself, I wouldn't have believed her. I



wonder if my friend has gotten in over her head. This new mystery man of hers seems to be pulling her down to the trenches with him. It's one blow after another, she went to prison for the guy! But judging from the apartment he bought her and that house in Inyanga, he is rich, filthy rich, might be politically connected too. So, I guess Vimbai got what she want.

Is this dress too tight? Too short? Argh!! I really need to start making friends.

My reflection in the mirror makes me twirl a bit just to be sure it's me, one of the dresses that Vimbai gave me when we parted in college which seems light years away but it's only been a year and some months. I had been eyeing this particular dress for months and she gave it to me and a couple others as a parting gift.

It's a blood red Strap Midi Dress, of polyester silk

material which shimmers a bit in the light of my apartment, which came with the job. The dress clings to my curves, mine are fuller than the past owner of dress and are accentuated by the Gucci belt I accessorised with. The plunging U neck is revealing my cleavage, my dark skin is glistening from the glow of the dress. The slit is downright sinful, it's almost riding up mid-hip. I look at the bold red lipstick in my hand hesitantly, but then I go back to my f\*ck it all mood and I apply it anywhere.

There. Done. I look nothing like Nosi the mousy girl that Jacob toyed with and I look nothing like the sweet, hopeful girl that Joshua f\*cked with. It's time to get my groove on. I call a cab, I need to invest in a car, I took my driver's license during my job hunting days.

When I have almost talked myself out of going out, the cabbie calls to say he's downstairs. He's a bit older than Joshua, looks ex-military and I got in

touch with him through work, he asked me to call should I need to go anywhere and I've called him a total number of three times since, mostly to go grocery shopping. He eyes me disapprovingly from the bottom of my Jimmy Choo's, also gifted, to the top of the hair that I bought from a lady who needed me to help her clear her hair products from the USA. It is quality A-grade hair. I am looking like a million dollars, I have no friend to tell me this but I feel it. He must get over himself, he is not my father. God knows if that lowlife is still alive.

“Where to, madam?”

One of his quips is calling me madam and he plainly refuses to call me Nosihle.

“Club Sankayi, I mean Dreams Nightlife,” I miss college and Vimbai plus that is the only club that I went to and know.

The cabbie grunts but he still drives. My social media is boring maybe a few of the selfies and mirror selfies that I took in the apartment will liven it up a bit. Painting the nightlife Red! Cute Caption and posted. The dual camera iPhone that I got from another client in Beitbridge really does justice to my glow.

One of the things I miss about Beitbridge is when people are desperate to get their stuff clears and they offer you stuff at discounted prices. There is none of that from the corporate people in their fancy suits and perfect English. Stuck-ups the bunch of them, but I will not think about them or anyone that will ruin my mood. Yeah, even the one who has ghosted me for seven weeks, four days, twenty-two hours and thirty minutes. No one is keeping count.

.....

I'm on my second Cosmopolitan and I'm starting to feel the vibe in this place. The neon lights don't hurt my eyes anymore and I feel like getting down and getting busy. These shoes are hindering me, I take them off and ask to leave them and my purse with the barman. He agrees and winks at me. Male attention is not something I am used to basking in but it feels good. I'm not stupid, I put all my money in my bra and the phone too, the bag only has make up.

Bits and pieces of the time I was here with Vimbai, Danai and that witch, keep infiltrating my mind. Daring Vimbai to go and talk to Chatunga, not only did she do that but the bitch managed to shag him for the night. Now that is the kind of energy that I need to channel tonight.

Maybe that is the only way that I can get rid of Joshua's scent, get rid of the memory of how he filled me up and his strokes, dear Lord my thighs are tingling mercilessly and I have to press them

together to curb the itch.

David's Jowo comes on and I forget all about how much of a horny mess I am. The slit makes it easier to gyrate my hips to the beat and I'm getting down, a little circle has formed around me and I love it! This, being the centre of attention has never been my portion in life but it is exhilarating.

I make sure that my hair doesn't show my face in case anyone is Live or taking videos. I came to unwind, not get fired. I'm enjoying myself until some asshole decides to dance behind me and grind his little sausage against me. I stiffen. I came to get laid not scratched. I move away from him to another spot in the night club but he follows me. Jehov'oyingcwele!

Before I can turn and give him a piece of my mind, he is forcefully shoved off me and a fist decks him, sending him sprawling to the ground. There is

screaming from some dramatic girls and I wince, maybe I shouldn't have drunk that third Cosmopolitan.

The hairs on the back of my neck stand up and I just know that it's him, even though right now he is squatting next to the guy nursing his probably broken nose and saying something to him that I can't hear over the din in the nightclub.

"Boss, we don't want any trouble," the bouncer who seemed huge when I came in, is a fraction smaller than Joshua and that pisses me off.

The music has been turned down just like my mood and it plummets even lower when Joshua assures the bouncer that we are leaving and orders me to get my shoes. I want to defy him but then I remember that we are living in the world of digital media and I huff before making my way to the bar area. The barman gives me my things but there is no flirtatious

wink this time, his hands are slightly shaking. Great!  
Just great.

I want to put on my shoes but the Mountain is dragging me, barefoot and all, outside of the club. He's seething, I can smell the anger rolling off him but I don't care, this is my life and I was going to take care of that guy. I had it all under control. Ouch! I might have stepped on some glass fragments but this man ignores my sharp cry of pain and he continues dragging me until he gets to a huge SUV.

He bundles me inside the passenger seat and fastens my seatbelt before banging the door. His scent when he bent over to fasten my belt, crowded me and now it lingers around me confusing my anger. He looks at me under the light of the car, whatever his sweeping inspection revealed to him has his hands tightening around the steering wheel.

He doesn't say anything as he drives into the city.



Not even when I put my feet up to check the damage. I'm bleeding on my left foot. I can't feel it now because of the vodka in my system but it's going to hurt like a bitch tomorrow. How do I wear shoes to work on Monday? I can't find the glass fragments, no matter how much I squint my eyes so I give up. Let me rest my eyes for a bit, they feel heavy.

I am jolted awake and I realise that the mountain is carrying me into my apartment. I want to know how he knew where I stay and where I was but I won't be the first to dispel this silence between us which has been brewing for several weeks.

Some of the alcohol leaves my body when we get into my apartment and I see Vimbai sitting comfortably on my couch, with a plate of ribs and sticky wings next to her like it's not just after midnight.

"Vimbai!" I exclaim trying to wriggle out of Joshua's arms but his grip is vicelike.

Vimbai gets up exclaiming over my bloodied foot, but my eyes grow round as they are fixed over her huge tummy. She's pregnant! The revelation makes me happy and sad at the same time, but mostly happy. We are going to have a baby! We hug as soon as I'm placed on the couch.

Vimbai and I watch bemused as Joshua silently works on my feet, removing the glasses with the tongs that I use to pluck out my eyebrows. He isn't saying anything to either of us and when he's done, he pours some stinging antiseptic on the soles of my feet. After bandaging my foot he grunts his satisfaction at his handiwork and after bidding Vimbai goodnight, he leaves without saying a word to me.

"Wow! That was intense," Vimbai breaks our stunned silence, we look at each other and burst into a fit of giggles.

“You're pregnant!” she laughs and absent-mindedly brushes her belly, she's glowing and she's picked up a little weight. She looks good.

“Girl, I have a lot to tell you and it seems like you have a lot to tell me too and we have the rest of the night to talk. We are leaving tomorrow and I just had to see you, thank you in person. Plus, I missed you so much Nosi!”

This is what I needed girl talk to unpack this man who has turned my world upside down in a matter of months and I'm not sure if it's a good thing or not.

“So you and Joshua,” Vimbai starts when I come back with a cup of coffee for myself and got chocolate and cake for her, no wonder her tummy is so big.

“There is no me and Joshua,” there hasn't been for

seven weeks, five days, three hours and fifty minutes, I add silently to her raised eyebrows. But this is Vimbai my best friend in the whole world, who has seen me at my best and helped me up in my worst. So, I find herself pouring out my heart to her into the early rays of the rising sun.

.....

Morning Fam, as long as promised.

Happy weekend.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

Rubies and Rain

Thirty-five

“I’m setting you free from my memories so I can finally set myself free from the murky darkness.”

Tanvi Dasaur

Vimbai

Nosihle and Joshua? I would never have pegged them as being into each other but I can tell that whatever is there is deep, even though Nosihle vehemently asserts that she is over Joshua. She wasn’t there when we got to her apartment.

The security didn’t give us an issue but asked to speak to Joshua separately. I couldn’t hear what was being said but Joshua's face changed into a

stormy expression and he took out his phone. I felt sorry for whoever was at the other end because they got the brunt of whatever displeased Joshua. It's the most I've heard him say since I met him.

After that call, I had to clear my throat to remind him of my presence and he actually looked shocked.

"Your friend isn't around, the security says she went out," his clipped voice carried his irritation. K for Hektik!

Before I knew it I was bundled up in Nosi's apartment and left alone, breaking Ian's cardinal rule but who is going to tell him? Not me. Besides, he sounded distracted yesterday when he was talking to me on the phone. I understand and I was a good girl even though sitting alone waiting for Joshua and Nosihle gave me time to think as well.

They came back just after midnight with Nosihle hurt and Joshua looking like he was about to kill someone. I was too shocked to even comment as he dressed her wound then left with only a clipped goodbye. Nosihle has been filling me in about their relationship since then and after my initial surprise, I think they look cute together. Also, Nosihle is lying to herself if she thinks that whatever is happening between her and Joshua is over.

He has security for her and she's either too frustrated to notice or still gullible, but I won't be the one to shed light.

"I think I just need to go back to church and maybe I'll find someone there who won't mind my barrenness," she says and that exact moment the sun decides to sneak in its first rays on her skin, making it shimmer and making it look like gold Pixie dust is scattered all over her. She looks like a goddess on fire.

“Nosi, how many times do I have to tell you this until you understand it? Not having a womb doesn’t make you any less of a woman and I know that you want children, heck I can even be your surrogate if you want me to be. Just, stop putting yourself down and acting like you aren’t a full package because of one stupid mistake that you made in college.”

My words hang between us, heavy in the early morning light. I am angry that such a gorgeous being can’t see the power she possesses that makes even stiff men like Joshua lose their minds.

“I don’t think you and Joshua are anywhere near over but I have to warn you. These men, they are intense Nosi, they love to obsession, can be controlling if you allow it. They are not normal people, their work is dangerous and sometimes it’s hard to separate the man from his assignments or past. I’m not saying this to scare you,” I quickly add because



Nosihle's eyes have grown rounder than saucers.

“No one prepared me for Ian and Joshua isn't just my bodyguard Nosihle, I think he's one of Ian's right-hand men, him and Gumburai. I don't know for sure, it's just a hunch. You have to find a way of not letting him walk all over you.”

She looks freaked out, she doesn't know what exactly Ian does but she was clued in by my arrest that it's probably political, that's just the tip of the iceberg. I will let Joshua shed some light on their work if indeed he isn't done with her as I suspect. I just told her that we are relocating and she assumes it's to SA, I don't enlighten her and it's for her safety.

“What about you father, will you go to Gweru to bid him goodbye?” speaking of my father brings a huge smile on my face.

“He’s no longer staying in Gweru. After he was discharged Ian took him and, my siblings, they have a house in Mount Pleasant, I was there yesterday before I came to see you. He is so happy Nosi! He looks like my father again, he manages some of Ian’s stores, he insisted and it has done a lot for his confidence. I think also being free from that vile woman has boosted his self-esteem. The kids go to school and have two nannies taking care of them. Everyone is happy.”

“What about your aunt?” I laugh thinking about her karma.

“She got the house in Gweru, that is what she and my mother’s family held over my father. That house and she gets to keep it but she calls my father with different numbers to scream at him about the rates and food, never about her children. At times she begs him to come back but he’s done. He even walks with his shoulders straight, you should see

him Nosi, he's a whole new man."

Thinking about what Ian has done for my family makes me teary. At least now I can go to Australia with an open heart, knowing that my father and siblings are well taken care of.

"I need a favour," I fill her in on what I was thinking about yesterday and she looks at me dubiously.

"Are you sure about this, Vimbai?"

I am, I have had time to think about it and it has to happen. After some persuasion, Nosihle agrees and we first get some sleep, for an hour or two.

.....

Maybe this was a bad idea, but it's too late to back out now. There is a knock on the door and I wipe my clay hands on my dress. I'm constantly sweating. I got a call from Ian, they are on their way to his late wife's grave in Chiredzi.

A part of me is still expecting him to burst down the door. Another knock and I waddle a bit faster before checking on the spy hole and opening. He looks different. He's filled up and is wearing an expensive suit, he looks good. His eyes widen when he sees my huge belly and when the shock sets, his mouth thins and I sigh and step aside, letting him in.

"You don't waste any time, Vimbai. What? Are you securing the bag by giving that bastard a kid?" I close my eyes and count to ten, reminding myself that I called him here and why I called him here.

"I didn't call you here to be insulted by you, Tafadzwa," I sit across him looking for any signs of

the boy I was madly in love with and even though he looks the same, I can't find the spark that drew me to him.

"Did you call me to jump on my dick? Are the blue pills not working anymore," he's pissed when I throw my head back and laugh. I can't help the mirth that has ensured me.

Ian and pills? Ian is the most virile man that I know and compared to him, Tafadzwa's sex game was that of a boy still learning the ropes while Ian was the master of my body, he tamed it and made it run wild at the time and ever since I was cleared by the doctor, he has been showing me flames. As if making up for the time we were apart. I press my thighs together thinking of our last night in Caledon.

"No, thank you," Tafadzwa still has all this anger and I realise that part of it is my fault and that's why I asked him to come. The door flings open before I

can start my apologies and I am relieved to see only Joshua's angry scowl and Nosihle shrugging apologetically. I'm impressed that she even managed to distract him for this long.

"Look, Tafadzwa, I called you here to apologise. I realise that the way I ended things with you was wrong. I met Ian and I felt all these new feelings for him and when you proposed I just knew that I couldn't marry you when I felt something even if it was just infatuation or lust at that point, for someone else," in the corner of my eye I can see Joshua glowering at Tafadzwa but I focus all my attention on Tafadzwa, not on him.

I realise as I told him half-truths that it is true, besides the blackmailing, I felt something for Ian, I had from the moment I first laid my eyes on him in that house party.

"Can we have some privacy?" Tafadzwa arrogantly stares at Joshua but I don't know what he sees in

Joshua's face that has him fiddling with his tie.

"So, you dropped everything that we had for infatuation?" I hurt him, a lot and I can't make it up to him and there is no one I would rather be with than Ian right now.

"It was more than that, I met him before we got back together and something happened," I sigh because I know he's thinking I'm some slut but I don't care. I just want to set him free and me free from our shared past, even if he hates me.

"If that's all that you called me for," he makes to stand up and I talk quickly wanting to get this off my chest.

"You were a great friend to me Tafadzwa, when I needed you, you were there for me when I had no one and for that, I want to thank you. I'm sorry things got sour to the point that they did and I hope

someday you will find someone who will love you and only you. I forgive you for all the mean and hurtful things that you said. I know they came from a place of hurt. I wish you happiness," it feels like a huge burden has been lifted off my shoulders.

He looks like he wants to say something, his Adam's apple is bobbing up and down furiously. He doesn't say anything.

"There is one last thing, why did you come to see me in prison? Who sent you?"

He looks at me momentarily amazed. He looks at Joshua who grunts and then he looks back at me.

"It was one of my father's friends," when he says his name, my eyes grow wider.



“He told me that if I got you to talk then both our problems would be solved. I would have you and I would have helped take down a wanted criminal.”

I grind my teeth at the word criminal but I let it go.

“Even if it failed with Ian I wasn’t going to come back to you,” I say softly but firmly so that he doesn’t get any ideas.

“I can see that now, I wish you well too. I’ve only ever wanted you to be happy and you look happy,” that’s the kindest and most sincere thing he’s said since he got here. Now I can fully let go of Tafadzwa.

“Boss won’t be happy,” Joshua grunts after he’s seen Tafadzwa out of the building.

“I won’t tell him if you don’t,” he gives me a

murderous glare but he knows that he will just be in as much trouble as I . Should it ever come out that Tafadzwa was here, we are both in serious trouble.

“We have to go,” I look around Nosihle's apartment and I don't know when I'll see her again so I hug her and don't let go. It feels like I am letting go of Vimbai the student, Vimbai the candidate attorney and venturing into a completely new world.

.....

Morning family

I wish you all a blessed week ahead.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

## Rubies and Rain

### Thirty-six

“I’ve learned that goodbyes will always hurt, pictures will never replace having been there, memories good and bad will bring tears, and words can never replace feelings.” –Unknown

“I was always promising her that I would accompany her to Chiredzi,” it’s weird talking about my mother to my Dad. After her funeral, we buried all talk of her except when we were fighting and I wished she had lived instead of him. Dad chuckles looking outside at the passing landscape.

“You always managed to get out of going with her and she knew but she always tried to get you to go with her.” His voice holds a fondness that makes my heart swell. With everything we have been through

and Vimbai joining our family, it has been getting harder and harder to remember my mother's place in our lives. The role she played. I'm happy that he remembers her with such fondness.

"Mama never gave up on any of us," he nods and takes my hand in his, squeezing it gently, "why did you agree to have her buried in Chiredzi?"

I've always wondered why my father didn't insist that Mama be buried in Harare to be closer to us, to him mostly. Uncle Gumburai is driving and I see them share a brief look and I give up on knowing the reason he let them bury her in Chiredzi.

"We took so much of her that I didn't think it was right to be selfish with her in death as well," his reason surprises me. My father is the type to always want to have things go his way. He is forceful and controlling.

“She would have loved that you didn’t butt heads with her parents,” he chuckles but doesn’t say anything.

My maternal grandparents tried to kick up a fuss when my mother passed away and they wanted to take me to stay with them. My father calmly told them that heads would roll first, they could take their kid and bury her but make no move to touch his.

I had forgotten all about this but being on this journey, everything is coming back. The pain, the anguish and how lost I felt as I watched people I hadn’t seen in years cry for my mother. They would hug me without my consent and cry about how my mother wouldn’t have wanted to leave me alone. That they would be there. People make so many promises at a graveyard but I never saw any of them again.

All of this makes me appreciate my father even

more. He tried, in his own way he tried and lately he has been stepping up even more.

“Do you think your mother will feel like I moved on too quickly?”

My father of a year or two ago wouldn't have asked this question but he has been opening up to me and talking to me more like an adult lately.

“I think she wanted you to move on, she would love Vimbai,” I'm not sure about the last part, but don't we always make up things about the dead?

Once someone's soul departs, it's like fragments of their personality disappear over time and become vague until all you can cling to is what you loved about them most.

He smiles looking a bit relieved. I didn't think he cared. When my mother died all I could think about was losing a parent but I didn't think about my father losing a wife.

“It was hard for me in the beginning, I had to rediscover where my ties were kept, my suits. At least Mbuya Chipu runs a smooth house but it wasn't the same. Your mother always made sure to lay out a suit for me, every day from the first day we started living together. It was the little things that hurt the most and then I had no idea how to get through to you. She made it all look so easy.”

The rest of the journey passes in the same vein, reminiscing about my mother. Some stories make us laugh, some make us quiet and muddle alone in our thoughts. Somewhere along the way, I fall asleep and when I wake up we are in front of my grandparents' homestead. It looks like one of those houses in the Burbs. Nothing to indicate that we are

deep in the bundus, not even a single rondavel hut. By the time our car parks behind a Ford Ranger, my grandfather is already standing on top of the top step and he beams when he sees me.

“The gods must be smiling at me today, Ruby ndiwe here uyu? Is this really you, Ruby? My child's child look at how you have grown! You look like your mother, bless her soul.”

I let him fuss over me even though I look nothing like my mother. He welcomes us in and I can tell that my father and grandfather are trying hard to stay cordial with each other.

“Your grandmother just went to check up on the livestock, it’s another drought,” he explains as he puts down a tray with juice and an assortment of cookies and biscuits.



I eat quietly and listen to them talk about game farming, my grandfather is reluctant but Dad is telling him how much money he makes from his game reserve in Chiredzi and the other one that he has in West Nicholson. After I have taken the dishes to the kitchen, I find my grandmother back from wherever. She used to be fair-skinned but the constant exposure to the sun, has left her skin burnt and leathery. She smells of citrus fruit as she clasps me warmly in her arms and she starts crying.

“Look at you! You look gorgeous! If only my child had lived to see how beautiful you have become,” that makes her cry even harder until Sekuru slowly pries her off me. I have tears in my eyes as well because I wish she was here to guide and hold me through every storm.

My father tells them that I got a scholarship to finish my studies in Germany. Germany? I understand why he had to lie but out of all the countries, he chose

Germany. The grandparents are happy, I even get a promise of a cow, a pregnant one at that. We ask to go and see my mother and permission is granted. Dad hates this asking for permission but he does it anyway for me.

Grandma must clean this grave often and it makes me grateful that my mother is buried here with someone to take care of her grave. Dad puts the mixed bouquet of lilies, tulips, white rose and some wild flowers on her headstone and lovingly caresses her headstone.

“I know how much you wanted me to leave the force behind and I didn’t listen. It almost cost me our daughter and I think it’s time I listen. I met someone, she’s amazing and she cares for our Ruby, just like you asked. I will keep on looking after her, rest easy my love. We are going away to start a new life, we aren’t abandoning you. We will keep carrying you in our hearts,” he bows his head and I look away as he

discreetly wipes away a stray tear.

It's my turn and for a moment words fail me and I take out my phone. I used to laugh at her for loving James Arthur I scroll until I get to the perfect song. I put my phone on the headstone. I smile through my tears as I listen to James Arthur.

" I wanna live with you

Even when we're ghosts

'Cause you were always there for me when I needed you most

I'm gonna love you 'til

My lungs give out

I promise 'til death we part like in our vows

So I wrote this song for you, now everyone knows

That it's just you and me 'til we're grey and old

Just say you won't let go

Just say you won't let go

Just say you won't let go

Oh, just say you won't let go”

I take my phone and turn off the songs before a nasty one comes on.

“I’m sorry Mama, I’m sorry that I didn’t come sooner. It just hurt thinking of you lying here underneath this pile of dirt. You hated dirt, I will never understand why you had to leave me so soon. I still needed you to scold me, for you to teach me to be nicer. Your sense of style and everything that you wanted me to learn and to become. I love you mom and I always will.”

We say our farewells then head back to my grandparents, we bid them goodbye but Grandma insists that we stay for the almost ready meal. We

have no option but to stay. Dad's phone rings and he frowns as he looks at the screen.

"Chitekete?" he sounds worried as he moves outside.

"Is he seeing someone?" my grandfather interrogates men and before I can even answer his wife cuts in.

"Of course he is, this generation doesn't mourn. He couldn't even wait for the maggots to finish eating my daughter. I knew we were wrong not to fight harder for Ruru. Now she's going to be mistreated."

"No, I'm fine, Vimbai is the best and we get along well," I see them share at each other in shock, like I've been bewitched.

"Mama is gone and we are just trying to get by, the

best way we know how. My father has been nothing but nice to you, he built you this house and he loved his wife, don't begrudge him the little happiness that he has now. I'll just go and join him, keep well Ambuya, Sekuru. We will come visit some other time," I hug my shocked grandma and leave.

I find my father at the door about to come in and he's also surprised to see me out.

"I have said my goodbyes lets go, is anything wrong with Vimbai?" he is still frowning trying to understand my abrupt departure."

"No, it's nothing. She was just checking if we travelled ok, I forgot to check-in. Are you sure you are ready to leave? What about lunch?"

I'm sure, I have said my goodbyes and I am ready to let go. My heart is at rest now that I finally came to

visit my mother's grave.

.....

Morning Family

See, I love peace.

Love and light

Busisekile Khumalo

## Rubies and Rain

Thirty-seven

“Some people are in such utter darkness that they will burn you just to see a light. Try not to take it personally.”

Kamand Kojouri

My limbs are aching. Driving almost three days from Caledon to Harare, then to Chiredzi and now back to Harare has taken its toll on my body but it was worth it. Now I can leave without any guilt. I thought that coming back here would break me, the memories are there but those sessions with Camilla have made me realise that I should not let their actions define me. I am not a victim, I am a survivor.

The drive has been good for my dad and I. We've talked, laughed and listened to his boring music and



he complained throughout my playlist. It felt like the good old times and I felt my mother's presence for the first time since she passed on. Not on her graveside, no, but with us in the car. It felt reassuring.

We took the longest route to lose any tails I guess but there wasn't anyone following us but they said we can't be too careful. Uncle Gumburai and Dad exchanged driving and they wouldn't let me drive. Eye roll. I'm a better driver than both of them combined. A clear lie but I am a better driver than their exhausted, old selves. Somehow we got to Harare in one piece and passed as if headed to Bulawayo. When we turn towards Lake Chivero, it's already almost morning.

"I'm not as young as I used to be," Uncle Gumburai complains while cranking his neck.

"I hate to admit it but I also felt this trip. Let's rest today and we will leave tomorrow once it gets dark. I

think I'll just organize a chopper because this driving is too much work."

"You should have organised one in the first place," Uncle Gumburai mumbles and Dad only grunts and scowls at him. It's like watching me talking to him. It's fun to watch.

"Go sleep before you develop arthritis just by standing here," he gets the parting shot and hugs me while Uncle Gumburai swears softly and leaves after ruffling my hair.

I haven't been in this house for years and it wasn't this massive back then. It was just a cottage. We only came once and stayed for a holiday. Back then, my father had just gotten the tender to develop the area and Kintyre Estates was born. Our house is a bit further up than the other houses, secluded and with the most gorgeous view of Lake Chivero. I plop myself on my bed and within minutes I drift off to

sleep.

When I wake up it's a little after 3 pm and my body feels well-rested. After a luxurious bath, I feel human again and my limbs are not as sore.

“Look who finally decided to join us in the land of the living,” I flip a finger at Vimbai and she laughs as she dips her chicken into some sweet chilly sauce.

“When we got here, it felt like my whole body was on fire. Now I feel a little bit alive. How is my baby brother doing?”

“He thinks that my tummy is his own personal soccer stadium. I swear I felt him kick my lung,” as if to show off, he starts kicking when I brush her belly and she groans making me smile.

“How did it go?” I chew my chicken first, swallow and sip on some lemonade before responding to Vimbai's question.

“It went well, I’m glad I came back and it feels like this huge burden has been lifted off my shoulders. Why are you eating alone? Where is Dad?” Vimbai rolls her eyes.

“He is still sleeping, he woke up around midday, had brunch and went back to sleep. His age is showing,” she leans over and stage whispers the last part.

“I heard that!” my father’s voice drifts from the passageway and we dissolve into a fit of giggles.

He comes out looking bemused. He’s always complaining that we gang up on him and that he can’t wait for my baby brother to come so that he at least has someone on his side. He leans over and

kisses my cheek before going over to Vimbai. He rubs and kisses her belly, rubbing it and then lands a short, swift kiss on Vimbai's mouth.

“Get a room, yuck!” That only eggs him on to deepen the kiss and I throw a bun at him before he lets her go. Vimbai is panting softly and her cheeks are burning up.

This is something that I am looking forward to when we get to Australia and seeing Tendero of course. I wonder if she will be happy to see me, if she misses me just as much as I miss her. Dad managed to get a chopper so we are leaving before dawn tomorrow. I'm excited, I won't even try and hide it. I ask to go to the Lake and I'm told that I must take Joshua, Vimbai's guard with me. I thought he would straight out say no.

The walk to the Lake is peaceful and picturesque, even the air is a bit nippy and there aren't people

allowed on our side of the Lake. The sun glimmers, stretching its rays languidly across the water probably shuffling around and ready to knock off and leave the Lake and all that surrounds it behind. I wish Davirai was here to see this, we left her with her father and she was sad to see us go but she has to go to school.

Joshua doesn't say anything, he just watches over me, resting against a tree. This moment next to the water, watching the sunset is the perfect way I want to remember home, not the dark and dingy prison cell. My perfect moment is disturbed by the crunching of gravel and I turn to see the last person I thought I'd see here, heck I haven't even given him any thought in what feels like ages.

Joshua's gun is drawn and Chatunga has his hands in the air. I don't say anything as he is briskly patted down and when Joshua looks at me with a question in his eyes, I nod and he allows Chatunga to come to

me.

“I’m hurt that you would come and go without even a call to your boyfriend,” he says with his hands pressed dramatically on his chest.

He looks beautiful in some neon shorts, a life vest over another vest, his arms are rippling, everything right down to his charming smile used to make my breathing pattern change but now I remain unfazed by his proximity.

“What do you want, Chatunga?” I go back to watching the sun but it is fast losing some of its golden-fiery timbres.

“I was jet-skiing then I thought I should come see how my baby is doing,” he looks more like his mother when he’s being this charming snake.

“I would have appreciated it more if you had come to visit me in prison,” I look him in the eye and now his eyes are shifty, not quite meeting mine.

“I didn’t know...”

“Cut the bullshit, Baby, if you knew I was here now it means that you knew when I was here then. You knew and didn’t bother to do anything while I was being tortured, drugged and raped. So excuse me if I am not interested in buying any of your crap today.”

A moment passes between us, my eyes still on him, wondering what about him drove me so crazy that I ruined the one good thing in my life.

“Ruby, look, my hands were tied, you know that we are always heavily under scrutiny. We are still a threat to some and one wrong move, they won’t hesitate to eliminate us. I have to think of my family



first,” I nod and honestly I am not bitter or anything at his betrayal. I remain unmoved by his presence. I just want him to leave so that I can go back to enjoying my little sunset moment.

“For what it’s worth, I really dig you Ruru and I want us to start over,” I throw my head back and laugh, a deep belly laugh that leaves my eyes smarting and I wipe them with the back of my hand.

“I prefer girls, thanks,” he doesn’t look disgusted or bothered by my assertion, he looks excited by it.

“I saw your video and it was kind of hot, I wouldn’t mind getting in on some of that. I never would have pegged you for a freak...” he’s biting his lower lip and leaves the sentence to linger between us.

“No, thanks. Now please leave, I was enjoying being alone,” the sunset has gone and I might as well head

back, the mood has been ruined.

“Ruby...”

“Bye Chatunga, try to keep it in your pants for your new girlfriend,” I turn and leave him there his hands twisting the summer shades in his hand.

.....

We are having dinner when there is a bit of commotion at the door. Gunshot to be precise but my father, Uncle Gumburai and Joshua remain calm and continue eating. Vimbai and I share a look. There are heavy footfalls and then the door opens and Shefu, the ugly man who rescue-captured us comes in dragging Camilla behind him.

I look at Camilla in shock and she won't meet my eye

either. Her head is downcast, she is hanging it in shame.

“Gentlemen, Shadow how good it is to see you in the land of the living,” Dad’s eyes are trained on Camilla and I can see the angry vein jump from his forehead.

“I’ve come to collect my debt, seeing as you have been busy,” I’m convinced this man loves the sound of his own voice.

He moves his hand under his armpit and two guns are turned on him in a blink of an eye. Hat only makes him laugh and take out two folded newspapers. He hands the newspapers to me.

I look at my father and he nods. I open the first newspaper and gap at the headline.

“Prison Warden hangs himself after being gang-raped by convicted felons in Chikurubhi.”

This one is dated two weeks ago and my hands shake when I see the face of one of my tormentors. He's gone. Dad made sure he felt what I felt before he ended his miserable life.

“Zimbabwe’s Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) and the Ministry of State Security have issued a reward for anyone who might know the whereabouts of two of its top agents.”

There they are, I will never forget the faces of the men who dragged me from my apartment. I thought that I was over the whole ordeal but seeing these articles has opened up scars. Vimbai places her hand over mine and squeezes it gently, a warning not to show any weakness in front of this man. He is smirking as he takes out a pen. Wait, that pen looks familiar, Camilla's pen. Gasp!

“Vimbai shot him, yes, and at first I was horrified. I had never seen a dead body before but then what he did to me came back and I felt relief. I was so relieved that he couldn’t be there to hurt me anymore. For a moment I was so out of it but somehow, Vimbai dragged me out of there and back to our cell and she locked us in then threw away the key.”

My voice comes out as clear as day and I see my father blanche and his hand curl into a fist. Everyone is tense except for Shefu who looks like he is having the time of his life.

“Gentlemen, I believe my price has just gone up.”

.....

Morning family

Happ weekend and be safe. Made today's insert a bit longer to say thank you so much for your interaction.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

## Rubies and Rain

### Thirty-eight

“Sometimes fate is like a small sandstorm that keeps changing directions. You change direction but the sandstorm chases you. You turn again, but the storm adjusts. Over and over you play this out, like some ominous dance with death just before dawn. Why? Because this storm isn't something that has nothing to do with you, This storm is you. Something inside you. So all you can do is give in to it, step right inside the storm, closing your eyes and plugging up your ears so the sand doesn't get in, and walk through it, step by step. There's no sun there, no moon, no direction, no sense of time. Just fine white sand swirling up the sky like pulverized bones.”

Haruki Murakami

Tension. I can taste its metallic presence in my mouth. No one is saying anything. My father looks like he is about to blow a gasket while Vimbai is still eating her food as if we weren't disturbed, as if she isn't implicated in a murder. My appetite flew out of the window but then again I ain't carrying a baby in my womb.

"What do you want?" it comes out as a hiss because Dad's teeth are ground tightly even as he speaks.

"These are some pretty hefty prison sentences that your women are looking at, breaking out of prison and murder of a prison guard. They can get up to a life sentence. I don't know, I didn't go to law school, what do you say, Mrs Shadow?"

Vimbai continues chewing her food slowly and then she sips on her sparkling water and pats her mouth with a napkin while everyone in the room stares at her.



“I don’t carry work to the dinner table, as you can see I am halfway through my steak and I’ve been craving it the whole day,” she shrugs and goes back to cutting her meat.

Shefu is ticked, I can see it from the little vein popping on his forehead but he masks his irritation with a laugh and turns his attention back to my father.

“Women! Right? That’s why all this lies at your feet my man. What is it going to be? You haven’t reached out yet I rescued your family for you in good faith. I thought you might need a little motivation.”

Uncle Gumburai is dark in anger. If we weren’t in the room, he might have already killed Shefu while my father looks drained. He closes his eyes briefly and when he opens them they are bloodshot.

“It's me that you want, let my family go. The chopper is here, let them go and then you and I can discuss whatever payment you want.”

The tension has piled in my stomach and I feel like I am about to pop an ulcer. This is all my fault, again. If I hadn't insisted on wanting to visit my mother's grave or if I hadn't literally confessed to murder during my sessions with Camilla, none of this would be happening.

“Fair enough, I'm feeling generous anyways. Let them go,” he flashes his ugly smile at me and I just glare back at him.

“Joshua, take them out of here. You know what to do,” Dad's mask has fallen in place and he looks cold and ruthless, I can't see any trace of the man I was doing car karaoke with.

Joshua looks at me and I stand up, pushing my chair back and it feels like a lump is permanently stuck in my throat. This might be the last time I see my father and Uncle Gumburai. Who knows what this Shefu chancer wants from them.

“It will be fine, Ruru,” as if he can hear my silent cries, Dad assures me and he smiles a little and I just want to throw myself at him and hug him.

“I’m not going anywhere without you, Ian. I refuse to give birth without you is the room,” Vimbai announces and punctuates her assertion with a belch.

“Vimbai!”

It’s the first time that I hear my father calling her by her name, he usually uses that weird endearment,

Chitekete. I don't even know what it means but Vimbai likes it and she is also unfazed by the sharp tone that Dad just used on her. If anything her chin rises up a notch, stubbornly.

"I, no, we are not going anywhere. Ruby sit," I look at her incredulously and she looks at me in the eye, silently asking me to trust her.

I make to sit when Dad calls out my name sharply, now I'm hovering over the chair torn between my father and his wife. He paid roora for her when we went to leave Davirai. Who do I listen to? My father, who I butted heads with until recently? The man who would walk through a crocodile infested pool for me. Or Vimbai, my stepmother who slept with my boyfriend but also killed a man for sexually violating me? I look at Vimbai again before looking apologetically at my father and sitting down. Whatever Vimbai has up her sleeve, it better be worth it. We just undermined Shadow in front of an

enemy.

I refuse to turn an look at Uncle Gumburai even though I can feel his disapproval from here. The Shefu guy laughs again, his throaty laughter grinding my ears.

“This one has you by the balls, eh Shadow?” Dad growls his response while Vimbai pushes her plate away.

“He loves and enjoys having his balls in my hand but you won’t,” her manner of indifference reminds me of the first meal we shared with Chatunga and the defiant fire dancing in her eyes tells me that she is ready for war. Shefu laughs, louder this time but if I were him I wouldn’t be laughing.

Vimbai looks at Joshua and nods, he goes out of the room and we are left looking at each other. I can tell

that Daddy is royally pissed. He looks like it is taking all of his strength to not haul us out of the room. I avoid his glare and I focus on Camilla instead. She keeps wringing her hands and I wish I could snap them clean off her wrists for her betrayal. Joshua comes back with a Manila folder and hands it to Vimbai who thanks him.

“Brigadier General, please sit you are making me dizzy and it’s rude to hover over people in their property,” her tone is clipped and she means business. Shefu hisses and remains standing. After a stare-down, Vimbai opens the Manila folder and takes out the first file written Camilla in bold red capital letters.

“When Ruby told me the line of questioning that Camilla was taking, it made me suspicious and on a hunch, I had her investigated and voila I dug up a nasty can of worms. Camilla is your side whore Brigadier General, I’m sure your wife would love to

know about the five miscarriages that she experienced and some of the pictures from your recent rendezvous with Camilla at Jacana Gardens Guest Lodge, two days ago.”

Shefu's face blanches and all the arrogance that was stretched all over his face slips and he takes a chair so does his mole, she sits with her arse perched at the edge of the chair. He tersely watches Vimbai as she flips through her folder.

“How does Ruby's murder confession stick when she was never booked for arrest? There are no records to suggest that Ruby was arrested, how could she have been in that cell with me then?” she calls his bluff without even looking up from her files and the jumping vein is now on Shefu's forehead.

“Instead of trying to make murder allegations that will not stick, you should be worried about the charges that you will face when this file finds its way to the Attorney General's Office. Let's see, Treason

and Espionage, sounds about right to me.”

She holds up pictures of Shefu with different leaders in the world. From the Korean Vice President to the Russian President. All photos are taken inside hotels, secret looking boardrooms. She takes out phone records.

“You have a banner phone registered under your child, smart but I still managed to get text messages from it and they are not making your case at all Brigadier General.” I have a lady boner for my stepmother.

In a room full of testosterone, she remains unruffled, she keeps paging through her file and I’m glad that I took her side over Dad’s side.

“Should I go on with your involvement with Masaiti and the weaponry that you have been getting from



your supplier in ESwatini, Ntsikelelo Hlongwane.”

Shefu is now the one sweating and he has unbuttoned the first two buttons of his uniform. He keeps clenching and unclenching his fist. Dad looks like he also has a boner and he wants to jump her the moment they are left alone.

“Here is your file, you can keep that one, we have the originals.” She digs into her dessert as if she wasn’t eating a couple of minutes ago. When I grow up I want to be just like her. She finally raises her head and looks at Shefu, tilting her head as if something is interesting to see in him.

“Now, you can go ahead with your plans, try to implicate me for a murder when you only have one piece of evidence that is inadmissible and your one witness can’t even be placed at the murder scene. I have nothing to lose, I’ve been to jail. I killed a mere guard and you are trying to kill the President. I’m

liking my odds.”

Shefu opens his mouth to say something but nothing comes out so he looks like a fish gapping for water and I stifle the giggle that wants to break out. I fail dismally and I laugh-snort feeling my shoulders relax as some of the tension eases out of my shoulders. I catch Vimbai's eye and she starts laughing as well. They threw us to the wolves and she came out leading the pack. Dad looks at us bemused then looks at the Brigadier General.

“Women! Does she have you by the balls, eh Shefu?”

Uncle Gumburai roars with laughter and this is the first time I have ever seen him laugh, all of us in fact, we stop and stare and he keeps laughing, head thrown back and the laughter rolls off from deep in his belly.

.....

Morning family

I hope you have an amazing week ahead. I apologise for the delay with The Princess and the Piper for those who placed their orders.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

Rubies and Rain

Thirty-nine

“All masterpieces of art contain both light and shadow. A happy life is not one only filled with sunshine, but one which uses both light and shadow to produce beauty.”

Billy Graham

Vimbai

“You will stop trying to blackmail us into doing your dirty work, you saved us from prison and we aren’t going to have you prosecuted for treason, I think our debt to you is cleared. Should you want our assistance, go through the proper channels, you know how Shadow works,” my act of bravado is slowly slipping and I’m waiting for the other shoe to drop.

I'm waiting for Ian to put me in my place or interject and take over but he doesn't, he is lounging next to me, quietly sipping on his nightcap. Letting me take the reigns and finish what I started.

"You will not come for our family, children are off-limits, is that clear Brigadier General?"

The chauvinistic pig growls like a cornered beast, he hates being bested by a woman and despises the fact that I am now giving him his marching orders. I'm not afraid of him. Well, I am not afraid of him in a room with Ian, Joshua and Gumburai. I know that they would rather die first before allowing this man to lay even a single finger on me. That is all the confidence boost that I need.

"I'm sorry General but I do not speak angry bear," there is a titter and out of the corner of my eye I can

tell Gumburai is still finding all of this highly amusing.

“Fine, but I’ll only discuss the ceasefire terms with Shadow,” his jaw is wound so tightly I can almost hear his teeth gnashing.

“You should have thought of that before coming here and trying to use Ruby and I as your bargaining chips. Now, if you’ll excuse us Brigadier General we have some packing to do. Unfortunately, I can’t walk you out, I’m pregnant and you came here uninvited disrupting dinner. Please see yourself out and take your trash with you.”

The old man hisses a slur and Ian just gives him a warning look and he backs down dragging Camilla, who couldn’t look me in the eye the entire time, out of the room with him. Only then do I allow my shoulders to sag in relief and I bow my head down, trying to get my nerves in check.

“You did great Mommy,” Ruby says squeezing my shoulders before kissing me on the cheek and that makes me emotional so I don’t lift my face.

There are a few things said but I can’t hear them over the rush of blood around my ears as the adrenaline ebbs away from my body, leaving me shaky. I squeal and jump when I feel a hand on my back.

“Chitekete, it’s only me,” I look up in relief to find Ian’s molten brown eyes trained on me, everything else fades away and it’s just me and him.

“Let’s get you to bed,” I almost purr at the way he gently massages my feet before pulling me into his arms.

I try to protest, I’ve gained a lot of pregnancy and

medication weight but he holds me firmly, not breaking a sweat.

“Not bad for an old geyser,” I mumble and his chest vibrates as he chuckles. I snuggle close to his chest, letting his steady heartbeat calm me.

I’m drifting off to sleep when he makes me lie down on my side, I miss his warmth immediately and I open my eyes. His broad back is impressive as he hovers over the dresser which looks tiny and ridiculous in front of him. He comes back with an assortment of creams and oils and places them next to me on the bed. I dutifully lift my arms as he gets the maternity dress off me, a sexy asymmetric dress with a plunging neckline. As always he begins by massaging my breasts, their fullness drives him crazy as he kneads the creamy flesh.

“When you were talking to that sleaze head back there, you had the same fire that you had the first



day that I met you and you accused me of having small dick energy,” I can’t help but laugh at the last part, I hadn’t intended to blurt out my thoughts and he never forgot those words.

“It made me so hard,” he grinds against my back making me feel his thick erection and wet heat spreads like a wildfire between my thighs.

“I’ve never been more proud and turned on at the same time. Chitekete, what did I do to deserve you?” his voice is thickened by lust and roughened by some emotion that soaks my thighs. I no longer wear panties because they dig into the edges of my thighs.

The bed dips as he kneels on it and squeezes some of the firming cream on his palm before carefully, as if denoting a bomb, he kneads it into the taut skin around my abdomen. My baby kicks in excitement and Ian’s hands falter.

“Did you feel that?” the wonder in his voice halts the sassy response that I had in the tip of my tongue. The baby has only been kicking for Ruby and I, he is finally acknowledging his father’s touch.

“Hey, Kwayedza, your mother is one hell of a spitfire and I do not doubt that she'll have both our balls in her hands for eternity,” my baby kicks to this absurdity and I laugh while shoving Ian.

“Kwayedza?” I ask frowning at him, I thought he would choose an English name as his and Ruby's.

“Yeah, he is the Dawn of a new era. The dawn of my, I mean our empire. He came at our darkest moments and broke the darkness ushering in hope of a new day, new beginnings,” the meaning behind his choice of the name goes straight to my heart and I have to blink back the tears.

“It's perfect,” he kisses my brow, his lips lingering a bit before he lets go.

He continues talking to his son as he massages the DIY blue belly oils that he got from a YouTube channel that is said to help with a stretching belly. My stomach hasn't itched since he started applying it on my belly every night and some mornings.

“I'm going to need you to close your ears and sleep now Kwayedza, there are things that I need to do to your mother that I rather you don't know about until you are at least twelve.”

“Twelve!” I turn incredulously at him and he only grins widely at me, knowing full well that his grins are my weakness.

“If we are lucky, you are carrying a Barwe, Chitekete,

our manhood works from the day we are born until the day we die,” he proudly strokes his engorged manhood as if to prove that point and I forget all about our son as the wetness pools between my thighs.

(Removed)

When I come to, Ian is spooning me, his haggard breathing and the soreness between my legs reminding me of the beast that I unleashed.

“Do you want to kill me with pleasure? I’m old, Chitekete,” I can’t even laugh, I am still trying to catch my breath.

“Wait until your son comes out and I ride you until you scream like my bitch,” he loves my dirty mouth, I can feel him stirring back to attention and I realise that he didn’t remove himself from inside me.

“Vimbai,” he sounds solemn all of a sudden. It shouldn’t be so hard just to turn and face him! Can I give birth already. My rant dies an instant death when I see the naked vulnerability in his eyes.

“Vimbai, you are my ray of sunshine, the moment I saw the fire in you I knew I needed it to keep me alive and you awaken feelings in me that I didn’t know I was capable of having. You brighten my life in every aspect but I am scared, Chitekete. I am scared that I am dragging you into the darkness with me. At first it was prison and today it was Shefu, who knows what mess I’m going to drag you into tomorrow. I forced you into this life, I...” I place my finger on his mouth because I hate it when he’s in this much anguish and he’s beating himself up.

“Ian don’t you see, you bring out this fire in me, no one else just you. You didn’t force me into anything. If I didn’t already have feelings for you I would have

found a way to get out, I would have found a way but I didn't. Because deep down, I was drawn to you from the first day that I laid my eyes on you. You exuded the power and assertiveness that I craved. I will go to the pit of hell fires for you and I know that you will do the same for me. You have my back and I have yours. There is no sunshine without shadows."

When his eyes are still a bit clouded I recite to him a quote that I read once from Rumi, "Both light and shadow are the dance of Love," I bring his hand to my protruding belly.

"Look what we created, you restored me Ian, in ways that I didn't know I needed to be restored and you do it so effortlessly that even you can't see it. I don't care what tomorrow brings, where I land as long as I have you by my side. You, my husband, are all the fire that I need."

A different emotion now lights his eyes, need and I

let him kiss me and worship my body and I worship his and we love on each other until Dawn.

.....

And they lived happily ever after, the end.  
I'm kidding

Morning Family

Look out for the removed in the group Sunshine and Shadows I will post it shortly.

We are almost at the end of the story and then I'll take a break then we move on to "His Baby Maker". Does the name Candice ring a bell?

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

P.s The Princess and the Piper is almost done at the Printers and I have ten more copies for preorder. If you are in Zimbabwe and want my books shout below.



## Rubies and Rain

### Forty

"Work on your stony qualities and become resplendent like the ruby. Practice self-denial and accept difficulty. Always see infinite life in letting the self die. Your stoniness will decrease; your ruby nature will grow. The signs of self-existence will leave your body, and ecstasy will take you over." ~ Rumi

"You look great," Vimbai assures me but I look at the mirror just to be sure and I smooth an imaginary crease on my short tropical dress.

"Maybe it's too much I should have gone with the romper," I see her roll her eyes via her reflection and I frown at her. She's not being helpful.

“This is the fourth time you are changing, Ruby! You look gorgeous, you couldn’t look less gorgeous in anything you choose. Now if you don’t get moving you’ll be late and that is unattractive.”

I sigh because she’s right and I slap some ruby lip balm on my lips and grab my phone, glasses, hat and bag and make my way out of my waterfront room.

“Have you changed your mind about coming with me?” I throw in my puppy eyes and pout prettily but that only makes her laugh.

“You don’t need a chaperone on your date, relax she said she will meet up with you so she wants this as much as you do.”

I doubt that’s true, I have obsessively thought about seeing Tendero for months and it feels like it has

been years. I dragged my family halfway across the world to come and be with her. I was excited up until our jet circled over Frederick Henry Bay and Seven Mile Beach to land from the south of Hobart International Airport. I couldn't even admire the aerial view of brilliant blue water against the symmetrical Aussie buildings.

All I could think about was Tenero, would she be happy when she saw me? The only time my thoughts drifted from her was when the cute sniffer dog gave my hand luggage a going over, the wet nose made me giggle a bit and realise that it was raining when we landed.

My heart plummeted to my stomach once we reached MACq 01 Hotel, the place is divine and riddled with Tasmanian folklore and history from artefacts displayed downstairs, I saw a Napoleonic sabre, to the huge canvass above my bed a reproduction of a landscape in Hobart. My hands

became clammy when I had to dial her number while perched on the edge of my bed.

“Hello?” hearing her voice almost had me weeping and I gripped the phone to my ear while I took in copious amounts of air, trying to calm my trembling hands.

She had to repeat her greeting before I had collected myself enough to utter any word.

“Tendi, it’s me. Please don’t hang up,” I added hastily and let out an air of relief when I could still hear her breathing on the phone. It had become erratic after hearing my voice and that gave me hope, I still affect her as much as she affects me.

“I ummh, I mean we, my family and I, just got here and I don’t know anyone around here. I was wondering, if you are free and if it’s not too much of

a burden..." my voice tapered off when all I could hear was her breathing over the static of the line.

Then I gulped down the rest of my nerves and asked her if she could meet me at the Old Wharf Restaurant which is downstairs.

"Or I can come to wherever you want me to come, just tell me where and when I'll be there. I'll probably get lost a bit but I'll figure it out," I added a touch desperately when she still hadn't said a word.

"You're here? In Hobart?" she finally asked incredulously just when I was about to lose my mind.

"Yeah, I had to see you," I answered simply as if it was the easiest thing to get up and travel while you are political exiles of some sort.

By some miracle, she agreed to come and see me. She said Old Wharf Restaurant was a perfect place to meet and then ended the call. I needed more of her voice but then reminded myself that I have a lot of grovelling to do before I can win back her trust and her heart. She agreed to see me and that's a good start.

"You'll be fine," Vimbai's gentle conviction brings me back from my thoughts and I smile faintly at her while squeezing her hand.

She straightens the strap of my dress before leaving me to go back to her husband, their suite is next to my room and I thank heavens that the walls here seem to be noise-proofed. I'm still traumatised from the last night in Lake Chivero. They were at it all night, I had to find my sound cancelling headphones before I could fall asleep. When I woke up to go to the toilet at dawn, I made the mistake of taking off the headphones and heard my father's growls

followed by Vimbai's screams. Isn't he too old to be making anyone scream like that? Do pregnant women even get it on? Or am I the only one with perverse parents? The horror, the trauma of knowing that your father is getting it on all through the night!

Indigenous artefacts and replicas including kangaroo skins, a model canoe, conch shells, kelp baskets and digging sticks grace the Lounge but I can't admire them fully past the droning sound of my heartbeat. The staff is warm and friendly and I am guided to my reserved table. I got a corner table with the best view of the harbour and I gratefully sip on the wine that has been recommended, swirling the deep red liquid to gather some liquid courage from its rich thickness.

I see her the moment she steps into the room. My heart is thudding painfully against my chest. She looks gorgeous in dungaree shorts, sneakers and a checkered shirt, rolled up sleeves and tied on her

midriff, showing off the ink on her abs. When did she get those tats? They look hot and my heart is beating to a whole other rhythm. This one makes me sweat between my legs.

She looks like she's been working out and she has a nose ring that looks ultra-cool on her. I stand awkwardly, I don't have to stand because she is being ushered to our table but I feel the need to open her chair myself.

"Ruby!" her wide infectious smile highlighting the gap between her teeth eases some of my nerves and I hug her.

At first, she doesn't respond, her arms lie limp but after a heartbeat, she hugs me back just as fiercely. I cling to her for as long as I can until she starts squirming. I let her go and she sits in front of me.



“You look gorgeous,” it’s not a compliment, I am blown away by how at ease with herself she seems.

She’s blushing and I realise that I have never complimented her before. Our relationship sort of evolved around me more and the thought makes me sad.

“Tendi...”

“Ruru...”

We speak at once and then we laugh at the silliness, it helps diffuse the awkwardness that had settled over us after my compliment.

The waitress greets us again with a big friendly smile and asks to take our orders.

“I'd say opt for the Chef's Table experience for five courses from the open-style kitchen served with stories of produce origin and some ripping Tassie yarns,” she offers in her twang while I browse mindlessly through the menu and I agree to her suggestion and so does Tendero.

“So, Tendi, what have you been up to?”

“I'm doing an advanced diploma of leadership and management at the International College of Tasmania and I also work part-time at the Salamanca Whiskey bar, mostly on weekends or whenever they are busy or have events.” She sounds a bit like the waitress, the way she shapes her words.

“Are you coping with school and work?” she tips her glass as I pour her some time, I refused when the waitress wanted to pour her drink.

“At first I struggled with finding a balance but I’ve found a pace that works for me. I’ll probably stop when I get to the last year of my studies.”

The food comes and we are talking as if we were never apart. I mostly steer the conversation to her and her life here in Australia. I’m not ready to share after the whole Camilla thing, I don’t like laying myself bare. Not about prison and rape.

“You look like you’ve been working out,” I muss as I drag my knife across my steak, medium rare and so succulent.

“I have, I never thought I would be a gym bunny but I love it now. It helps clear my mind and it keeps me happy,” I wonder what plagues her mind. A small part of me wishes it was me. I don’t want to poke it though or throw the boat.

“How are your parents?”

I last spoke to her mother when she told me to stay away from her daughter. A cloud shifts over her eyes for a few seconds, she looks a bit haunted but then she smiles.

“They are fine, just going through a divorce so yeah,” I see the way she bites her lower lip. A sure sign that thinking about it makes her emotional and she’s trying to hold her emotions in.

“I’m sorry Tendi,” I know how much her parents mean to her.

“It’s better now, they no longer need to speak through me. It got so bad in the beginning, the police had to be called at some point. He impregnated a fellow engineer at their workplace.”

My heart breaks for her mother and for Tendero too. When she finally joins her family a rift is formed between them. She used to be such a Daddy's girl and I know that she feels just as betrayed as her mother. She blinks and the pain decapitates, leaving a sad little smile that I last saw when she told me it was over between us.

"None of it is your fault, both your parents love you so much and this takes nothing away from their love for you."

I'm relieved when she doesn't snatch her hand away from mine and she allows me to hold her even when I squeeze it gently.

"This is the most we've talked about me," she says sadly with a hint of surprise as if she's going back to all our conversations. I do the same and I don't like what I come up with.

“I was a selfish brat, I’m sorry that I didn’t lavish you with the same love and attention that you showed me,” she closes her eyes as if my admission is too much for her and when she opens her eyes they are shimmering with punished tears.

“Thank you. I needed to hear that. Ruby, there is something I need to tell you,” I can feel my palms getting sleek with sweat.

Please don’t say it, please don’t let it be what I think it is. I beg silently. It feels like my lips have been glued shut.

“I have someone in my life and it's serious.”

.....

Morning Family

I hope you have a lovely weekend ahead. We are probably going to end Rubies and Rain next week.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

## Rubies and Rain

### Finale (Part one)

"Don't run away from grief, o' soul/ Look for the remedy inside the pain/ because the rose came from the thorn/ and the ruby came from a stone." ~ Rumi

I could have let her go after the meal with a hug and a kiss on the cheek, but I'm a sucker for pain. So I stayed. I asked her to tell me more about the person that she's with and it both breaks and heals my heart to see her glowing as she talk about the girl who has her heart now.

"Ava is a DJ, teaches English online during the day, a content creator and she's also doing her Masters in Telecommunications part-time. She's a free spirit, daring but she shows me every single day that she



loves me and isn't shy to love me out loud. I'm afraid of the needle so each time I want a tattoo she goes with me and gets another one," Ava sounds like a cross between an angel and a demon, I'm trying to hate on her but she sounds like the perfect person for Tendero.

"How did you guys meet?" I want to stab myself in the hand with the fork I'm holding but I told myself that today isn't about me, it's about Tendero. Even if hearing about her girlfriend leaves a bitter taste in my mouth, I will listen to her.

"She also tutors at my college, I was meeting her for my English class and she couldn't take her eyes off me. I liked it but it was also kind of creepy. Then the next day when I went to her, she told me that she asked them to assign another tutor for me, I was so disappointed. Until she brought me flowers the next day and told me that she likes me and that's why she had to stop being my tutor. It felt different you

know,” I look blankly at her prompt and she shrugs her shoulders, something she does when she’s avoiding conflict.

“No, go on I want to know what you mean by different,” sucker for pain.

“Different from you and I, there was never any pursuing between us. We just went from being best friends to kissing one night after movie night. Ava pursued me, pulled all the stops from flowers to a yacht dinner asking me to be hers. It felt magical almost,” I’m hurt and I want to defend myself but I realise that she is right.

Everything with us just happened without any prompting, any extra efforts from either of us. Maybe that’s a lie, Tendi did try but I was too scared of disappointing my parents.

“I’m happy for you, Tendi,” and I mean it. “You deserve to be loved out loud. You deserve the romance and fireworks. I am just sorry that I didn’t put any effort into us.”

“That’s not what I meant Ruru, we were kids, in a largely homophobic and closeted country. We didn’t plan to fall in love, we just did. It happened and even though I have known about my preference since as long as I can remember, it was still hard. I had my parents, they are liberal they made me accept and live my truth. You didn’t. I meant that in another life I would have loved to pursue you or be pursued by you as openly as Ava did, but it would be unfair of me to hold that against you because the two of you are from different worlds and Ava is older than you. Please don’t cry,” her reassuring words and her thumb wiping my tears makes me aware that I’m crying.

“You’re so amazing, you know that? Ava is a very

lucky girl.”

When Tendero blushes, it’s like it comes from deep within her belly, warming up her dark chocolate skin and sending sparks through her eyes. She looks like a lamp has been light up inside her and like a moth, I’m drawn to her flame.

I am so close to her now that we are breathing each other’s air. I don’t know if I’m the only one who leaned in or she leaned in as well. But the sparks between us are reignited. When our lips touch, the tiniest butterfly touch, it feels like someone has torched my blood and it comes humming back to life. She pulls away abruptly and the moment is broken but my blood burns from that brief touch.

“I’m sorry...”

“I should go...”

We both speak at the same time, she's no longer holding eye contact with me and I miss her already. I ask to walk her out and she agrees.

"Who is the giant man who is following us? I noticed him in the restaurant," I turn slightly to see who she means and Joshua gives me a mini salute.

"Oh, that's just my security," I don't want to explain that he's Vimbai's security because then I'd have to explain who Vimbai is. It's a relief listening to her talk about her life, adjusting to Australia and school.

The sun is about to set and it had turned a luminous ball of magenta and indigo hues in the clouds that are reflected in the water. It's magical and I sneak a picture of Tendero with her face turned towards the sunset. Perfection. We are now walking along the harbour. It's like I'm inside an oil painting, everything

stuck in time; fishing boats, sailing yachts, motor cruisers and commercial vessels all mixed in one small area. Giving the place a quaint and laid back feel.

“You should totally go kayaking and explore the hidden coves. Maybe go on a day trip to Sandy Bay and wander along Marieville Esplanade, see the luxurious waterfront mansions and the Royal Tasmanian Yacht Club’s squadron of sailing boats,” her eyes sparkle as she talks of the places that she’s discovered and all I’m thinking is that I only want to explore those places with her. I don’t tell her though, I just let her talk.

“I went there with my mother to cheer her up when she filed for divorce. We went all the way up to Wrest Point Casino. Unfortunately, we couldn’t afford the helicopter ride over Hobart. I heard that it’s scenic and shows all the Hobart highlights, from Tasman Bridge and Bellerive Oval to the city’s patron

peak, Mount Wellington,” she points out Mount Wellington from where we are but it’s getting a bit dark and I can’t make out more than its silhouette.

“I have to get going Ruby, thank you for lunch. It was great seeing you, how long are you going to be around?”

“Ummm not sure yet, I’ll hear what my Dad and Vimbai have to say,” telling her the truth that I relocated my family here just to be with her will not only make me seem desperate but will also put too much pressure on her. I don’t want to make her feel bad.

“Vimbai?” there is a bit of worry in her voice.

“We need another lunch date for me to unpack everything that has been happening in my life this past year. Thank you for coming, I wasn’t sure you

would come. I respect that you have moved on but can we still be friends? You are like the only friend I have in the world,” besides Vimbai and Davirai but they are family. I hold out my hand for a handshake.

She looks at it hesitantly for a moment before attacking me with a hug. I hold on to her for a bit, inhaling her new spicy scent combined with her natural sweet musk. She doesn't seem in a hurry to let me go, so we just stay in each other's arms until a tear lands on her shoulder. I let her go before I start sobbing and kiss her gently on the forehead.

“Let me know when you get home, yeah?”

She nods while biting her lip then she turns abruptly, rushing away as if hounds are chasing her. I stand in the same spot, watching her move quickly past the throng of people who are laughing and chatting until she's a speck in the crowd. Joshua clears his throat next to me, signalling that we should go back.



“She’s found someone else,” I don’t know why I’m telling him because he never says much but at least he doesn’t grunt like Uncle Gummy.

“Do you want me to eliminate the competition?”

I know that he’s not joking and that makes me laugh, that would be the easy solution but I wouldn’t be able to live with myself and how do I even look Tendero in the eye after.

“No, it’s ok. Sometimes we mess up the ones we love the most and the only kindness we can do is, let them go and find happiness without us.”

I can see that my words hit a nerve with him but he grunts and the emotion that was on his face disappears and we move silently back to the hotel. The lights are on and it gives the place an even more

intimate vibe. Couples are holding hands, some are kissing, it's like fairy dust has been sprinkled around the entire boardwalk. It's sickeningly beautiful.

\*\*\*

"How did it go?" Vimbai attacks me with the question, the moment I get into their suite. She's almost giddy in excitement.

"Chitekete, calm down. You're making the baby excited," she throws my father one writhing look and he shrugs, raising his hand in surrender.

Uncle Gumburai chuckles at their interaction, ever since the Shefu supper, Uncle Gumburai laughs, he chuckles and I heard him go on a full-on guffaw at Joshua's expense. I wasn't listening to the conversation but I think it had something to do with Joshua's woman finding a nice church guy. That

tickled Uncle Gumburai no end.

“Lunch was great, I just walked her home,” I say and my father gives me a reassuring smile as if he can tell what’s being my breezy voice and fixed smile.

“She’s found someone and says it’s serious,” I hate the looks of pity that I’m receiving so I turn to my phone. No text messages.

Vimbai's belly shows up first and that brings a smile to my face. I place my hand on her belly and right on cue, he starts kicking excitedly as if he’s been waiting on me the whole day. That raises my spirit considerably.

“You’ll be fine, you’ve been through the worst and came out stronger for it,” I nod my head and keep stroking her belly.

The truth is one of the things that kept me fighting in prison was the need to make things right with Tendero. The other things was my baby brother, my wish to visit my mother's grave and Vimbai's strength. Now, I feel bereft, off-kilter.

"Do you love her?" My father asks and it's still weird opening up to him about my relationship with Tendero.

Of course, I love Tendi but she looks happy, happier than I have ever seen her and it would be selfish of me to want to disrupt that. Right? I nod at my father's question and he nods back briefly.

"Then you get her, don't let anyone mess around with your happiness."

"Ian!" Vimbai's voice is sharply admonishing, "We are not emotionally blackmailing Ruby's girlfriend and

nothing happens to the new girl in her life. Nothing, do you hear me?"

She's addressing all the men in the room, looking from Dad, Uncle Gumburai to Joshua. They all mumble their concession and she demands more vocal responses. It's kind of funny seeing all these big guys being bossed around by one tiny, pregnant woman. I excuse myself and I go lock myself in my room. I play Ed Sheeran's Happier and I curl into a ball in my bed and stare at the picture of Tendero that I took at the harbour.

"But ain't nobody hurt you like I hurt you

But ain't nobody need you like I do

I know that there's others that deserve you

But my darling I am still in love with you

But I guess you look happier, you do

My friends told me one day I'll feel it too

I could try to smile to hide the truth

But I know I was happier with you”

I wipe the tears from my eyes when I get a text message notification.

“Hey Ru, got home safe. It was so great to see you again. XXXX”

I stop myself from pouring out my heart and begging her to take me back. I type and delete a few times until I find the right response.

“It was amazing seeing you too Tendi, goodnight XXXX”

I can't get over the glow of her skin from the rays of

the setting sun. She looks surreal and I post the picture on my Instagram and I simply caption it Goddess. Ed Sheeran is still mourning in my ears, making my heart bleed.

" 'Cause baby you look happier, you do  
I knew one day you'd fall for someone new  
But if he breaks your heart like lovers do  
Just know that I'll be waiting here for you"

.....

Morning Family

I hope your week is filled with goodness and blessings.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

Rubies and Rain

FINALE Part 2

I work with gold that holds our past and diamonds that see the future and rubies that long for love. It's just a way of telling a story. - Waris Ahluwalia

Crash! There goes lightning illuminating the sky,  
Clouds the colour ruby, dark as an afterbirth, trapped  
and begging to be let out.

In this heavy downpour, we are cleaned and humbled,  
Molten simmering ruby stains we become

Don't lose heart they say, but it's the soul that is  
afflicted,

For roses come from thorns and the ruby came from



stone.

Yet, with the rain pelting down angrily, scathingly

Tormenting her core, this ruby has turned to a deep,  
dark sinking hole.

Or that's how I think it goes, when rubies and rain  
collide.

I read through the poem again, worrying the tip of my  
pen with my teeth. I don't know, something feels  
lacking. I don't think I have fully brought forward my  
pain. How do I paint in words how my world has  
been crashing around me this past year?

Over the past three months, I have found that writing  
poems and short stories helps as an outlet for all my  
pent up emotions. I turn my nightmares into poems  
and it helps soothe my heart. I crumple most of  
them and throw them in the bin or burn them but this  
one is showing promise. I put it aside and I take a  
fresh piece of paper.

Did I tell you of the flower that was born at the crack  
of dawn?

While the stone was being purified, into sapphires to  
be turned,

It cracked wide open right smack in the middle.

What to do? Worried the blacksmith, for the stone  
was ruined before

It could be polished.

I know, said the Potter's son, a Fixer of note.

Let's plant a seed!

Sceptical he was, but the blacksmith chucked in the  
seed.

Anxiously, they hovered but nothing happened.

Until the potter's son thought to throw the cracked  
stone outside

As the rain poured, some of the sapphires it  
destroyed,

But then at the crack of dawn,  
The most beautiful gem was born,  
With leaves so blue, stems so delicate  
And petals as soft as the touch of a babe  
Stoma a screaming texture of fire and ice,  
Sunshine and Shadows  
Rubies and Rain  
Sapphires and Dawn  
Petals the colour of a raging inferno  
A more beautiful flower is yet to be known  
That is how the flower was born, in the crack of  
dawn.

I sigh as I read over this one, it doesn't make much sense but it gives me peace. I press the paper to rid it of all wrinkles before I place it on top of the first poem. I close my journal carefully and put it in my desk drawer. The sun is hidden by quickly darkening

clouds, a storm is approaching, I can feel it by the bite in my fingers. Temperatures have dropped a lot. I sigh and put on my jumper before heading out for supper.

Although I wanted to move out of Australia when Tendero made it clear that we stood no chance as a couple, I couldn't. Well, we couldn't, the doctors warned us that considering the high-risk factor of her pregnancy, Vimbai couldn't risk travelling until after she gave birth. So Dad bought us a bungalow next to the beach on the outskirts of Hobart. It's beautiful and homely, not too big but there is room for all of us to stay out of each other's way.

"Hey, Ruru," Vimbai's energy has diminished over the last month. She talks slowly, walks like a drunken slug and every other movement of hers is slow.

"Hey, Vimbai, hey Dawn," I refuse to call my brother after a Harare scandal rag. Nope no, naming him

Kwayedza is just begging for the boy to be bullied.

“He’s lower than usual today. Why won’t he just come out?” she sounds like she wants to cry and I soothe her as much as I can until we reach the dining room table. Dad swiftly opens the chair for her and I can’t miss the picture of devotion on his face as he fusses over her. Joshua looks as miserable as I feel if not worse.

“Where is Uncle Gumburai?”

“He went out to explore the city,” weird.

Vimbai and I share looks. Dad being Dad, ignores us and says grace before digging into the food. His grace is always rushed, he only does it for Vimbai, we all do. I want to ask more about Uncle Gumburai but then Vimbai lets out a scream. We all turn to her and she’s clutching at the side of her stomach.

The baby is coming. After the initial shock, we all jump into action. I go and grab her baby bag, Dad calls her doctor while Joshua brings around the car.

\*\*\*

I'm sitting in front with Joshua while Dad is holding Vimbai at the back and helping her breathe. The wind is howling, picking up speed. I've heard of Hobart storms but it seems like we are about to experience one. Fat drops of rain pelt on the car screen when we are about five minutes from the Hobart Private Hospital, they could have been more creative with the name but the facilities are said to be the best in Tasmania.

"We are here, Chitekete, try not to fall asleep," I feel sorry for my father, he sounds scared. We all grow alarmed when we notice that Vimbai started

bleeding in the car. There is a stretcher waiting for us when we park and she is quickly whisked away while I run after them with the baby bag and Joshua takes the car to be cleaned.

Dad and Vimbai have disappeared into a private maternity suite and I'm left pacing in the waiting room. Dad comes in just as I sit and I spring up in worry.

"The bag, I'm going to scrub and I won't be allowed back here," I swallow in relief and I hand him the bag.

He's gone for about ten minutes when there is a commotion in their suite. A huge bed is rolled out with Vimbai stuck to some machines and pipes. I wouldn't have known it was her if I didn't see Dad following her in his scrubs, rushing for the doctor and nurses.

“Dad!” I call after him but he only turns and gives me a brief, shattered look before rushing after them. I stop a nurse who just came out of the suite as well and ask where they are going.

“I’m their daughter,” I explain when she just eyes me suspiciously. She still seems unsatisfied with my answer but she still responds.

“The baby needs a higher level of care, he and mommy are in distress they are being taken to The Neonatal and Paediatric Intensive Care Unit at the Royal Hobart Hospital which is adjacent to our facility. Don’t worry Dr Kristen is one of the most capable obstetricians in the country. Mommy and baby are in good hands.”

I sit there alone, wringing my hands until Joshua comes back and I give him a low down of what I’ve been told and he tells me that the storm is raging outside. My phone rings, startling me and I frown



when I see Tendero's number.

I've only seen her three times in the past three months and she was a bit distant on our last outing so I decided to let go of her completely. This is the first time that she's calling me. She usually texts and never this late.

"Tendi?"

"Ruby," her voice sounds different, muffled and hoarse.

"What's up?" I ask when the silence has stretched on for a bit.

"Ummm could you please take down my pictures that you posted on your Instagram account."

My heart slows down in confusion. How does she know my ghost account?

“Tendi, I deleted all my social media,” I act dumb. That’s better than being a creepy ex who steals pictures when you meet up and posts them on her ghost account.

“The Ruru Moyo account, I know that’s you. You used your mother’s maiden name. Please, just take them down.” She sounds agitated, something isn’t right here.

“Tendi are you ok? You don’t sound ok.”

“Just take them down, Ruby,” first of all her calling me Ruby shows that something’s wrong and I know Tendaro when she’s angry, she doesn’t sound so muffled.

“Tendi...” The line dies before I can finish my sentence. I call her back and she answers.

“Ruby just delete the fucken pictures!”

I switch the call to Facetime and she rejects it. I try again to Facetime and it gets rejected again and this time when I call her it doesn't get through. I've been blocked. Even my texts don't go through. I can't shake the feeling that something has gone wrong.

I'm about to ask to use Joshua's phone when Dad comes back. He looks like he has aged a lot in the past two hours. There are haggard lines drawn on his forehead.

“Daddy?” I prompt when he just stares at us with blank eyes. He sits down and buries his head in his hands. Then his shoulders start heaving as he sobs quietly. The wind seems to be wailing with him and

the lights momentarily go off before the generator kicks in. He won't respond to our questions he just sobs.

.....

Morning Family

Those who ordered The Princess and the Piper I'm sorry for the delay but I've been assured that the printers will deliver this week.

We have one more insert then we wrap up Rubies and Rain.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo

Rubies and Rain

The End

“There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are messengers of overwhelming grief...and unspeakable love.” – Washington Irving

Ian/Shadow

When Emma died, I had known for about a month that she was dying but it still hit me so suddenly and I felt like I was drowning. She held together the humanity in me and around her, I got to be Ian never Shadow. Her loss brought a sharp, insistent pain in my heart but I had to shelf my pain and focus on Ruby.

My sweet girl, her mother hid her sickness from her against my advice, she didn't want her Ruby to worry. Emma shielded Ruby from the realities of the world and when she died, I saw my daughter change into an entitled and resentful brat. I saw it happen but I couldn't change it because I wasn't good at parenting, Emma held down that fort effortlessly and made me look good at it too.

I kept it together for Ruby until she went back to school and then I started drowning in alcohol. But given the nature of my work, I couldn't even drown myself into oblivion. I always had to be aware of my surroundings, always looking over my shoulder. Threats were many and any sign of weakness would have cost me my life, Ruby couldn't remain a complete orphan. So, while I drank, I obsessed over planning her future, protecting her the best way I knew how and somehow, I managed to mess up even that by causing her pain.

Joshua planned a house party for me, as an attempt to clear my head of everything. Had it been anyone else, I would have refused. But I have had a soft spot for Joshua ever since I almost ran him over as he was running away from a couple that he had pickpocketed. A street ruffian with quick and bright eyes even while sunken in his malnourished and dirt-caked face.

I paid off the man who was chasing him and I told him to get into my car, much to Gumburai's irritation. He was mostly irritated by the dirt on the leather interior, my father can be particular with cars. I took Joshua to my base camp, I didn't know where else to take him where he wouldn't steal and run off back to the streets. I made sure that he had a bath, a warm meal then left him in Gumburai's hands.

He hated admitting it, but Gumburai was impressed by the boy's athletic prowess, his agility and that he was also clever. Joshua has a very high IQ almost as

high as mine. Gumburai finally admitted that he reminded him of me. Once he was combat-ready, I took him in and taught him everything I know. I had resigned myself to never having an heir. This world isn't for women or so I thought that is until I met Vimbai at the house party that Joshua planned.

She deliberately clunked her feet so that her shoes could announce her presence and I watched her from the corner of my eyes as she swayed those non-existent hips of hers. She was ultra-confident in herself and it annoyed me when she started simpering like a gold-digging hussy. That quickly changed though when I was deliberately rude to her. She called me out on my bullshit.

“People with small dick energy are exhausting!”

Those words after giving me the first talk down I had ever received from a woman and gulping down my Macallan M 1950 Spanish oak whiskey as if it was



water, made me want to bend her over the bar table and fuck her to oblivion. Those were the first sexual thoughts that I had since Emma's death. Luckily, she ran away. But that didn't remove Vimbai from my mind.

I had to know if she was sent by anyone, her background and every piece of information there was on her. Gathering intel on her was child's play, hacking into her devices by myself and not sending Joshua, was exhilarating and the most alive I had felt in months.

When she slept with Chatunga, I should have let go. I did, for all of a day but then when her location showed up in the seedy parts of Mbare, I was curious. How she handled her friend's near-death abortion attempt and blackmailing that pathetic doctor gave me a hard-on. I tried to fuck different women who were similar to her in structure then those who looked nothing like her, but nothing could

get that razor witted woman out of my mind. She was a few years older than Ruby, that should have deterred me but Vimbai had a backbone and maturity far beyond her years and once I had caught a whiff of her scent, I just had to have a taste.

When Masaiti threatened her life, I couldn't see clearly, I had to protect her at all costs, she didn't fold. She didn't break down and weep. She danced to my beat but kept up with me toe to toe and that should have told me that she was my equal. She danced with Shadow and came back unscathed.

She didn't only know Ian, the businessman as Emma was only comfortable knowing without probing further. Vimbai probed until she came face to face with Shadow and she didn't cower, no, she loved me as Ian and as Shadow. She took what was light and dark in me and gave me more. So much more.

In that theatre room when they were operating on

her lower abdomen, I was allowed to watch and I cut my son's umbilical cord. The nurse took him for cleaning and the doctor was about to stitch her when she stopped. I tore my eyes from Vimbai's teary ones to see what was happening.

"Oh-oh, it looks like we have another baby. It's a boy," I remember how much my hands shook before I cut the umbilical cord of my surprise gift. I should have known that Vimbai would give me more than I bargained for, again.

I was laughing and crying, so was she, the most perfect moment of our love personified not just by one but by two.

"You did it, Chitekete, you gave me double the greatest gifts I could have ever asked for," I kissed her tears away.

"I deserve a Bugatti for this, twins!" She was

exhausted, in pain but had the widest smile that I had ever seen on her.

The doctor had just finished stitching her and the babies were brought back in a double cot movable bed when the machines started going haywire and Vimbai started convulsing, her eyes turning to the back of her head.

“There is uncontrolled electrical activity in the brain, her blood pressure is spiking...” I don’t remember what was said after that I just remember clutching at her hands and begging her not to leave me.

As if feeling his mother’s distress, one of the twins screamed once then there was utter chaos.

“He’s turning blue! Baby and mother in distress...”

I had to be dragged out of that room and I know I was standing in their way but I had to do something, I couldn't lose another wife and a son to boot. The male nurse had to wrestle me out and he was patient as I took off my scrubs in a daze.

How had it all gone so horribly wrong? In a blink of an eye. I dragged myself back to my family but seeing Ruby's worried face brought it all back and I broke down. I should be used to loss by now, my mother was gunned down in front of me and I stayed under her corpse, trying to get out of her cold dead weight. My first wife succumbed to cancer. I got shot in the head and was left for dead in a shallow grave. I have lost so many comrades along the way, death is an intricate part of my life.

But thinking of losing Vimbai or any of those two boys, shredded my heart to pieces. A white, blinding pain ricocheted through me and I succumbed to tears. I couldn't say anything past the lump of pain.

.....

I don't know how long we've been sitting here, my tears are depleted, Ruby is curled up on my lap, Joshua has his head buried on his lap and Gumburai has joined us. I hate that he had to cut off his date, the first he's had in years but when he called and heard the choked tears in my voice, he came running. We are waiting for news from the doctor and she comes, striding purposely towards us. I see the haggard lines of exhaustion around her eyes once she is in front of us. I don't have the strength to ask and I am grateful when Gumburai asks.

"Your wife has suffered Postpartum preeclampsia, which is a very serious condition. It can lead to strokes, seizures and other complications if not promptly treated. The causes of postpartum preeclampsia are not known, but I suspect Schizophrenia complications then there is the birth

of monozygotic twins...”

“Monozygotic twins?” Ruby asks looking as lost as I am.

“Identical twins, sorry, so I will have to sanction a brain scan to check for any possible brain damage while she’s still in the induced coma.”

Brain damage? I feel a whooshing sound in my ears and I feel like screaming.

“Can this postpartum preeclampsia be treated?”

“Is she out of the woods yet?”

Joshua and Ruby ask at the same time and the doctor's mouth thins even more in sympathy.

“While postpartum preeclampsia can be treated if detected early, there are still many risks associated with it. Permanent damage to the brain, liver and kidney due to the seizure and high protein in her blood. We are yet to rule out Pulmonary edema that is a condition of excess fluid in the lungs. She can stroke, develop Thromboembolism, HELLP syndrome and worst-case scenario, she can die. The next 48 hours will be very critical.”

I fight the sea of despair that is rising in me, threatening to swallow me whole. She can die. Ruby is squeezing my hand tightly. I hate this because for her it's also losing a mother all over again. I know she would choose Vimbai over me, she's already done it before.

“What about the babies?”



“One of them is healthy and has aced his body examination while the affected twin shows relative ventricular enlargement, a swelling in the left ventricle of his heart. We are doing all we can and I’ve requested a special foetus MRI to be done to see if none of the swelling is in his head as well.”

.....

I hate how strong Ruby has had to be for all of us. She tends to her healthy twin brother and held the tiny hands of the other as test after test was performed. I’ve heard talks of defibrillators and heart implants. I’m just numb from it all. I have not named my children. I can’t help the little resentment that I feel toward them. If it weren’t for them, Vimbai would still be here.

Ruby on the other hand is pouring all of her love into them. She reads them bedtime stories. She’s watching YouTube videos on how to bathe a baby.

She watches the nurses and copies how they carry the baby, feed the baby and she also checks up on Vimbai and the second baby. He's underweight a little and is fed by pipes. Like Vimbai, it's unclear if he has improved or not. But they passed the 48 hours critical point, that should mean something right?

I'm proud of Ruby, the past few days have been raining and I know that she misses Tendero, Vimbai and her mother. Yet, she's taking care of us all. Especially, the twins and she is doing an amazing job. She has grown up so much this past year, I can barely recognise the woman that she is becoming. She has a layer of steel that even her mother didn't possess. Emma was soft and all feminine gentleness and I shielded her from my life as Shadow. Ruby, got caught up in it even though scars remain but mostly strength and resilience were birthed in her while in that prison cell.

My phone rings and I let it be as I have been for the past three days. This time the caller is persistent and I end up picking up.

“Shadow my man please, please come on board. Our contact in South Africa is activated. I need you to pull this off. I have upped your price.” The desperation is evident in his voice, nothing like the corky tone the bastard had when he was threatening my family.

Vimbai put him in his place, the thought is bittersweet now. In another life, this would have been the milestone of my career but now, looking at Vimbai on that bed with the baby on her other side, both of them have machines and pipes stuck in them, I can't find the strength to be Shadow. I am just a man, going crazy with grief and praying for a miracle.

“Discuss everything with Joshua. He is in charge

now.”

I hang up before he can even start complaining. Shadow has resigned. In that moment, I swear I see movement in Vimbai's hand, I look at Ruby and she has seen it too. There are tears streaming down her eyes but both of us are frozen in fear. The rain continues pelting relentlessly outside and there is no more movement from Vimbai or the baby.

.....

Thank you so much for following me through this story and the others before. For lending me your time and your emotions, thank you.

See you on His Baby Maker.

Love and Light

Busisekile Khumalo