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Prologue

So this is what it comes to? Hehe... I think I'm losing my mind.

No.

I think I may have actually regained my senses.

After all I've done for them...

After all the blood, sweat, tears and everything in between they do this to me? ME?!

I let my guard down! I let my guard down twice in my life but this time... this time it got me burned.

Third time is a charm I guess.

I ought to thank them, because had they not betrayed me I would still be the blind, law-abiding citizen they expected me to be. A sweet girl will never be considered vindictive or even

remotely close to changing her character. This gun that is in front of me should have sent me running for my life from their perspective. The blood trailing down the left side of my face alongside my bullet wound should have made me call the emergency line for assistance, from their perspective. I should have never even rescued this 350 lb jaguar sitting next to me from those dirt bags that were ready to trade it and chop it's body parts, from their perspective.

I finally understand. I finally understand why...

These people think they are above the law, they think they are above the citizens, they think they are above me! They will not know what hit them.

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

You know who said that? Martin Luther King Jr.

"RAPHAEL! It's time to go."

"They made me like this, and now it's time they met their creation."

1

My mind is racing. What are we going to do with the body? Throw it? Burn it? Bury it? What are we going to do? She is not breathing and so are the lives she is carrying in her womb. She is just lying there on the road with blood trickling out of both ends. I drifted for a second until she stood in front of me and snapped her fingers so I can escape the trance I was in.

"Naledi, I need you to focus right now. We are going to be late if we keep on contemplating with what to do with this dog. So I need you you to put away your obsession with these creatures for a minute and focus!"

How could Tshego be so insensitive? Sure it was just a dog but it was a living organism. A pregnant organism! Besides, we were the perpetrators that overslept and had to rush to campus. With our minds still disorientated from running all over the apartment looking for missing socks and leftovers that served themselves as breakfast, we didn't even see this poor thing as it was crossing the open road. In this case, she did not even see the dog and unfortunately hit the brakes when it was too late.

"Naledi! I'm talking here. You know what I will do it myself and you can just call Troy and cry that I'm a murderer." I ignore her

comment and got back in the car to ease my mind. She did whatever it is that she did out there, hopped back in the car and drove on.

A few minutes went by as we listened to some guy debating about 'relationship tendencies' and further closed off the show by saying his cheesy line; "...and that's all from the looove doctor, catch y'all same time, same place on the love repertoire. Peace!" A known lunatic if you ask me but Tshego listens to him either way.

"So you're ignoring me now? Okay look I'm sorry for scolding at you earlier, I know how much you love dogs and I admit that I was a bit..." I raise my eyebrows in shock of her last word and she picked it up so she rephrased; "...okay I was a lot harsh to Mother Nature's bitch."

No one can make a joke out of an abomination like Tshego which is why I found myself chuckling whilst shaking my head and further more bursting out with laughter and her joining me.

"It's okay girl. I understand, especially since Sbusiso left your sorry ass." I smile at myself and brace my arm for an incoming punch from her but to my surprise, this best friend of mine just chuckles to herself and makes that face of 'Okay I deserved that.' She knows I always tease her with Sbu just as she makes

every situation revolve around Troy. Well, that is one less sore arm for the day.

Upon arrival, we realize that we were not even that late nor early due the rest of the students slowly dragging their feet to class. Mr V must already be inside, probably setting up another presentation for the next hour to talk about more cases that happened centuries ago.

How fun.

I grab my leather jacket from the back and leave Tshego trying to find hers.

June will make it seem like South Africa experiences heavy snow or something. It's so cold that I curse myself for not grabbing something warmer during our raid at the apartment earlier, what the hell happened yesterday? I don't even remember... "Miss Mapulane. Wonderful weather we're having is it not?" I swear Erica is the only one that calls me by my surname and makes it seem so casual. Erica is another one of my best friends. In fact, she's been a friend since high school and now we attend the same tertiary institution. She's wearing her big blue furry coat and sweat pants that seem to be way out of proportion with her height. FYI, she's short.

"Bye Eri!" I can't even stop for a chat because of how cold it is and it looks like she's late for her art class too. I look at her one

more time before she turns the hallway corner before disappearing, that's my best friend right there. I know she was mocking me for wearing a pair of sandals and a leather jacket when the thermostat's reading is below 0°C. I'm always prepared for everything so this is utterly frustrating and a little funny. Quickly and silently, I start walking to my seat even though my heavy panting followed by Tshego's grand entrance behind me gave it away. Who wears shades at a time like this? The friends we keep.

After settling down and having a brief talk with the dog-murderer to remove her shades we all get interrupted by Mr V clearing his throat, seeking our attention of which he got. He starts scanning the room to detect anyone that would even dare speak in his presence. Unsurprisingly, we all just return the gaze he's giving us and then he proceeds to talk. My ear starts ringing all of sudden and I get a bit dizzy but I just brush it off. I would advise you not to shake your head when you feel disoriented because my head just went blank again. As the ringing in my head subsides I begin to see colour again. I look at my reflection on my phone and see that my pupils have dilated even though I'm in a lit classroom. What is going on with me today? I need to get this checked out but before I can do that, I need to prepare myself to respond to this lecturer in front of

me in case he points at me to give him the answer to a question I don't even remember. He's always asking questions.

"I will not repeat myself mamas. What is defamation of character according to our constitution?" I realize that he's looking directly at me and so is the rest of the class. I'm the unfortunate victim in this offence against students worldwide. I know the answer though. Yes of course I know this. Right? Before I can give my response that would have sounded lousy, Troy came to thy rescue. Thy fine specimen came to thy rescue. I don't even remember what he said. What I do remember is how his lips were moving and would show his pearly whites in between. God this guy is so perfect! Typical jock but still lovable. Very very lovable. I heard, from one of those students that know everyone's background including who ate what for dinner, that he's actually from America. Unfortunately, the little birdies did not tell me which part of America but that didn't matter anyway. I never get a chance to ask him about that, and even if I do he just gives me vague answers. I probably sound like a typical 18-year-old in love with her first crush but I learnt that some crushes are meant to be exactly that, and 5 years later it's still working for me.

Thank Tshego to call you out from day dreaming before you are caught staring like I was.

"Hey! If you're going to be day dreaming, at least don't make it that obvious. Jeez." She whispers to me before leaning back on her chair and pretending to concentrate.

"I wasn't day dreaming." I whisper back.

"Okay you were morning-dreaming then. Now shh!" She writes the date in her book before closing it and logging onto Facebook. I just chuckle to myself and try to focus.

Mr V just carried on with the lesson and I was slowly drifting away again.

A little while later, Tshego nudges me and stands up because it was now time to go home or the next class. Was Troy that dreamy that I gazed at him for the whole lesson? How is it possible that I've spent an hour in here and yet I arrived a few minutes ago? That's it! I'm going for a checkup. Right now. This will not do.

"Tshego, I need you to take me to a doctor." I'm basically keeping a straight face on so that she can stop greeting everyone she sees and take me seriously. See that's another thing about some people, those people that know everyone and while you walking with them then keep on pausing to greet someone and then give you the go ahead to continue talking. Only to greet another individual later on.

"Sure I need to go there too. Wait a minute, what's going on? You are like the healthiest person I know." I tell her about my moments where I would just lose sense of reality and then snap back into it. She really needs to take me there because I keep on panicking with each passing minute. She knows I can't take myself there because... of all my awards and academic achievements I've never given myself the time to obtain my driver's license. I'm not lazy or anything like that I'm just... a busy woman.

"Oh you probably got cancer. That's how Sbusiso passed on."

Everything goes blank again but this time I'm aware that my nervous system is beginning to shut down, and sooner or later I'm going to faint. I thought Sbusiso left her because she cheated on him with his sister, not died because of CANCER! She stops in her tracks when she notices that I'm no longer walking beside her to the car. She suspiciously scans the area for any witnesses that would've heard her and when she was sure she just broke down. Right here in front of me, yelling to the world at large that she misses Sbusiso and not a day goes by without her regretting her actions. Her hands started on my shoulders and ended up holding my legs as she continued wailing. I've never seen her like this. I'm on the verge of tears myself. She's still crying and I am just standing there, trying to process what she just said. Hold up, what does this mean for

me? Will his fate be similar to mine. What if I'm already far gone? Why am I asking you all these questions?

Okay there's no time to argue with myself now. Her outburst has caused us a few eyes and a video of her outstanding performance which will probably be posted on Facebook later on today, I assume.

Possible caption: "Student breaks down as her lesbian girlfriend breaks up with her."

I pull myself together and help her get back on her feet. That doctor's visit will have to wait. My friend needs me now. We get in the car after the walk of embarrassment we encountered with her makeup coming off and her arm over my shoulder. We get in the car and I hand her a tissue to wipe her black-tainted tears with. I put the heat on and we keep exchanging awkward looks, yet no one is saying anything. Our communicative eyes are the ones doing the talking for us.

"Okay, let me start from the beginning of our relationship;" she says in between her sniffles. I make myself comfortable and turn to face her. This moment right here is going to be historical. Whatever she's about to tell me will change both of our lives forever.

2

“So that’s what happened. I didn’t mean to hurt him but I... I couldn’t help myself. Growing up I never got to experience such urges or emotions. You know my mom Naledi, a firm believer like her would never accept her daughter bringing home a bride. Heck, she would come back just to ask the church ladies to re-baptize me if word got out. Which is why I’m trusting you with this Nay, trusting you that you won’t tell anyone about this.”

I haven’t moved an inch nor shifted my gaze from her until she was done pouring her heart out.

No, she didn’t do anything to Sbusiso but it turns out that he has been battling cancer for a while and when he was ready to tell her, he got the shock of his life based on the grunts and moans echoing through the hallway of our apartment. Laying there on the bed was his girlfriend and half-sister panting and... well you get the picture. He left both his sister and Tshego right on the spot and went to go live with his uncle and aunt in North West. To start over I guess. His health started deteriorating from there and it took a whole lot of therapy and constant chemotherapy to calm his nerves. “Something” happened after a while and I guess it got him back to square one which was him in a hospital bed fighting for his life yet again. His last words before he left this messed up world was; “Never again...” and

he closed his eyelids after that. According to her, he passed on last week. Students heard that he moved to NW and that he broke up with his girlfriend three months ago because he didn't believe in long-distance relationships. That would be garbage to me even though I was not Tshego's friend. These people had been dating for over a year and at this day and age, a year together is a huge achievement for any relationship.

"Naledi, say something. Don't just say nothing. I... it wasn't my fault right? That he...;" she can't even say it. I know she's asking this because Sbu's parents probably pinned this label on her head that she's a murderer.

"It's not your fault chom. Not at all. It was his time." I give her a reassuring smile while rubbing her back. I don't even know what to say because I'm more worried about what is going on with me and my head. Yes, it sounds selfish but I might be dying here!

"Who ever thought that our last year in University would be like this huh?" She says still sniffing but with a small smile on her face.

We had some good times I will admit. I stayed on campus for the first three years of my university life and on the last year, which is this year, I had made a friend and she needed help with paying rent for her apartment. I already managed to secure a job at a nearby coffee shop so when she told me the

price I instantly took her up on the offer. My last roommate was too grim anyway, and too loud. Studying to obtain your LLB at the very last year was crucial and I could not afford to keep on reminding her to keep the noise down.

Tshego was very shy when I moved into the apartment at first, but that didn't last long. She just began talking and talking and talking after dinner, but I somehow got accustomed to it. Five months later, I'm in her car and trying to comfort her when I have my own issues to deal with.

"Do you still want to go to the doctor's office. You know I didn't mean what I said earlier, what you're experiencing could be the result of the brownies we ate yesterday. I mean-I-can... I can still take... you a bit... a bit later because... I'm... a mess now and a coward and..." She's trailing off again. His death really hit her hard. Remind me to download 'Sevyn Streeter's', "How bad do you want it" to cheer her up. She's been procrastinating to get the song in her phone ever since she saw the 'Fast & Furious' movie but keeps forgetting to download it. Wi-Fi makes us all go crazy.

Wait a second did she just say brownies? What brownies? I don't remember eating any brownies. Her, Erica and I were playing Monopoly after eating... oh God, Erica!

I thought she left that crap when she left high school. She nearly failed 12th grade because of this drug. What was it called again? Whatever. Now I know I really need to get checked out. If it's what I think it is then I need to be treated right away. I cannot be another statistic of drug addicts. I cannot. In South African townships our youth seem to fall into the circle of substance abuse day by day. They already have a nickname because of that. 'Nyaopes' is what a discriminative citizen would label them if they beg for a R2 coin or something to eat. It breaks my heart really. One time I tried to help one of 'them' when I gave him a rehabilitation center card and some money for them to get there. Did I not regret it when he gave my money to some guy who took it in exchange for a fix? When I told momma the story, she just blatantly told me that, "Not everyone wants to be saved."

I shake my head and look her straight into her eyes.

"Stop, stop. Hey, you're not a coward and definitely not obliged to take me right now. I'll ask Troy to accompany me there." She smiles at my comment and for the first time I'm glad that I managed to say his name without getting irritated. He's been asking me out for a while now and I rejected his offers every chance I got. I kind of contradict myself by rejecting him, yet I find him so attractive. I will tell you later the reason why I let down one of the most handsome guys in school.

“So you finally decided to give him a chance hey? Bad boy with a good girl gon’ make some colored babies up in this house!” It’s good to see her smile and back to her old self. I wouldn’t have it any other way.

“You know you can tag along right? That reminds me, what was your appointment for anyway?” I had forgotten to ask her that because I was kind of busy trying to not have a stroke.

“Uhm, nothing really. I just have a cold. We weren’t properly dressed today you know;” she says. That was odd but I let it go. There’s no need to play detective with my friend, I basically trust her with my life. That’s how strong our bond is.

“You know what I was thinking, let’s push through this year and towards the end of it we have a little party at our place. You can even bring Troy as your date. Woo! I can just imagine him in that tight shirt with those weird sneakers he puts on. Damn!”

I don’t know how to react to this. I feel like attacking her for noticing so much about him. I’m even hit with a pang of jealousy. Let me describe Tshego for you. She’s coffee colored, average height, got curves in all the right places and has short hair, but she recently braided it into those long twists. She got dimples and dreamy eyes too. Atleast that's what Sbusiso used to say to her. Perfect girlfriend material right? Of course. I’m not jealous of her or anything, I mean I have my own special

attributes. I too am dark in complexion but more of that coffee color with a dash of milk so you can say I'm... I don't know, caramel? Unlike her though, I'm a tall girl but not too tall, proportionally tall?

This is funny, okay let me continue.

I happen to have a big crown and I'm so proud of it.

Maintaining an afro should be considered as one of my special skills though because one wrong move and poof! Afro gone. I'm more of an hour glass shape but I have my stretch marks and that stubborn flab of fat around the waist that won't go away no matter how much water I drink. No need to lie about my imperfections anyway. I gave up on it when I started watching Karabo's YouTube videos. Thee inspirational guru we all know her to be and a friend too.

Now where was I? Oh yes, Troy. My killer instincts subside when I think of how almost the whole school drools over Troy. Girls want him. Guys want to be him. I don't even have killer instincts, seriously. I have a hard time squashing a fly or a worm without thinking that I've once again ended a life. So that ladies and gentlemen is the reason why I keep rejecting that ice-cream date he keeps talking about. I may be crushing on him but I managed to throw him into the 'friends zone' and I pray every day that he never crawls out of it.

"A party sounds good but-..."

“Mamas!” His knock startled me. I roll down the window to be met by his face that smells like prunes. He’s holding his brown briefcase and few papers in his hand which means he’s done for the day.

“Mr V!” I say nervously.

“Mamas. You are still here? I thought students head home after bunking their afternoon class.” It’s only after he’s done speaking that I notice the watch on his wrist indicating that it’s 14H00.

When he realizes that nothing is going to come out of our open mouths he says his goodbyes and waits at the entrance of the parking lot.

“That guy really gives me the creeps. I mean I would do an old white guy but definitely not him.” She says while hugging herself due to the cold breeze coming through my open window.

“Why is he standing there? I thought he had a car.”

“He does have car but some boys drew graffiti on it two days ago so... yep. They drew ‘Mr V 4 Vulture. Kwaaa!’ It’s kind of funny. Just like how he says he won’t repeat himself in class but then contradicts himself by asking the same question again. What’s also funny is how that jacket is wearing him and not him wearing the jacket. Fashion police!”

“Shut up for a second and look over there. Who’s that?” I interrupt her. If you don’t interrupt Tshego then your direct speech will never be set free.

“Oh, that’s Victor. His younger brother. Now him I would do any day. That police uniform he got on makes one imagine him...”

“Tshego please! Not today. I didn’t even know Mr V had a brother.” I swear this is how our normal conversation goes every day. I guess she forgot about her outburst earlier because wow!

“Now you know. Nice guy but no wife or any kids just like his big brother. Shame. Anyway let’s get out of here and go home to pick your outfit for later.”

Oh... I forgot about that. How funny would it be if I left him hanging? Ha! This is going to be fun.

3

“No not this one. Oh my word definitely not this one. God is this a closet of 20-year-old or Nanny McPhee’s wardrobe?”

She’s been going at it for a while now and I’m just sitting on my bed with a towel on waiting for her to just pick an outfit. It’s not even that deep. I’m going to the doctor’s office not a matric dance. Try telling that to her and you’ll just see her neck rotate 360° like how horror movie villains turn their heads after the protagonists challenges them.

“Dude I’ll just wear that high waist and the black top okay. Now get out of my room.”

“No.”

No? She just said no? He’s going to be here soon and my roommate is still raiding my closet like a mad woman. It’s only a matter of time before he...

‘Knock knock knock!’

That must be him. She instantly freezes and starts grinning. She always does this and its surprising that she still can’t get it through her head that Troy and I are friends. I know this and he knows this too. What I also know is that he likes fooling around

so when he asks me for a date, I reject him like another girl would and we laugh it off.

“Okay you know what just put on the black top with the high waist jean. I’ll keep him company;” she says. Wasn’t that what I suggested? I just watch her leave my room to go open the door for Troy and my heart instantly skips a beat. Those brownies must be messing with system or something. I quickly dress up and head downstairs.

“Okay I’m ready let’s go!” I didn’t expect him to be wearing a black top too but before I can go upstairs to change, Tshego grabs my arm and brings me closer to him. My word he smells so good!

“Hey Nay. You look beautiful.” He says. He's sitting on one of our bar stools in the kitchen. With me standing I can see his curly black hair that trails down his caramel skin tone. Naledi snap out of it!

“Thanks can we go now?” I really need to go and come back home so I can shout at Tshego for serving our guest the very same messed up brownies he’s eating.

“What? No! I need to take y’all a picture first for... you know... friendship goals. Say cheese!”

Troy and I obliged to a snap but not to the added 15 with different poses.

“Tshego I’m going to be late. Dr Bob is packed but he managed to squeeze me in for a few minutes so please have mercy.” I beg.

She finally lets us go, after 3 more pictures, and Troy and I walk to the front gate of the flat.

“Wow. Your friend is still retarded.” I burst out laughing way louder than required and I find myself holding a hand over my mouth to trap the rest of the sound that’s still pending. “Well... yes but she means well. She still can’t get over the fact that you and I are friends.” I say trying to wipe anything he wanted to say about my ratchet laugh.

“I still can’t get over it too.” God but why me? I look at him and he’s got that genuine smile on his face that makes every girls’ knees weak, including mine.

“T not you too.” Yes, I happen to call him ‘T’ and he calls me ‘Nay’ of which my roommate now calls me. I try to change the topic but I’m saved by the Uber arriving a few feet from us. I didn’t even ask him to but he insisted we get there with style. We get in the car, greet the driver and make our way to one of the scariest places on Earth. I don’t like doctors’ offices but I

really don't have a choice here. Blood, needles even stethoscopes don't sit well with me.

We finally arrive there but I'm 7 minutes late and I'm basically rushing Troy to finish his conversation with the driver. There's no time for this. I grab his arm and start brisk walking inside. That was not a good idea because he's now holding my hand in the waiting room after I filled in my form and told the secretary that I made it just in time.

"Relax okay. Relax. Think happy thoughts like how our- "

"Miss Mapulane? Dr Bob will see you now." Thank you Mrs Secretary for saving me from what this man beside me was about to say.

I walk up to the consultation room and I'm hit by the smell of pine gel and pills. The floors are squeaky clean because I can still see Troy's hand holding mine on the tile. We get in and I just rush towards him for a hug. Dr. Bob is one of the kindest people I know aside from my mother. His sweet and weird personality reminds of my father. He's still the same old tall man he was 4 years ago.

“Dr Bob! Thank you for this because I kind of needed it. You will not believe what happened to me this time.”

He shakes his head and puts on his glasses.

“What happened now?” he asks with that smile of his that makes children trust him. Yes, he’s a pediatrician which is why I trust him even more. He looks behind me and asks who the ‘young man’ is.

“Oh this is...”

“My name is Troy sir, I’m Nay’s boyfriend. Pleased to meet you I’ve heard so much about you sir.”

I close my eyes for a second and look at Dr Bob who is already taking a shine at Troy. Maybe if I get an actual boyfriend then Troy will stop with his jokes. See why I said that he likes fooling around? I laugh it off and play along.

“Yes he is.” Then I blush a little which wasn’t that hard to do.

“Oh. Well, I don’t believe you. I can sense a real couple when I see one and this right here is so fake its making my grey hair grow, fall off and regrow.”

I look at Dr Bob stunned, and back at Troy who looks a bit annoyed by his comment. Next thing I know, Troy is grabbing me by the waist and kissing the day lights out of me. He stops after he’s satisfied and looks proudly at Dr Bob who merely

shakes his head and raises his hands to surrender. Man do I have news for Tshogo later.

After Dr Bob drew blood samples he told me to keep it on the low with everything until the results come back from the lab. That should be about a week from now. Right now though I'm at the park near the school campus with a vanilla ice-cream in my hand. He forced me to.

"So do you mind telling me what happened back there?"

I haven't brought up the kiss yet because I thought that I needed to clear my head first before tackling on this impossible mission.

"Uhm, that's what couples do babe. They kiss each other to show affection." He says sarcastically.

"What? We're not dating T."

"Yes we are. You said it yourself at Dr Bob. Happy 30 minutes' anniversary by the way. It feels like just a few moments ago when I made you mine." He says that holding his chest dramatically. I can't believe this guy.

"It was a few moments ago!" I blurt out.

He gives me the eyebrow and I instantly hate myself for speaking without thinking. Congratulations Naledi

you just admitted to Troy that indeed you are 'his'. Great just great. I'm now dating my friend of 2 years and I don't feel happy about it.

"Oh I didn't realize. Thanks for clearing that up for me babe" He says and kisses me on the cheek then continues to open his ice-cream sandwich.

I stop walking and sit on a nearby bench and look at him dead in the eyes.

"T what is going on?" I'm honestly tired of playing leap frog with my feelings now. He really needs to tell me straight to my face what is happening, it will be best for both of us.

He sighs and takes a seat next to me. He then calls a little girl that's been on the swing since we got here and whispers something into her ear. The girl smiles and looks at me; "Lady please give uncle T a chance to love you so that he can give me his ice-cream." He smiles at me and whispers something else to her.

"Lady, uncle T has been... has been. Has been what?" T whispers again to her and she continues; "Uncle has been serious about you from day one. So what will it be babe?"

I'm beyond shocked at this point. Troy gives her his chocolate sandwich which she thanks him for it. Before we can blink twice she's already at the swing again devouring the desert. He then turns to me and waits for me to say something. This is not him fooling around. He's looking at me with pleading hazel eyes and I open my mouth but no words come out. A minute passes and I think I'm ready to speak again.

"Troy listen to me. You're a sweet guy and everything but..."

"No Naledi, no buts. You think I'm a playboy and I will probably break your heart like your douchebag ex but I am not like that. Please don't make me pay for his mistakes. You want to talk about looks then take a look in the mirror. Nay you are beautiful beyond compare. When I see you post yourself in the morning saying that you look crusty I... I can't believe you. I just think to myself how beautiful you would look waking up next to me every day. I know I'm not perfect (is this guy for real?) but if you can just give me a chance to show you my love then you will never have to doubt love again. I love everything about you. I love how you enjoy smelling new books at the store, I love how obsessed you are with coffee, I love how you enjoy watching the rain because the world is at peace when everyone is inside, I love how you adore dogs and dislike cats even though you make an exception of a few, I love how you keep

re-watching movies hoping for a better ending, babe I love how you want to bring justice to everyone so that peace dominates the world. Shit I thought I was prepared for this but I just sound cheesy now.”

Mom said that this would happen. On my very last year of law school there will be something that has to distract me because “the devil saw my potential.” Could Troy be a distraction though? Look at him, he looks genuine and a bit desperate at this point. I’m sorry mom but I’m giving in. I won’t forget myself though and the reason behind me choosing law. My reason is that my father was a police man just like Mr V’s brother but he had a wife, which is my mother, and two children, that would be me and my little brother Tshedimogo. He died due to his line of work. Mr. Mapulane was one of the many policemen that were trying to stop a protest that had already spiraled out of control. The people were protesting about foreigners abducting young South African girls and shipping them off to God-knows-where and our government was doing nothing about it. He tried to save a girl from the protestors because she fell and was about to get trampled on. I guess you can say that he took a bullet for her because instead of it hitting the girl it went right through his heart. He was a good man; he really was but not his family. After the funeral his family took most of his belongings

and his monies because they blamed my mother for not convincing dad to leave his career. They didn't understand that he chose it because he loved it. It might've been dangerous for a family man but he really loved what he did. I know some of you don't believe that there are no corrupt policemen in our country anymore but there really are. Take my dad for example. My mom tried to get justice for my father but the case was not watertight and with time it got cold. We lived in a house that was provided by the government and had to adjust to our new lifestyle. Luckily this happened a decade ago when my brother was just a few days old otherwise he too would have cried a river like I did. I was 10 at the time and understood everything that was happening and from then on I willingly chose the path of law and crime. It just felt right. Ever since then I also made it my mission to change the situation at home and get my family out of that house. I didn't get a bursary but I did however receive funding from a student scheme because of my good marks and at 22 its still funding me. My mom told me to enjoy life and not worry about her but after my father's passing that became my job. I had to protect my fragile mom and little brother from all the evils of this world.

Now sitting opposite me is a man that claims he wants to love me and that I should give him a chance. For the second time in

my life, I think I will let a man in my life. If I get burned then lesson learned, I really don't want to be those people that ask themselves every day "What if?" or "Had I?" He's really been there for me so let's do it. My inner voice says let's do it. Its official? Okay its official.

"Okay" I smile at him and wait for his reaction. He lifts his head from his hands and looks at me confused. When he finally gets the idea he hugged me so tight I drop my ice-cream cone.

"Don't worry, you're about to get more ice-cream cones than you ever had before."

"... and coffee?"

"... and coffee." He says while reaching over to kiss me again. He gets interrupted by a call coming through my phone and the name 'Tshego' flashes on my screen.

"Tshego!"

"Yo! Where are you and why haven't you seen your messages? Erica has been asking about you since you left and its driving me nuts!"

"Ha-ha I'm at the park"

“With Troy?”

“Yes with Troy. I’m officially off the market by the way” I smile at him and find him already smiling at me.

“Oh. Well I’m happy for you.” I’m taken back by her lack of enthusiasm and I can sense her tone has dropped.

“You okay? I thought you’d be happy or something.” Troy mouths the word “What?” and I shrug my shoulders while listening attentively to the silence before she speaks again.

“No I am, it’s just that he reminds me of Sbu you know. He would’ve been so happy if he knew I’m carrying his little one.”

4

Darn it! My call got cut off because of this weather. It was cold in the morning, sunny in the afternoon and now its windy. The clouds are starting to cause a plague up there too. I didn't even grab a jacket because the temperature looked promising before I left the apartment. It's still winter dum-dum!

"Babe what happened?" He asks when he looks over at my phone. I smile while still focused on my call log, he keeps calling me that and I might just marry him on the spot!

"Argh it's probably the network. Can you take me back to the- "

My phone rings again and it's Tshego. I made the song I mentioned earlier by 'Sevyn Streeter' my custom ringtone for when she calls. I still have to send it to her but I want it to be a surprise.

"Tshego? Hello can you hear me?"

"Yeah I can hear you perfectly."

"Sorry about that, the network just died on me. What were you saying before our call ended?"

"Wait, so you didn't hear me?"

"No. Is it bad?"

"Errr... no it was nothing. I just missed you that's all."

“Oh. I missed you too. I love- “

(Network Busy)

Okay this is pissing me off now. It’s getting colder too, even that little girl by the swing is gone alongside the man in the ice-cream truck. I try calling her back but to no avail.

“Hey T can you call the Uber to take me to the apartment?”

“Yeah sure, let me just...”

“What?” I ask. This is the first time I look up from my phone ever since Tshego called me.

“Well there’s no network so... ” Great, now I’m going to have to walk back. It’s such a long way and with this weather the distance will feel like it doubled.

“Babe, we can just go to campus and chill there. Maybe the network will stop being shitty and revive again then I can take you home okay?”

That actually sounds a good idea and at least we will be out of the cold.

“Okay” I scoff while standing up to start walking. The campus isn’t far so when we arrived we weren’t as traumatized by the cold as I thought we would be.

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“The campus looks weird without guys playing loud music and girls screaming at one another.” I try to make conversation with him. He’s been silent all the way and that’s so unlike him, it’s a bit unsettling.

“Yeah. Wait here I’ll be right back.” He hurriedly makes his way to his room. I know this because I’ve once been there when he invited me over for movie night when Tshego and Sbusiso went out for a date.

I sit on one of the couches by the check-out office where it separates the girl’s dorms from the boy’s.

I haven’t had time to just appreciate the scenery of it anyway, the round coffee table still has mug stains, the other two couches facing me makes the room lighten up because of their red color, the lilies on the white table where the schools’ pamphlets are always stacked has its own merits, it’s all so pretty.

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“Hey.” I turn around to face him and follow him with my eyes till he sits on the coffee table to face me.

“Sorry for ditching you here. My roommate likes throwing... surprises so I didn’t want you traumatized and shit.”

“It’s okay. The network?”

“Oh yeah the network is back on but it’s already late. You still wanna go?”

I think about how Tshego and I were robbed after we came home late from a sleep over at Erica’s room here at campus. They took our phones, money, expensive clothing that we brought and Tshego’s watch. They looked like they wanted to do more than just rob us but luckily the security guard by the gate scared them off. They ran off with our things and only dropped Tshego’s watch while they scurried away. To be honest, I was glad that they dropped the watch and took my phone because I know how much it meant to Tshego- her grandmother gave it to her before she passed on. I wouldn’t want history to repeat itself so I just tell Troy that I’ll go tomorrow after he told me his roommate isn’t there and its practically “safe.” His roommate is not all that bad though, he just happens to live on the wild side of life and has gotten Troy in so much trouble than he was guilty from. He kind of reminds me of Erica, that reminds me, I should text them both and tell them I’m safe. I should also have a little chat with Erica about her weed problem. Yes! That’s what Erica used to smoke back in high school, of course! I’ve been trying to remember that word the whole day but I never gave up. I hate it when my brain gets stuck like that.

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“Wow, your room hasn’t changed a bit.” His room is full of animal posters and his “thinking board” is still on the wall above his bed about what he wants to accomplish after he’s done with school. I’m also glad that its clean and pet-free. Once I came here and found a snake under his pillow, he said that he rescued it from children that were taking pictures and poking at it. I don’t see myself rescuing a wild animal any time soon from now until forever.

“Thanks... I guess.” He gestures for me to sit down on his bed and I reluctantly agree while still looking around the room.

“Okay so how are we going to do this? There’s a single bed and two people.” I ask still trying to perform thermo regulation and raise my body temperature with his ‘Lakers’ jersey. Basketball fan huh? Nice.

“Two people that love each other;” he corrects me and then turns his back on me to continue preparing something to eat I guess.

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I feel a bit uncomfortable with his statement, reason being that I’m still a virgin. I might have an ex but I managed to keep myself sealed up until this point. In fact, that’s why my ex left, or more like I left him. His name was/is Tebogo (I don’t know if he’s dead or not and I’m hoping it’s the latter), and he just so

happened to have been my first boyfriend. I had no time to date in high school but for Tebogo I made the time. We starting dating in grade 12 and that was the same time Erica had started using the... stuff. Yes, some people say that weed is good for you but Erica was abusing it, mixing it all up every day with another drug to make it stronger. Anyway, Tebogo and I dated for about a week before he mentioned the word 'sex' to me and that 'that's what lovers do' too. It made sense to decline him and tell him I'm not ready and so forth. A week and he was already trying to smash, ah! About 8 months later we were going strong and I was ready for him, it happened to be his birthday and I was going to surprise him with his favorite cake... and me. I stumbled upon the same situation Sbu did but this time it was him and my netball couch getting it on. I couldn't believe my eyes but instead of walking away I shouted and cried and broke a few things too while he was trying to calm me down. Their nudity made me sick and just when I thought an apology was going to come out of him he suggested we have a threesome. Okay that's when I left. When I think back on it, I find myself laughing and hoping he caught an STD or something. No I'm joking

Advertisement

I forgave a long time ago. I'm not one to hold grudges.

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Troy notices that I've grown rather quiet so he drops the kitchen knife, which is unnaturally too sharp for my liking, and kneels down so that we meet at eye level.

"Babe I'm sorry if that came off risqué. I have a sleeping bag and you can take my bed okay?" I silently breathe my relief out. I'm glad he's so understanding. People like him makes us realize that some exes were a mistake from the word-go.

"Besides, I know you're still a virgin. I can practically sense it and shit." I grab the nearest pillow and throw it at him. I then pretend to sulk while he's still laughing at my poor aim.

"Nay you're so adorable when you're mad. You mad at me? Please don't be mad at me." He says in between chuckles.

"Okay okay your aim is as sharp as an eagle, better?" I find myself smiling when he squeezes my cheeks and pecks my lips.

"You better be glad I'm in a good mood or else... or else I would've stabbed with my hairpin. Ha! You... you stinky boy. The stinkiest boy in the world!" I lift my head up high and find a quiet place to call my friends while he's still hysterically laughing at my attempt to insult and threaten him. I don't know whether he heard me or not but I told him, while taking my walk of pride, that I needed to make a call and there was better cell service by the reception.

I go to the reception I was at earlier and unlock my phone, there it reads '25 June, 06:21 PM', my word is it that late? I've really been enjoying Troy's company, who, by the way, is still laughing. I call Tshego and add Erica to the call.

"Hey girls!"

"Woo somebody sounds happy. Troy already tap that huh?" Tshego is something else.

"Mapulane you were busy with Troy and you decide to tell me now?" Erica should just take my surname at this point.

"Erica, I didn't even say anything but I am sorry for waiting this long. I had to go to Dr Bob because of YOUR WEED BROWNIES!"

"Yo chill Nay."

"Oh. Mapulane, it's not what it sounds like. I'm not abusing the stuff like before because you know, my parents would kill me. I just thought we would have some fun last night so I..."

"You gave me brownies and didn't tell me what was in them." I finish her sentence. I'm not being harsh but giving her tough love worked before so I'm hoping it will work now.

"Errr... yeah. But it was only for yesterday. Never again. I love you okay?"

"Yeah Nay, love you too."

“Stop trying to soften me up because it’s not going to work and I will not be telling you what went on today.”

“Oh come on! Nay you can’t do this to me!” I chuckle a little and remember what I also wanted to tell them.

“Hey guys did you see Tshego’s video? Tshego remember when you were crying after class? Well it has been posted and now everyone knows that Miss Kethe’s boyfriend, Sbu, passed on. How? I don’t know.” I wait for her savage reply like she always does but... nothing. Instead Erica jumps in.

“Argh these people don’t have lives. Don’t pay attention to them Tshegofatso, don’t give them the satisfaction. They need to get laid and stop meddling into people’s fucking-”

“Whoa whoa Erica calm down. They weren’t accusing her of anything they were actually feeling sorry for her that she kept everything in and how it’s been affecting her ability to hold her tears in public.” Which is actually true but I added a bit of a concerned tone so that Eri can calm down. I’ve never heard her swear not once- well aside from when she was high and stuff.

“Listen guys, Troy is calling me so we’ll continue this tomorrow. Goodnight I love you guys!” I say meaning every single word. These girls are my family.

“Goodnight Mapulane.”

“Goodbye Nay.” Then she dropped the call- weird. Erica assured me that Tshego was just a bit upset over the leaked video and that she will get over it by tomorrow. We end the call on a sweet note and I start getting worried about Tshego, a part of me is also telling me that in should risk my safety and just go home to check on her but her text that just came through now put my mind at ease.

“Sorry about that, network u know. I meant gudnyt friend!”

I smile at her message and make my way to the room because students are starting to roam around now and I don’t want them getting the wrong idea.

I get inside and look around like I just got there for the first time, I can never get enough of his room. It’s so spacey and feels like home- the white painted walls and beautiful furniture makes me at awe, there was definitely a woman’s touch here somewhere.

“Hey, did you really do all the décor by yourself?”

He chuckles before he can reply; “No, my mom did most of the... furnishing.”

Oh boy, a mama’s boy. I push the thought away when I feel like I’m getting too judgmental.

We start talking with him laughing at my insult earlier in between eating what he prepared- well what he ordered. Pizza was on the menu.

What he was preparing earlier was so... yep I'm not going to talk about that, let's just say he needs a few cooking classes before I eat anything he prepares.

We starting getting drowsy at 01AM... yes we talked the whole night even though we were in our 'beds' and the light was switched off. That night, everything was as it should be.

I wake up before he does and instantly check my phone, which reads that its 8AM. Pretty late for a student but its Saturday and this is what I call 'relaxation day'. Anyway I don't know what it is with us and immediately checking our phones when we wake up, it becomes a daily routine and a reason to live. Oxygen =Phone.

Anyway I check my messages and... nothing. Usually I find tons of messages from those two in our little group chat. This is odd but I brush it off (not a good idea) and start stretching my stiff limbs back to life. I'm wearing Troy's big white shirt and with the 10 hours I've been here I've concluded that my boyfriend loves 'swag' and basically big clothing when he's at home. Kind of like old hip-hop artist clothing.

“Good morning. Ah jeez first night we spend together and you wake up before I do. Minus boyfriend points.” He says that while joining in the stretching escapade and a few yawns here and there. I understand that he was exhausted due to his basketball practices he has almost every day after his classes- and he slept in a sleeping bag. Before I can reply I get a call and I answer without checking the caller ID.

“Hello.”

“Greetings Miss Mapulane. We have been trying to reach you all morning, we are calling from the SAPS police station down town and we’re going to need you to come down here and answer a few questions about your missing friend.”

“Excuse me? What’s going on? Who’s missing?” I say in a panic with my eyes wide open.

“Tshegofatso Kethe.”

5

I'm semi-unconscious, I can hear a beeping sound but with the same breath I can't move my body. I can feel that there's someone next to me, I can smell the scent of pills and sanitizers. I tried to open my eyelids but I wish I hadn't, the light was too bright. My eyes grow accustomed to the brightness with the occasional vigorous blinking. I can tell I'm in the hospital, and that person that was beside me is Troy- he has his face in his hands. I try to shift to sit more comfortably and I'm met by his gaze, he doesn't look good (if that's even possible).

"Hey."

"Where am I?" I know where I am, the real question is why am I here.

"In the hospital babe, how's your head?" I try to detect any pain from my head and... nothing. I'm just confused at this point. Why am I here?

"Morning Miss Mapulane;" a female Indian doctor enters the room. I giggle a little at her attempt to pronounce my surname.

"Hi."

“I’m Dr Kuthrapul. You passed out a few hours ago, do you remember anything before you got here ma’am?” Is she for real? No I don’t!

I shake my head and look up to Troy for answers.

“Babe you were on the phone with someone and then after a while you just fell. I tried waking you up but... and then I called an ambulance and they just... sirens and drips and... God don’t ever do that shit to me Nay.” I make a mental note to talk to him about his dirty mouth, swearing doesn’t sit well with me.

I try to piece together what they’re saying with my last memory so I close my eyes and squint my face. Okay I do remember getting a phone call from a lady at the police station and she told me that someone was missing. Who’s missing? Okay its coming back to me. I remember watching Troy sitting up after I asked the lady which “friend” she was talking about and then she said it was... it was...

‘TSHEGO!’

I bolt out of the hospital bed and reach for the door but Troy is standing in my way. I can feel the adrenaline rush and if push

comes to shove, I'm going to have to punch him out of the way. Of course! Tshego is missing! This is why I ended up on this hospital bed, that's why I had a feeling of risking it all and heading back to the apartment, that's why she said goodbye last night.

"Miss Mapulane I would advise you to calm down before you hurt yourself or your friend. I wouldn't want to put you down."

I give her a death stare and calm down a bit when I remember my fear of blood and needles. Troy takes a seat next to me and we watch as the doctor heads out in a rush to look for something.

"Babe, babe please talk to me. Babe?" I ignore him and keep my gaze at the door, if I say something I'm going to break down and I don't want him to see that right now.

After 2 minutes, two white policemen enter the room and say their greetings to Troy. I ignored them. I watch as they put on that sympathetic smile the doctor had, the taller one starts talking.

"Miss Mapulane, I'm Sargent- "

"Where's my friend?" If my mom saw how rude I was being towards my elders she'd whoop my behind, I don't care though- I'm desperate here."

“Miss Mapulane we are still investigating her disappearance; it does not look like she was kidnapped though. There was no sign of struggle and some of her clothes are gone. With addition to her note our presumptions might just be correct but your other friend, Erica Tevola, believes she was kidnapped.”

Erica? Note? Kidnapped?

“Sir, what note are you talking about?” Good question T.

The Sargent tells us that the note is at the lab so that they can verify if it's her handwriting or not and to see if there's no foreign fingerprints on it. He asks me where I was last night until early this morning, what was my last conversation with her, does she have any enemies, would she do anything like this and so forth. I found these question irrelevant because the answers I had to them were irrelevant. I do understand that it's protocol though, but could Tshego really do this to me? If she wanted a getaway, she could've told Erica and I and we were going to organize a girl's trip or something. I turn to the Sargent and ask where Erica is. He looks at me like I'm not going to be able to handle what he's about to tell me but I don't back down. I had a lot of practice in Mr V's class to know that you don't shift your gaze unless you're afraid.

“I’m sorry ma’am but Erica Tevola is on her way to Mozambique. Her parents organized the trip after they heard that she had taken strong substances when she read told your friend is missing. It looked like she wanted to commit suicide.”

I put my head back to stop the tears that are threatening to come out, I’m hyperventilating too. We were so close girls. We were so close to finishing school and owning that private jet, we were so close to riding the top down with our favorite songs playing on the stereo, we... we were... Oh God why me? Why is it in my world that people have to leave me? Did I wrong anyone? Am I not allowed a ray of sunshine?

I couldn’t do it anymore I just started crying. I’m trying to speak but nothing comes out. I grab Troy’s shirt so as to transfer the pain to him but nothing. I just feel empty; I feel the warm tears run down both cheeks to my thighs. I wail and I can see that the policemen don’t know what to do so they tip their hats and head out, I guess T told them to leave. The doctor dashes in the room and finds my head on T’s thighs while he was caressing my afro. I don’t cry a lot, but heck I’m still sobbing. The pain is too much, my girls are gone and I’m afraid this man beside me is going to leave too. I push the thought away when I feel like a second wave of tears is building up.

Troy tells the doctor that we are leaving, not ask, tell! It's surprising that in all this rubble I still manage to pin point things that majority pay no attention to.

We get in the Uber and head back to campus, I tell Troy that I want to see the note so he should tell the driver to head to the police station. He's reluctant but after a few threats we end up at the station, sitting at the Sargent's desk. He told us that the lab took all the necessary information and we will have to wait for the results. He also told me that I could read the note which is now in my trembling hands. It's sitting upside down but I don't want to turn it, that will be like accepting the fact that she's gone. T flips the note and keeps brushing my back; "Read it babe."

I look at him and back to the note, it looked like it was torn out of a bigger page and had dirt stain on the corner. I take a deep breath and start reading.

"I love you too Nay. Signed

Tshego"

That's all it read. The seargent hands me a brown bag and told me that whatever is inside was next to the note they found at the apartment. I quickly open the bag hoping that I was going to find another note telling me this is a joke but... nope. Inside

the bag was a watch, a beautiful watch, Tshego's watch. This is her grandmother's watch that was nearly taken by those robbers that night. I massage my temple and put the watch on the desk. This was not the plan! We are sisters and we were supposed to disappear together if that was what was required. Now my friend is gone or kidnapped or whatever, and my other friend is on her way to a rehabilitation center to mend her broken promise to never relapse and mend her broken heart too. So this is it? No answers. I know this investigation will lead to a dead end, the only conclusion is that she really did go away willingly.

I'm lying on my bed at the apartment. I asked Troy to sleep here and he said he'd come along with me. The police gave us the go ahead to enter the apartment. I'm glad he's out of the room now, I want to be alone with my thoughts, he has been supportive though even through my craziness. I chuckle a bit when I think about the fact that this is our 2nd day into this relationship but he's already seen the best and worst of me, nah he has already seen it even before this, during our 2-year friendship. I'm holding one of the shirts she left behind as a way to console myself. I know Erica will be safe but Tshego... she doesn't have any family. Her mother was a single parent that went out one night with her older boyfriend and never came back, probably because her mother, Tshego's grandmother, told her to leave the church and take care of her only child. I

say 'was' because it's almost like she doesn't exist, she lost herself to some church and went deep into it that she was just spiritually blinded. The boyfriend, which was the pastor to the church she was attending, was abusive but he put food on the table, so her mother stuck around. She was starting high school when it happened but she bounced back and went to go live with her grandmother. Her grandmother died a proud woman when she was accepted to study Law at UJ and promised her spirit that she would continue to make her proud. I guess that ship has sank.

This makes me home-sick and I suddenly find the need to go home and love the heck out of my family, love the heck out of Troy, the need to keep supporting Erica, the need to obtain my LLB, to keep the faith. It's true that you will never know the worth of something until it's gone. What a week this has been!

I will tell you one more thing though, if you think this was the last of the drama... then think again honey.

6

“Stab him.”

“Come on, stab him.”

“Do it now while he’s not looking, stab him in the back!”

I can’t do it, that’s too harsh. I know Troy says that this is just a game but I honestly can’t bring myself to do it, even though the game character betrayed me and was working undercover for the warlords. Now that I have him cornered after our brutal battle I’m supposed to stab him and take on my reign to be queen. What kind of video game is this anyway? I thought I left swords and castles at history class.

I get up from the carpet and head to the kitchen for a relaxation drink, Troy will continue the game for me I don’t care. I mean when he plays it, it looks so interesting but stabbing rogue knights? That wasn’t written on the game cover.

I exhale after taking a sip of my grape juice and look up at the white painted ceiling. I can never get enough of this ceiling though, unlike some other apartments, the designers put some effort into this one. It looks like a ravage ocean up there with the wave patterns and the tint of peach to brighten up the place. Troy and I decided to move here in North West after we both graduated from University and needed to get away, away from... the past. I’m hit with flood of memories when I recall

what happened 1 ½ year ago. Yes, it's been that long since I last heard that my best friend, Tshego, disappeared/ran off and my other best friend, Erica, was sent to a rehabilitation center. I have not heard from either of them and when I tried to get a hold of Erica's parents so that I can talk to her they just cut me off or insulted me for being insensitive. After a few attempts of calling her phone and the parents', the lines just went dead. They probably blocked me or something. I would have paid her a visit if I even knew which rehabilitation center they took her to but the odds were against me back then. A year might not be such a long time for some of you but what I learnt from being an attorney is that anything can happen in one second. Anything. You can graduate, you can lose your best friends, you can fall in love, you can... die. Yep, all that in one second. Which is why I cherish time so much and make sure to balance it with work, my relationship and family. Speaking of which, after I graduated I landed myself a job as a partner in this major law firm right here in North West, which was not surprising at all since I applied to various firms away from Johannesburg. I was also ambivalent at first if Troy and I should even continue seeing each other but I never raised the issue, I didn't want him to think I'm uncertain or insecure about what we have. He's been supportive though, through my silent moments to my complete and utter outbursts of why life is an unfair, cruel etc. When he asked me to move in with him, I didn't even think

twice. We might be coming upon our second anniversary in a month but we have known each other for way longer, 4 years 5 months (as friends) to be exact. So it felt right when we moved into this apartment and shared one bedroom even though there were two. After moving furniture and cleaning up, not that the apartment was dirty when we got there but because his weird belongings that kept leaving stains on the floor and the walls they brushed up against, we just internally vowed to ourselves that this is the real deal.

Boy were the stains visible, the apartment might've been big but it was also a spacious place with white coated walls and tiles. I also found out that Troy Lane is a big game-lover. Apart from his obsession with animals, he also loves sitting in front of the television just vigorously pressing the controller and yelling as if the characters can hear him through the tv. It became better when I suggested that he opens a game reserve of his own instead of gaming all day. I was joking but he took seriously and after a hop, skip and a loan he did it! With his mother's assistance and the banks', he managed to open his own game reserve and host wild animals there which I never touch no matter how many times he assured me that; "They won't bite." I used to enter people's yards in my childhood after they assured me that their devil dogs "Don't bite," and me being a dog lover I would reluctantly believe them only to regret later when I breathe in and out after a chase.

I'm lost in thought because I just suddenly feel Troy hugging me from behind that I nearly spilled my drink.

"Hey, penny for your thoughts?" I smile as he whispers in my ear sweet words he always does after a good game. I have given my heart, body (yes exactly what you're thinking) and soul to him and he has definitely kept his word to never willingly hurt me. I did have my doubts because of my past relationship and the fact that he's 'hotness on two legs', Karabo's words not mine.

"No thoughts... I just... I just... T what are you doing?" I ask while smiling. He's trying to push my afro aside with his chin to kiss me but it's not working. My afro doubled over the last 1 ½ year and so has my love for this man behind me.

"Babe, you sure you don't just want to be bald?" If we were in the lounge I was going to throw a pillow at him for even suggesting such a horrid idea. He knows how much I value my afro.

"I'm joking babe. I know how much you value your afro." Took the words right out of my head. I just smirk while leaning in for a kiss and things escalate to us cuddling on the bed after a hot session.

'Roaaaaaar!'

I get startled by the sound that I sit up right with my eyes wide open. I then relax and hand Troy his phone, I told him to change his lion ringtone but to no avail. His love for animals has almost become a norm to me, that's why he even moved to South Africa- because of the animals.

I massage my temple and get out of bed to take a shower, it might be 04 AM but when I'm up, I'm up. 'Three hours too soon is better than one minute too late.'

I take my shower and wrap myself with a towel surprised that T hasn't come knocking and asking if he could join me. Followed by my astounding "No!" only to aggravate him even further and open the door either way. One time I was on my periods and I was so tense that I locked the bathroom door, only for him to literally break it open and ask; "Are you sure?" I was so shocked that: 1) He has seen me naked, 2) He broke the door!

He doesn't do it every day though but a week does not pass by without him softly knocking and saying his 'line.' It got kind of funny and a morning routine since that day, until today. He was face down on the bed with the phone in his hand.

"T

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you okay?"

He looks up and scratches his head.

“No. Yes. I am fine.”

I raise an eyebrow and dress up really quick into my uniform black suit with a white top so that I can give him my full undivided attention. I leave the shoes and my messy hair.

“Talk;” I say as I sit beside him and brush his back.

“I... I... Miracle gave birth to a white cub!!!” He says that while grinning and holding my face way too close. I thought someone had died or something, but I grasp that he was joking around earlier and so I join in with the celebration. The lioness he’s talking about was ill when it got to the game reserve and we all thought he was ripped off by the salesman because he told us that the lioness was in great condition. T, of course, saw something ‘special’ and made a ‘connection’ with it so strong that it would be an abomination to return it. He was right about that though, because I nearly had a heart attack one afternoon when he got in the cage without any protective gear or backup because he wanted to ‘check up on it.’ I thought he dragged me off work because he just wanted me to see Miracle but he showed me way more than that. He just got in, locked the cage and went to sit by it while smiling at me and scratching Miracle’s back. ‘Oh God! I’m dating Tarzan;” I thought but soon enough it became a tourist attraction: ‘American man connects with the queen of the jungle;’ the ‘American’ part was

unnecessary but it made sense to make a story about it. Miracle was and is very dangerous, let alone now that she's a mom. I know Troy still has the 'connection' though because of how he loves these creatures, he made sure that they aren't held in cages but more like a wide area with a fence around it. He only puts them in cages when they are injured and seek medical attention or start attacking other animals they aren't supposed to or show his girlfriend that he's Tarzan.

"That's great babe! I'm so proud of her... and you." I really am, he's come so far since my crazy idea of making his obsession with animals a career. He was already studying animal behavior anyway.

"Thank you babe, I'm proud of you too."

"For what?"

"Well you gave Miracle a chance and didn't jump to conclusions that we are seeing each other. Yes, she's beautiful but..."

I cut him off with my chuckles and leave him in the bedroom, my morning cannot start with Troy and his side lioness instead of coffee. I chuckle again as I'm pouring the coffee in my favorite pink mug my brother got for me on my birthday last year. My phone rings and I answer after checking the caller ID, I stopped not-checking after the 'phone call' 2 years ago.

"Karabo baby!"

“Naledi baby! What’s up?”

“The sky.”

“Which I will launch you into if you keep talking such nonsense.” I chuckle and shake my head, this girl is crazy... she reminds me of Tshego. They are totally different aside from the craziness though, plus she’s the only friend from my past that I kept in contact with.

“Okay I’m sorry. Nothing much, well Miracle gave birth today and I’m getting another case today.”

“Another case? Your boss is ruthless and... wait a minute, Miracle is a girl?” I roll my eyes and assure her that Miracle is a ‘girl’, she was there and she saw that it had no mane around its face and head.

“Yeah well I don’t pay attention to manes but more to the pointy, bloody teeth and large ass.”

I laugh and we continue our conversation through my process of moisturizing and combing my hair, I tie it up in a bun and accessorize with my mom’s silver cross necklace she got for me on my first birthday without dad. I never forget to put it on, I’d rather not have lunch and my work suitcase. We talked from the apartment until Troy and I reached my workplace’s parking lot, he is definitely a happy fellow today. Don’t get me wrong, I have my own car that I put down a deposit for with my second

paycheck but after Troy helped me put on my shoes while I was talking on the phone he figured it would make sense if he dropped me off and made a statement to my male colleagues that 'I'm taken.' With my first paycheck, I took my mom and brother out to dinner. They were so happy that day, it broke my heart a little. I told her I'd look after them and I meant exactly that which is why I've also been saving money every month so that I can get her the dream house she used to tell me about.

"Okay K-baby I got to go, later?"

"Later!"

My ear feels hot and so does my phone, we really do check up on each other... a lot. Which is why she's such a great YouTuber and a therapist. I sit down and text Troy a cute message so that he doesn't think I forgot about him, he won't see it now because he gets really busy on Monday's- but I feel better knowing that I sent one regardless. Inhale. Exhale. I peek around for my suitcase and pull out my laptop, my office is really the 3rd best place in the world, the place where all my ideas emerge. Second best place in the world is our apartment and back home takes the cup. The white walls, wooden floors and dark brown desk makes it feel like I'm in some sort of a cabin. My office looks like this: big space, glass doors, black office chair, the mentioned elements earlier, mounted

television and a lamp. It looked like a CEO office when I started working here but through my mother's prayers it was all mine. I added a few customary things like a framed photo of Troy and I as well as some lilies on the glass table where the law textbooks used to be. I wish to talk about my colleagues but Mr Cornish is heading this way.

"Miss Mapulane! Top of the morning to you." He says that as he walks in while straightening his black tie of his predictable grey suit and holding a brown folder on his other hand. He makes one of heck of an entrance, reminds me of Mr V- I don't know why but the people in my present remind me of the people that used to be in my past. Anyhow, I last saw Mr V when I graduated law school and he assured me that I will do well for myself- for an uptight man he sure was benevolent towards me.

Back to Mr Cornish, his golden name tag he puts on every day on his suit makes everyone gather, even those who don't know him, that he's the boss around here.

Although this firm has branches in four provinces, this office happens to be the original which makes him superior I guess and the fact that he's been in charge for the last 7 years.

“Morning sir.” I sit up and cross my legs. He makes me feel uncomfortable, especially when I catch him gazing at female colleagues when they bend down or walk away from him daily even though the symbol of marriage is clear to see on his left finger. I’ve asked a work friend if she has ever seen him doing it and she replied with a resounding; “No.” God must be really angry with him; may He have mercy on his soul. His tall demeanor does remind me of Dr. Bob but he gets nowhere near him, his big abdomen and white hairs around his beard portrays a typical discriminative boss. Disgusting old man, but he pays well; hasn’t done anything unlawful yet and I love what I do nonetheless.

“Your first case was not easy but as you climb the corporate ladder things don’t become easier, I trust you will be able to handle this case just like you handled your first no?” I completely forgot about the new assignment, I thought I was going to knock off early so that I can go see Miracle and her cub but I guess that’s not happening. This must be serious and urgent because it’s usually me going into his office not the other way around. That’s just how pompous he is, labels really do create limits.

“Errr... yes sir I am. What is the case about?”

“Murder.”

"Oh... who knew I'd be dealing with a murder mystery on my 2nd case huh?" I try to sound pompous but deep down, I'm scared to death.

"Don't worry, I know you will do great-beauty with brains pays off well no? Well, everything you need to know is in that folder and remember that if the going gets too tough, Rivonia will help you out. Work too hard and I might just come in here again to take you out no?" He says with that vindictive grin on his pasty face. I nod and force a smile just enough to make him walk out. I then breathe out not realizing I was holding my breath the entire time. Oí vey!

What does he mean by "take me out"? To take me out as in a dinner date or to permanently remove me from the face of the earth? I start getting nervous-for an attorney I get intimidated easily, the only time I feel powerful is when I'm in the courtroom. I shake my head to remove the uneasy feeling and get to work, I prefer to read about the crime and the person I'm going to be defending before I meet them. It makes things easier that way.

Before I can open the folder I receive a call from...an unknown number? Is it those funeral policies people again? I get irritated by just the mere thought of it that I answer it, put on loud speaker and throw the phone on the desk.

"Hello?" I ask because there has been no exchange of greetings for the last 8 seconds, I'm basically giving my phone a death stare like it asked to receive the call.

"Hello? Hello is anybody there?" I repeat with my index finger close to the 'End Call' button. When I hear the ticking of the office clock instead of a voice I end the call and switch on my laptop. I don't have time to waste on teenagers who are probably playing a trick on me, I have a murder case to handle.

I say a silent prayer before taking the folder into my sweaty hands, let's do this!

Opening the folder was not the hard part, no the hard part was reading the familiar name written on the top of the document. Lord have mercy! I close the folder and rub my eyes a bit, maybe it's my eyes or something. I've always had eye problems and that was my partially my fault, reading books 10 hours straight damaged my eyes to the point where I have to wear glasses when I work with my laptop or read a piece of writing with a small font size. I open the folder again-slowly this time and I'm instantly horrified when I manage to fathom the name and surname from my memories. There on top it's written that Reverend Jeffrey Zono was the murder victim and I am to defend Miss Emma Kethe... Tshego's mom. What in the constitutional law is going on here? I am to defend Tshego's

mom from being convicted as the Reverend's murderer? Ah! I can't do this. I'm horrified and confused at the same time, nothing productive will happen when I'm like this so I grab my water bottle and head outside for some air. I keep reciprocating fake smiles to my colleagues and clients as I walk past them, keeping face is very important.

Too many people outside.

I head to the library where we basically keep old case files and other printed media and find the nearest table and chair. Once I'm seated, I drink the heck out of that water bottle and start thinking. Luckily I can cry even if I wanted to because there's rarely anyone lurking by. I appreciate the silence and privacy. I'm actually glad Tshego is not here to even hear these disturbing news about her mother. Remember how Tshego's mom joined a church and left with the pastor to their 'happily ever after'? Well nothing is ever permanent, including their happily ever after because years later the pastor gets murdered and she is the main suspect. I am not condoning what the pastor did by abusing Tshego's mom and everything else but get murdered in cold blood by his lover? The churchiest lady that left her only daughter for him? It makes almost never sense- I let the thought slide when I think about all the horrendous cases we learnt about in law school, homo sapiens are their greatest enemies.

I get distracted by Rivonia's presence, she may have a small body frame but you can spot her smile from a mile away. Her high heels keep on scraping the carpet of the library as she walks from shelf to shelf looking for something. I don't know whether she can't see me or she is just pretending to be busy, her dramatic pause when she sees me tells me that it's the latter.

"Miss M! Morning!"

"Hey Rivonia, how-how are you?"

"Perfect! You?"

"Oh I'm good just... came here to think you know?"

"Oh I know. Sometimes I appreciate silence in a world that won't stop talking." She says and fixes her glasses. I chuckle a little and a smile reveals itself on my face.

"Still studying quotes huh?"

"Being a secretary means you're the face of the company. People are met by your face and personality so I saw that throwing some quotes in between my smiles makes our business more... legitimate." She says and comes to sit by the table opposite me. I don't remember inviting her besides, she needs to get back to being 'the face of the company.' She sits

down and puts her purple coated fingernails on the books she was trying to find, ending is purple with this woman.

"I'm here when you need to talk okay? Not personal stuff but more business related- I'm a secretary not Oprah." She stands up and winks before leaving.

I too prepare myself to leave, it's only 8 in the morning so feeling sorry for myself is not going to assist me with anything. I get up and head back to my office, Rivonia smiles when she sees me again and I can't help but smile back. That wasn't one of those 'fake' smiles, this one was genuine.

7 hours later

Usually some people will feel grumpy after a long day's work and will want nothing more than a shower and a bed, but not for me. After I headed back to the office I dug up some information and did background checks on both Reverend Zono and Tshego's mom. Honestly, it felt like I was reading a book that I didn't want to believe it when it was time to head home. When you love what you do, you'll never have to work a day in your life- I guess Rivonia's quotes rubbed off on me. Since I came here with Troy's car and not my own

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I call an uber to come pick me up. After a few minutes of being in the car, I tell the uber driver to stop the car when I spot a trailer nearby, stepping out I'm hit by Deja Vu. I walk to the trailer and smile to myself, the prices have not changed a bit. I order two of their finest meals, pay and head back to the car. The driver starts the ignition and I simply cannot wait for Troy to taste one of these.

After what seemed like the longest 15 minutes, I walk into the apartment and head straight for the kitchen.

"Babe! Is that you?" He calls out from the bathroom, sounds like he's shaving his beard... again. My hairy love.

"Yeah its me!" I say and start microwaving the food, the way I'm so excited I don't even want to change my clothes. He appears with a towel over his neck and nothing on his chest, not even his charm will derail me from this meal I tell you.

"Hey Nay, what's this?" He says and hugs me from behind, he smells minty.

"I want you to taste it first before I can tell you." I say and hand him his plate. You'd think he would skeptical or something but nope, he took a large bite and tried to make sense of the flavours he was tasting.

"T you're just going to eat it like that? What if there's a love potion in there?"

"I'd be mad at you for giving it to me only now. Fuck this tastes good. Seriously what is it? Looks like a big sandwich." His sailor mouth is something I'm also working on. He once swore like this in front of momma but that's a story for another day.

"It's called a 'Kota' and yes you can say it's a big sandwich."

"A what?" I chuckle a little and head to the lounge, trust African mothers to embed rules into your head that you apply them even when you're an adult. One of the rules being that you don't eat all the while standing up.

"A 'kota' T."

"Koda?"

"He he, no say it with me... Kota!"

"Kota!"

"Yes, you got it!" I shake my head and take a bite too, it's been 2 years since I've had one of these babies and now I'm just hating myself for waiting so long. Momma used to bring them every month from work, and I remember how Tshedi and I would jump for joy and jump some hoops the next day. Losing my figure was not on my to-do list. She used to buy them from some old lady who, too, wanted to make ends meet. I loved

their sisterhood and how they kept supporting one another, mom used to buy from her and she'd babysit Tshedi when momma had to work double shifts. Unlike some patients where momma used to work, the old lady never underestimated momma because she was a general assistant but applauded momma for looking after her family despite the trials and tribulations she went through. Of course now that Tshedi is 15 he doesn't need a babysitter but she still comes over nonetheless. None of them work anymore but their friendship is still going strong.

"Babe? Babe? You alright?"

"Huh? Yeah I'm good. What uhm... what were you saying?"

"Oh. Well I was just telling you how Miracle is making headlines for her albino cub."

"Oh gosh! I wish I could see the cute little thing." I completely forgot about Miracle. He then shows me some snaps of him; the cub and Miracle. The lioness may love Troy but it loves it's cub even more.

"Adorable is an understatement. Anyway how was work?"

"Rather not talk about it. Too long, too lawful, you get the point. How's your kota?" I try to change the subject. Talking about Tshego's mom possibly being labelled a murderer didn't

sit well with me. I bet it wouldn't sit well with Tshego either, if she was here.

"Shit this thing is the bomb! Can I feed to the animals? I see there's some sausage and French fries here."

"What? No! Maybe not." I warn him again and again until he agrees with me. I don't want to be held responsible for some animals getting ill or something.

I get up to clean but he says he'll handle it, as a way to thank me for bringing him the 'magical sandwich.' That gives me time to take a shower and change into my pajamas. It's still Autumn you know.

"Babe you know what I was thinking, how about you teach me some of your words." He says as he gets in and sits on the bed.

"Words?"

"Yeah your 'kea go rata' and shit."

"Oh you mean setswana? I'll teach you a few if you can refrain from cursing."

"Shit okay. Shit! Shit! Okay I'm sorry and shit! Shit! Okay I'm sorry and... yep." I laugh at him and make a mental note to pray for him, seriously.

We get in bed after turning off the house lights and checking if the doors are locked, momma's tendencies not mine. We lie down and look at the ceiling as I begin talking.

"Okay uhm... 'dumela' means hello."

"Oh! Dumela Naledi!"

"'Dijo' means food."

"My baby brought me some delicious dijo today!"

"He-he okay uhm..."

"Wait how do you say I love you?"

"You said it earlier."

"I did?" Shame the poor thing.

"Yes! It's 'kea go rata'."

"Oh... I just heard you saying it to your mom on the phone yesterday I didn't know it meant that."

"Why do you want to know that?"

"Because kea go rata, Naledi Mapulane."

"Lenna kea go rata, Troy Lane."

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"What the? What mom does that?"

"I know I know but that's not the disturbing bit, the disturbing bit is that she is now on trial for the 1st degree murder of the very same pastor she ran off with."

"What are you gonna do?"

"Unfortunately I cannot tell you that, you know... congeniality and all, but I am still digging up everything. What surprises me the most is that age specifically asked for me even though she could have had legal assistance from another private firm."

"Holy shit!"

"T."

"Shit sorry. It's only the 4th of May and you're dealing with a murder case. Big ups to you Advocate Lane."

I smile inwardly when he mentions me with his surname. We might be coming on our 2nd anniversary but I strictly told him that I'm in no rush especially if the both of us are career driven folks. Marriage is a beautiful thing yes, but forcefully getting married because your life clock is ticking away or because all your friends are engaged derails society from the real reason behind two people binding themselves forever. The time will come though, maybe in a few ye...

"Nay you sure I can't just drive you to work?"

"T we talked about this. All my male colleagues are there to work not stare at my butt. Besides, I think you've already made it clear at work that I'm yours and you are mine."

I place my index finger on his lips when he wants to rebuttal with the word "but" coming out of his mouth, his insecurity was cute at first but now it's turning into a problem.

Anyway no time for that, I grab my water bottle and laptop bag to my parked car with Troy following me like a bodyguard from behind. I open the door and I'm instantly hit by the vanilla scent of the car, of all the flavours I could have bought I chose this one. It just smells like momma's cookies, which reminds me I have to go check on her this weekend. Tshedi will not trouble her while I'm around, seems like my brother forgot who I am.

"T can I get the keys now?"

"Give papi a kiss first." We are at the apartment's parking lot where anybody can just pop out of nowhere and Troy is busy asking... no, demanding affection. I wrap my one arm around his neck and give him a baby kiss while my other hand is trying to reach for the keys. When he seems to be into it I quickly grab the keys and head for the door, but he starts chasing me and I end up running for the elevator instead.

"Okay T enough! I'm going to be-"

I couldn't even finish my sentence because he just started tickling my abdomen. At this point we're both on the floor and he's still tickling me, I surrender and promise to kiss him properly if he can just stop. He lies on top of me to pin my arms to the tile floor.

"Okay time to kiss me now. Where did you think you were going running away from a former basketball player huh?"

"I still outran you grandpa. The only reason you caught on is because-"

He silences me once again with a kiss so passionate that the old lady that stepped out of the elevator and saw us, will probably sue us for public indecency.

I push T off me and fix my suit and hair as if the act hadn't happened.

"T look what you've done. Now that old lady will never greet me again. We probably traumatised her."

"It's not like we were naked and besides, we basically showing her what she's been missing. Maybe now she can get a man instead of a gazillion dogs."

I painfully nudge his arm and head to my car but this time he's not following me, the last thing I heard before I drove out was; "I love you!"

I'm already running late to be early. Yes I'm running late to be early, you read that right. I've always been late during my schooling years so I vowed to always be on time in my adult life and I have definitely been living up to my promise. I've also lived up to my promise to never eat brownies again, after Dr. Bob told me that I had weed in my system. I decided not to tell Troy about them since he looked perfectly fine while my eyes were playing tricks on me like I was high or something.

You know when you think of something and you start laughing alone? That's exactly what I'm doing now that I'm waiting for the street light to turn green. Troy is going to get us kicked out of that apartment if he keeps up with this charade. I can't believe he said that about that lady... which I inwardly agree with.

The light gives me the go-ahead and I turn on the radio to make the drive less lonely. Once I got my driver's license, that I had been procrastinating about, I just found it odd to travel alone. The radio takes the loneliness away.

"... and that's all from the loove doctor. Catch y'all same time same place on the love repertoire. Peace and love!" I chuckle as I remember the day Tshego and I were late for class and hit that poor pregnant dog on the way. I can't believe he's still doing his shows despite his viewing rate being below 10%. He loves what he does I guess.

I lift my hand from the steering wheel to glance at my watch, but instead of looking for the time I gaze upon it and watch as the sun, that's illuminating through the passenger's window, reflects on the rose gold coating of the watch. I always wear her watch when I'm missing her and today is the day- especially considering that I'm meeting her mother under unorthodox circumstances.

My thoughts are interrupted by a call from Troy, weird. I thought he was at the game reserve. I place my phone on the passenger seat and put it on loud speaker.

"So you still mad at me?"

"No... actually yes. We need to go apologise to that lady, seriously T."

"What? Nah I ain't doing that shit."

I sigh and ask him how can he be calling me when he's at work. He prefers to carry no electronics with him when he's bonding

with his African babies. That's why he named the game reserve: 'Africa Meets America Game Reserve' which I found adorable.

"Oh I meant to tell you, my mom is flying in from home to come here and see Miracle."

"Oh... well that's sweet." I slowly swallow the lump in my throat when I think about her. She may be sweet in front of Troy but I can detect when someone does not like me, and his mom is one of those people. I think she's disappointed that her son is dating a South African girl

"Yeah and this will be the first time y'all meet face to face. None of this video call shit."

A cop car appears on my rear view mirror and the traffic officer indicates that I should pull over to the side of the road, I gladly oblige and tell Troy that I'll call him back.

"Nah we ain't done talking. I'll wait."

Okay. I see him get out of his car and approach mine with a big smile on his face, a part of me is telling me to floor it but that would just have dire consequences so I pull out my driver's license and wait for him.

He rests his arm on my half-opened window and leans in to talk directly at me. Tall fellow.

"Hello. O sharp? Hape gwa fisa mo (are you okay? It's hot here)."

"Yes I'm alright officer. Is there a problem?"

"No no no sister. No problem. It's just that it's really hot and you took a long time to recognize me behind you." Not to offend anyone, but his breath was too husky to believe that it's only 8 in the morning.

"Oh, I'm sorry I guess. I'm just running late for work. Here's my license and registration."

"Yeah I can see that. I can also see that you're a pretty woman, that would look even better on my mattress. Unfortunately duty calls so hook me up with something for a cold drink and we'll call it even sweetheart."

"Excuse me?"

"You're excused."

"A demand for a bribe from a government official is against the law. Good day sir."

"Oh you're one of those? Let me give you a present ousi waka (my sister)."

He takes my license and heads back to his car then comes back and hands it back to me with a folded peace of paper. Soon after he leaves is when I realize that the folder paper is a

speeding ticket. What?! I wasn't even speeding. I am not paying this ticket! Over my dead body. He got mad that I didn't bribe him for something I didn't do and now I have to suffer for it.

I hang up on Troy and continue driving, Tuesday morning ruined!

I race inside the prison to the commander's office. I called him yesterday and made an appointment (for formality) to meet with one of the inmates. Prison is not a home to anyone, not even the baddest of the bad. As soon as I'm let in by the guards, the smell of pee and smoke hits my nostrils I find it hard not to gag. I'm led to the visiting room and I try to make myself comfortable for what I'm about to encounter.

The sound of a prison cell opening echoes through the dirty dark walls of the place and through the door, a slim; short and dark woman gets in and sits opposite me. She puts her handcuffed hands on the table and stares at me. Her gaze makes me uncomfortable so I slightly shift on my seat and get my head in the game.

"Miss Emmarentia Kethe."

"Miss Naledi Mapulane."

I can't help but get emotional when I see her, she looks just like Tshego- except she has short hair, a slim body frame and lifeless eyes that I wonder what happened to her. She looks way different than the pictures Tshego showed me.

"Miss Kethe. I will be the attorney handling your case, employed by the 'Jacobs & Attorneys' firm. Now I read up on your case yesterday and I must say, I don't envisage any problems here but we need to utilize the fact that..."

"Plead guilty."

"What?"

"I want to plead guilty to his murder."

"Miss Kethe I assure you that I might be new to the field, but I..."

"I know you are, but this is not about your expertise. I just want to serve my sentence, I did it and I should pay the price."

I sit back and throw my pen on the notes I took yesterday. What is going on here? I'm just trying to understand what is running through her mind. I know it's a bit far fetched, nonetheless I can sense that she is not guilty. This is not her doing, and if so why is she throwing in the towel?

"Miss Kethe-"

"Naledi listen to me. You need to convince the judge ukuthi (that) I'm guilty. It's the only way."

I was offended at first because I thought that she doubted my skills but now, I think her life is in danger. Could it be that someone is forcing her to plead guilty? Is there someone that's waiting to hurt her outside these walls? Is she protecting someone? Does she want to plead guilty because her actions caused his death?

I have too many obtrusive questions that are unanswerable, or at least the person who can answer them does not want to spill the beans. Before I can reiterate, my phone vibrates yet again with Troy's name flashing on the screen. I know he wants to talk about the 'traffic officer' incident, which is why I switched my phone to vibration after 7 missed calls from him. I decide to turn my phone to silent and come up with a way to go about the situation with the Zulu woman in front of me.

"Miss Kethe, do you know who Tshego is?" Her face lights up with astonishment.

"Ye-yes. She's my daughter, your friend."

"At least we agree on that. Do you know that she ran off 2 years ago? The police confirmed that it was her handwriting on the note they found at our old apartment. She left without a

trail and never contacted me again." I wait for her response which I hope will convince her to work with me.

"Ini?! (What?!)"

"Yes, and do you know that she was this close to obtaining her law degree and getting her grandmother a beautiful tombstone for her grave?"

"Ma?! Don't lie to me Naledi. Ma is still alive and I know it. There's no way she could've... she could've died. No."

I roll up the sleeve of my blazer to show her the watch that her daughter left behind, she goes mute but her body language tells me that she's still in denial. I stare at her for way too long to detect if she's acting for me or she's genuinely confused that her mother passed on years ago. I pick up my phone and head to Google to confirm what I'm talking about. The local newspaper wrote an article about her mother when she passed on due to her bravery in the apartheid era and her countless contributions to her community. I stand from my seat and show her the article. Once she saw it, the guard that was inside nearly had a heart attack and so did I, she screamed so loud her cry echoed through the walls of the room to the end of the hall. Her bloodshot eyes widened with pain as she kept scratching her hair as if it was infested with fleas. I thought she knew, where did she and the Reverend run off to? Under a rock? She knows I'm her daughter's friend but she doesn't know that her

mother passed on? She doesn't know that her daughter is M.I.A.? Something smells fishy here and it's not the urine scent from the cell next door. Still though, losing a parent is torture- I know this from experience. I try to comfort her but the guard says we cannot come into contact, drama much?

Since she's still in a state of shock, I tell her we'll resume our conversation on our next meeting. My last words to her before I exited was; "We're pleading not guilty, and that's final."

Technically the client can plead guilty especially if they themselves acknowledge their crime, but something is still telling me that the multiple stab wounds on the Reverend's chest had nothing to do with her.

I'm on my way to the office but before that

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I stop at one of South Africa's favourite cafés: 'Mugg & Bean' baby! Those coffee cakes and blue berry muffins are to die for, pun unintended.

While I'm waiting for my order, I pick up my phone and go to my contacts to call Troy. Those 7 missed calls turned into 12 for the last half an hour and I now feel bad that I ignored them.

"Nay? Nay are you okay? Fuck, talk to me!"

"I'm fine T. I was in the middle of a meeting which is why I didn't see your missed calls."

"But then you hung up on me while you were in the car. Who was that fucker and what does he mean by 'give you present'? Nay you cheating on me? What the fuck is going on?"

I take a deep breath and tell him I'll talk to him later. I know it's wrong to keep him in the dark, but as long as he's upset there's nothing I can say that will make sense to him. I grab my coffee and double fudge chocolate cake to go, hop back in my car and drive on. This is going to be a long day.

I settle in after having my heavenly breakfast, of which Rivonia stole a few bites from, and get to work. I give Mr Cornish the update from my meeting and then head to my office to do some more research, my water bottle and my laptop are ready for me. If I start taking off my blazer and rolling up my sleeves for a case then you should know it's about to go down.

Stretching my neck like I'm about to go to war is one of the many gestures I do before I devour information like a mad woman. Unfortunately, my work was cut short by Troy stomping into my office with Rivonia following and calling out for him.

"Sir! Sir! Sirrr! If you don't have an appointment then I'm afraid-
"

"It's okay Rivonia. Troy is my..."

"Husband! Now leave us alone I want to to talk to my wife."

She doesn't move until I nod at her, off she goes to be 'the face of the company'. Now Troy may be a handsome guy, but he just turns a bit ugly when he's mad- and a little scary. I'm not absolutely terrified of him though, especially now that he's staring at me with sweat dripping from his forehead.

"T, sit down."

To my surprise he takes a seat but he's still keeping his eyes on me. I close the door and then get back to my seat.

"First of all, you had no right to shout at me like that especially when I told you the reason behind me missing your calls. Secondly, I'm not cheating on you- your insinuation hurt me deeply because I've never given you a reason to doubt my loyalty. Thirdly, the traffic officer I encountered earlier 'gifted' me with a speeding ticket because I wouldn't bribe him."

"Say what? Well what was all that shit about his fucking mattress?"

"T. Language."

"Okay sorry. So what was all that shit about his fucking mattress ma'am?"

I sigh and stand up to sit on his end of the table so that nothing can stand in between us. He looks up to me and I remember the time when he came over to the apartment so that he can accompany me to the doctor. He hasn't changed a bit, he still has the curly hair and the caramel skin tone despite the exposure of the sun when he's busy at the game reserve.

"T you need to calm down. Some traffic officers, in fact, some men here in SA are sexual perverts without even trying. Nasty comments have become a normal amongst us ladies when it comes to our beauty or our body shapes. You know exactly what he meant by that so I won't explain it, what I do want to know is that do you still record your calls?"

"Yeah so that I can make some of your voice calls a custom ringtone. He-he, right now my ringtone is when you say 'I love you papi'."

"Good. I'm going to need a copy of that voice call recording. It won't be my word against his word. It will be his word against his word. This bribe thing from government officials needs to come to a stop, Officer Mthembu being the first one."

"Mthembu?"

"That's the traffic officer's surname. I saw it on his badge when he was talking to me."

"Oh."

I know he wants to apologise but he doesn't know how to go about it. Men, pride is going to kill you! I just peck his lips and go back to my office chair.

Rivonia steps inside looking horrified, whatever she's about to tell is not good.

"Miss M? A word?"

"It's okay Rivonia, you can talk in front of him. What's going on?"

"I just received a call from the prison you went to and it's Miss Emmarentia Kethe."

"What about her?"

"She tried to kill herself."

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"Come again?"

"She tried to commit suicide after you left. You've been requested by the hospital."

"Oh, because I'm her attorney?"

"Because you're the only person she's willing to talk to. I'll get you the location."

She nods and steps out to the front desk, leaving me with Troy yet again who, not so long ago, had a face of an angry mafia. I start clearing my throat and grabbing my blazer and other essentials I need.

"T can we talk about... everything later?"

"Errr, yeah sure I'll see ya' at home." I can see the he doesn't know what to say so I nod and he heads out too. Hectic.

Anyway, I bolt out of the office and rush to the front desk to grab Rivonia's sticky note that had the address of the hospital on.

Sweating, I get in the car; start the ignition; reverse out of the parking lot; punch the location in and throw the speeding ticket at the back seat. I feel so reckless right now, but I quickly snap

out of it and buckle my seat belt. Through the rush and the adrenaline I completely forgot about my safety belt, luckily I have a signal that mocks me every time I become careless about such.

'You have reached your destination.' Siri says and I pull up to the hospital I passed by when I went to the prison for the first time.

I get in, and I'm instantly hit by the aroma of pills and cleaning products I cannot fathom. I remember when I was in the hospital after hearing about Tshego's disappearance. You know, I'm starting to think that the Kethe family keeps bringing me back to hospitals.

"Hi. I'm Advocate Mapulane I came to see Miss Emmarentia Kethe."

"Just go over to the 2nd floor and turn left there."

I nod and go as directly told, upon arriving I spot her lying on the bed. I may be facing her backside but I can tell that's her, and she's the only one with handcuffs and a guard beside her.

I knock on the door and she slowly turns her head to face me with bloodshot eyes, looks like she's been crying.

"Miss Kethe."

"Naledi."

I tell the guard to give us privacy and then sit down carefully as if sitting down roughly will cause the energy in the room to be imbalanced.

"So..."

"Am I a bad person Naledi?"

"Yes."

"Wow."

"I'm sorry but I had to tell you the truth, okay to be honest you were a bad person. I think now you are just confused, misdirected."

"You're not even going to lie a little bit. Haii sisi. (sister)"

She chuckles for the first time ever since I've met her and I can't help but smile at that, Tshego really does look like her mother.

"I... I just keep thinking that u'ma died a disappointed parent 'yaz (you know), I know she did. I've lost my mom and umntwana wam' (my child) is nowhere to be seen. Heee, you've really outdone yourself Emma."

She claps her hands in the air but instantly curses under her breath, there on her left wrist is a bandage wrapped around it.

She must've triggered the pain by the handcuffs touching the wound.

"Why'd you try to-"

"I deserve it."

I sigh and release the inner preacher in me. I throw in powerful quotes, Bible verses and life opportunities. Life is full of second chances, and this is her second chance.

"I understand. I thought attorney's were just heartless brutes."

"Not all of them. Here's my number in case you need to talk or anything. I was serious Miss Kethe, we are pleading not guilty. The hearing is in two weeks and don't even remotely think that that's enough time. I'm still digging up some info and all

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but so far I've been getting one idea. Something you want to tell me mama ka Tshego (Tshego's mom)?"

She smiles then sighs to herself. I've struck something when I called her that.

"Brother."

"Huh?"

"Hello Miss, who are you?" A short, dark woman appears on the doorway with a clipboard in her hand and a stethoscope around her neck. She must be her doctor.

"I'm Miss Kethe's attorney, Naledi."

"Oh, well pleased to meet you. Is she talking now?" She asks with a forced grin and turns to her. Emma doesn't even smile or move an inch. When the doctor gets no response she clears her throat and reads the notes on her clipboard.

"Miss Kethe, your results came back and I foresee nothing wrong, aside from your status. You will be released tomorrow just so that I can monitor you overnight. If you need to talk, I can prescribe you to the hospital's therapist. Other than that, everything looks good, a nurse will come in later to change your bandage and you should be set for the next hour or so. I will check on you when I do my rounds again."

"Thank you doc."

She asks the guard to uncuff Emma. She checks her wrist then the guard cuffs her wrist again and heads out but before she does that I notice something.

"Doc? Why is her injured hand handcuffed?"

"She's a danger to herself ma'am. We-"

"Doctor had you checked you'd see that Miss Kethe is a left handed, stable woman. Even if she wanted to do it again, she will fail dismally. Also, there's a guard that's going to be with her for the whole day, and I fail to detect anything in this room that might serve as a weapon. An inmate slit her wrist not her, so may you please at least release the handcuff off her injured hand or I will drag you to court for endangering a patient's life. We all know the left hand is connected to the heart."

Her mouth stays wide open and she calls the guard outside to uncuff her hand. She then stomps out and whips her weave in between her strut.

"Eh..."

"We're pleading not guilty. See you later mama ka Tshego (Tshego's mom)."

"Thank you. Wait, aren't you going to ask?"

"About what?" I ask and then stand up to leave.

"Status?"

"Status? Oh, I know you're HIV positive ma. It's okay."

"Oh?"

"Yes. Bye Miss Kethe."

"Bye star." I stop to smile and keep walking out.

Stepping out I notice that the weather has changed, from a sunny, cool day to a windy, freezing one. The Autumn leaves rattle as they keep getting pushed down the street by the wind. It's so cold, its almost like its the flu season. Autumn and winter are almost the same here in South Africa.

I quickly get in my car; put the heat on and drive on back to the office, something about what she said triggered my memories. I remember reading about the Reverend's brother but I didn't give it much thought. Time to dig.

I spend about 5 hours researching and tracking phone numbers and it all paid off because I finally found the Reverend's brother, and his numbers.

I inhale then exhale before a deep voice on the other end says "Hello."

"Hi. Mr.Thulani Zono?"

"Yeah."

"I'm Advocate Mapulane and I'm Miss Emmarentia Kethe's attorney. I'm sure you already know that she's on trial for the murder of your brother, Reverend Jeffrey Zono?"

"Ha! Yeah I know."

"What's so funny? You're still hurt that she rejected you?"

"What? How did you know that? Did she tell you that crap?"

"I have a medulla oblongata and a laptop to help me connect the dots."

"Whatever! What do you want?"

"I need you to tell me why you told the police she killed your brother when you specifically told the media that you didn't know her."

I can see that the call is still going, this is not what I was hoping for. I was hoping he'd retaliate and just blab out information about... well anything. I didn't want to ask this question for the first time in court, I wanted to ask him now so that I can see who I'm dealing with. With this information I have, I already know that he's been going and skipping anger management classes for the last 10 years. He would go when his anger got him in trouble and would eventually stop when he feels better or when the public has forgotten all about him. Don't get this twisted, they're not famous people or anything but the Reverend's death did make it to one of the local newspapers and I hope it ends there. If this turns into a scandal, then there's a slim chance to none that Miss Kethe will walk free. Trust me, I did more than just find his numbers.

"You think because you work in a white man's office I'm scared of you? Think again sisi (sister). I don't answer to no woman mina (me); u'Emma made her choice so she must face the music. Ungenaphi nge past yam? (where do you fit in my past)"

"What do you mean by-"

Tuuuuuuuuuuuu!

The line goes dead. I put the telephone back to its original space and start thinking. Something tells me that I struck a

nerve and he's probably going back to those anger management classes, if he does then I'm screwed.

After hours and hours of doing some more diggings, the intercom rings and says; "Miss Mapulane, please come to the front desk."

I've been avoiding Rivonia a little bit, not because I'm trying to be rude but because I'm scared she's going to tell me more bad news or updates about this case. With every minute that passes by, new information keeps popping up but it only causes more questions and then resets my work back to square one. I made an appointment to meet with the detective that was at the scene of the crime and we plan on meeting up tomorrow which is a 30 minute drive from here. I don't mind though, I just hope it's worth it. I also have to update Miss Kethe about the information and how I tend to use it in court. By the end of this week, we are to appear in front of Magistrate Diale to plead not guilty. Then he'll give us a hearing date where we have to go head to head against the prosecutor and also prove to the magistrate that she is not guilty of the crime.

I realise that it's time to go home so I head to the front desk, as per requested, with my laptop bag and not forgetting... my water bottle.

"Hey Naledi! There's someone I'd like you to meet. Babe, this is Naledi, one of my friends here and Naledi this is my boyfriend Victor Vilakazi."

I look at his extended hand that's reaching out to me and I hesitate, but eventually shake it and revert my hand.

"Nice to meet you Mr Vilakazi."

"Nice to meet you too. I just came by to pick up i'dombolo lam (my dumpling)."

Rivonia blushes and takes her hand bag when the other receptionist pitches up to take over.

She waves me goodbye and heads out to the parking lot, I'm just blankly following them with my water bottle on the verge of falling out of my grip. How could this be?

She waves one more time as she climbs into the familiar black car I saw years ago, and it drives off.

I too climb into my car and buckle my seat belt like a zombie would. It's only when I'm on the road that I start remembering that he didn't have a wife nor kids, I start remembering that he's Mr V's brother. What a coincidence! Don't get me wrong

I'm not judging her, it's just that I never thought I'd see his 50 year old self with a 28 year old woman. If you get what I'm talking about. Well, what matters is that they love each other; (hopefully) so I make a mental note to apologise to Rivonia tomorrow, for the dramatic act. I just thought that I'd never see him again, I also make a mental note to ask him how Mr V is doing. It seems like just yesterday when he called Tshego and I 'mamas' with every sentence that comes out of his mouth. Heck, I remember almost making a fool out of myself when he asked me... I don't even remember the question, then Troy came to the rescue.

I start feeling bad when I think about how I've been treating him lately. Yes, my work takes up my time but not enough that I neglect him. He's been there for me and I know that he's also going through a roller coaster of emotions about his mother flying in. You'll know soon enough why that is.

As I drive in the apartments parking lot I try to see if I'll see him at the window of the kitchen, drinking or doing something. I just miss him so much all of a sudden. A genuine smile creeps up on my face and I hurry out of the car to the elevator, how odd that today out of all days it goes slow. Leaving the old rust bucket, I start climbing the stairs and with these heels I'm wearing it's very difficult to not fall on the hard cold tile. When I

reach the 3rd floor I'm already panting like I'd just run a marathon, am I out of shape? My body may look healthy but the exercise is in the 'junk status'; I can't remember the last time I took a run or hit the gym. I will start exercising though, next week.

I open the door and find my boyfriend of close to two years kissing our neighbour on the couch at the lounge. I didn't even need to clear my throat, my heels did the talking. When they realize they are in the midst of my wrath, Troy turns off the television and fixes his lifted up shirt. The neighbour is just standing there looking like an idiot.

"Oh please please don't let me disturb you

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I was just heading to the shower anyway. I don't believe we've met, hi I'm Naledi. T's girlfriend." I extend my hand with a big smile on my face.

"Uhm, I'm- I'm Nancy Diale."

"Oh! Are you Magistrate Diale's daughter? The judge there by the High Court?"

"Ye-yes."

"Oh well it's really nice to meet you. Well let me not keep you, go on doing whatever it is that you were doing."

As soon as I reach the bedroom door she bolts out of the apartment like how lightning would, maybe she needs to go use the bathroom.

Anyway, I take off my uniform and step in the shower. The hot water cleanses the bad energy away, and I then turn off the water when my skin starts to wrinkle. Long shower.

I lotion and dress in my pajamas despite the clock saying that it's only 17H00, I don't know about you but when I come from work I get straight into my night wear. Troy is on the bed just staring at me, I wonder what his problem is. He looks like he's about to apologise or something.

"Babe can we talk about this?"

"T are you still mad about the traffic officer incident. It wasn't my fault you know."

"I know it wasn't, and look I'm sorry for pinning the blame on you. May that fucker's soul not rest in peace, Amen."

I chuckle and drag my sleepers to the kitchen, I always open the fridge to see if it looks any different than how I left it in the morning, expectations will be the end of me. He follows behind

and leans on the kitchen counter close to the sink, did he bump his head or something? I look over the sink and notice two plates with half eaten ribs and french fries, I can't believe they didn't leave some for me. Assuming that he's already full, I just make myself a cold bowl of my favourite cereal. I keep tasting it as I'm heading to the lounge but turn around again, forgot the sugar.

"Troy are you okay? Why are you following me like this? Stop, that's creepy."

"Troy?"

"Isn't that your name?" I laugh loudly at myself for asking the rhetorical question.

"Errr... yeah but-"

I walk over to the lounge and sit on my favourite couch, the one they were making out on. I move the two wine glasses before putting my feet up on the coffee table, thank you momma for blessing me with beautiful toes. They look so pretty in pink.

I then look over to Troy who's looking at me like a wet dog and just grab the remote to watch my favourite soapies. He's just sitting there, watching the television, well more like the television watching him. After the last soapie I clean up and

lock all doors, check all windows before kneeling down to pray and slowly drifting off.

"Nay."

"Troy I want to sleep."

"It's not what it looked like."

"I hope when you lose me, you'll know that it won't be what it looks like."

"What do you mean by that?"

I ignore him and snuggle in the blankets to help keep my body heat up. It's so cold. He walks out and I hear him opening a bottle of whiskey before downing it in one go, he then throws himself on the couch and continues drinking.

Hours pass and I still can't get myself to sleep, I keep tossing and turning but nothing. I don't know why but seriously, I'm fine. When I think about it, it's almost like I've been mentally preparing myself for it, I don't know whether it's based on the fact that I have been cheated on before or I'm surprised that someone as handsome as Troy can stay loyal to one girl. I don't suffer from low self esteem and Troy has never given me a reason to doubt his loyalty, until tonight.

The images of him and 'Nancy' keep replaying in my mind, which is probably causing my insomnia at this late hour.

I glance over at my phone and it's a a few minutes to midnight. Maybe praying will help. Good thing he's not in here so that if I feel like crying I can just burst out in tears. He must've slept at the lounge on the couch.

After a long prayer I feel much better but my heart is still heavy. Maybe I should have just let him go when I had the chance, maybe I should have just kept him in the friend zone, because now I feel so much pain that keeps doubling with each passing minute. My job made me calm down and not attack that girl or throw objects at Troy when I caught them, having a criminal record as an attorney will not look good on my record. Now that I think about it, it makes me scared that I can get such evil thoughts about someone. I was ready to hurt them both, seriously, and I still do.

I glance over at my phone again and it read that it's now 17 minutes passed midnight. New day. New adventures. New boyfriend.

I've been awake for an hour now and with the way I'm feeling, I might just call in sick. Unfortunately, that will be a bad move on my part in terms of this case. Something else is preventing me from getting up though, and sooner or later I'm going to have to face the music. Troy really disappointed me, it doesn't matter whether it was just a kiss or that he's been faithful through my drama, the fact is he promised me. He said it himself that he would never willingly hurt me. This isn't even him hurting me, this is just pure disrespect. I'm too soft and that's on me. When I said "New day. New boyfriend", I didn't mean that I'm leaving him but he needs to know that I cannot be taken a fool. History cannot and will not repeat itself. You'll know when you're genuinely in love that it's not easy to just up and leave, especially when your partner stood by you through thick and thin. Just like my favorite movie line, 'I'm deciding to be with him for all the things he did right and not leave him for the one thing he did wrong.' I've decided to give him my forgiveness before he even asked for it. Love is weird.

I finally get up but instead of showering, I just brush my teeth and head to the lounge where I find him asleep with a whiskey bottle in his hand and a picture of us on our 1st anniversary in

his other hand. Unlike last night, I clear my throat almost startling him.

"Huh? What's going on? Nay you okay?"

"Go brush your teeth Troy. We gotta talk."

He smiles and basically runs to the bathroom. While he's brushing, I cleanup a little and sit down to watch something on TV. I switch it off when I find nothing interesting playing and wait for Troy to get back.

He comes back dressed in pajamas too and sits beside me.

"I felt overdressed. So anyway Nay about yesterday-"

"Shut up. I'll talk first then you'll talk okay?" He wide eyes me before nodding several times. I take a deep breath and look up to stop the tears from falling, this might be the second time a man hurts me but it's the first time I actually deal with it head on.

"T. Look at my forehead. There's nowhere where it's written 'stupid' there. How can you do this to me? I've never ever given you a reason to doubt my love to you. I gave you my heart, body and soul then you just threw them back in my face. I know I've been busy with work but that gives you no go ahead to search for a skirt to undress. We talk. You know we do. If you're unhappy with something or... or if you're unhappy with me then you tell me. The truth may hurt but at least I would know

you kept it real with me. What I saw yesterday made me feel something I've never felt before and it wasn't hurt or anything. No, what I felt was rage. Pure rage. I saw red Troy. I don't ever want to see that side of me again which means I'm going to have to leave."

"Leave? Shit! Nay look I'm sorry okay. I'm so sorry babe. It didn't mean anything. She's the new neighbour and I think she saw you leaving yesterday morning so before you came she thought she could introduce herself to you, but you were running late and I felt bad that she's been here for so long waiting, I decided to join her for dinner. While drinking wine, we were so tipsy our faces smashed against each other that landed us both kissing each other."

"Bull!"

"I know how it sounds but that's the truth. Shit! Nay please believe me. That's all that was to it."

"You'd think that seeing you guys make out was the traumatizing bit but it wasn't. What eats at me is what would've happened had I not walked in on y'all. What would've happened if I was an hour late? If I decided to stop somewhere for takeout? What would've happened huh?"

He keeps quiet and leans his head down. His sorry face isn't going to cut it, I've seen enough of them to last me a life time.

"Nothing was going to happen, but I just needed attention."

"You know when you're in the wrong and then you put a 'but' in your sentence then you're no longer sincere. So let me go to work."

I get up and he gets up to hold my hand.

"Okay yeah you're right. I know I would've probably killed someone if I saw you with another nigga kissing so I'm sorry. Babe please forgive me please. As soon as I have coffee in my system I'mma make things right wit'chu."

I stare at him not moving.

"Okay okay I'mma make things right right now. I'll go to her and I'll tell her that it meant nothing and-"

"No don't worry about her. I'll handle her. You gotta do right by me and me only."

"What are you going to do? I mean I don't care but you kind of freaked me out yesterday."

"What do you mean?"

"I read somewhere that if you hurt a woman like emotionally hurt her and she acts dumb or starts laughing then you're dating a crazy and you should move out of the country."

I can't help but burst with laughter at that. He's right though, what happened to me yesterday was a bit scary. It was like I was a puppet and my feelings were the puppet masters. I wanted to hurt her and him so bad. I should definitely pray about this.

"And whose fault is that T?"

"Mine. All mine. So you're not going to leave right?"

"Maybe."

"Shawty don't you do this."

"What did you call me?"

"Shawty."

"Okay I'm leaving." I turn to leave but he gently tackles me to the ground and starts tickling me. This scene reminds me of the elevator incident.

"T stop! Hahaha Haaaaaa! Okay okay okay I'm not leaving. I'm not leaving!"

"You promise?"

"Just as long as you keep yours."

"I swear to Go-"

"Ha ah!"

"Okay I swear to my... Game reserve that I'll never hurt you like that ever again."

"T you need to know that I'm with you because I love you not because I don't have options. However, I will not hesitate to walk out that door if you ever-"

"Never will I ever do that to you. I mean it."

"Okay get off me."

He gives me a smirk and leans in for a kiss.

"Don't even think about it T."

"Okay. I'm just glad you're calling me T again."

"What are you on about now?"

"Yesterday. You called me Troy. I've never been so scared in my life."

I laugh and wiggle off him to go take a shower. Don't worry he's still going to pay. He better start walking on egg shells when he's with me. I'm not going to keep reminding him about it but I will have a firmer tone with him. Ladies! If you ever find yourself falling in love and you're not ready to deal with any form of hurt it comes with, then run home girl. Run until you cannot feel your feet anymore. Same applies to men. There will always, and I mean always be an incident whereby your partner

hurts you, the key is to find a partner worth forgiving and loving again. Follow your heart but take your brain along with you.

I take my shower and put on another black suit and a white top, everyday uniform. Except when I'm in court, I wear a red suit for that one. When I see that it doesn't sit well on me I take it off and wrap a towel around me to go back into the shower again. The suit made my skin itch like it was made out of cactus or something. Maybe it's the new laundry soap we're using.

"Babe can I come in?" Here we go again with the bathroom shenanigans.

"No!"

He gets in anyway and I chuckle to myself before stepping out in my towel. I find him playing a game on his phone and sitting on the toilet seat but his pants are still on.

"T what are you doing?"

"I got bored out there."

"Don't you have to go to work to? "

"No. Sheryl is coming today."

"Your mom?"

"Is she my mom?"

"T we talked about this. You're going to call her 'mom' and you're going to be respectful through and through."

"Fine."

"Thank you."

"How did I get so lucky? How did I get a Shawty like you that's sweet and kind and sexy as fuck."

"T language... but continue." He chuckles and shakes his head before continuing.

"Who's also beautiful and intelligent and spiritual and forgiving and weird and a total miss independent."

I remember a song by Nayo and stare at our reflection on the mirror before singing.

"She's got her own thing!"

"That's why I love her!" T sings and joins in.

"Miss independent!"

"Oh-"

A knock interrupts our terrible singing duo, bad timing. Troy goes out to see who it is then calls for me at the kitchen, forgetting that I'm still wrapped up in a towel.

I go out anyway and find Karabo ravaging through the fridge.

"You need to buy groceries you know?" I say.

"Girl I'm not even-" She nearly chokes on her juice when she turned around to look at me.

"Girl I didn't know you and Troy man were getting it on. It's okay I'll come back later. By the way Troy she likes it-"

"Haaa! Gimme a minute and we'll be on the road in a few."

I give her a warning look to shut up then head to the room to dress up. She follows me and we start talking about a bunch of nonsense in the bedroom.

I hug Troy goodbye before heading out with Karabo to my car. We get in and we fight a little that she should buckle her seat belt before we take off. She's not going to endanger her life while I'm around, no sir!

"Tell me again why you aren't driving yourself to work?"

"I lost my keys." I give her the look and she reinstates her lie.

"Okay I just wanted us to spend time together. You've been so busy I feel like you don't love me anymore." She says as she dramatically sheds a tear or two.

"Oh K-baby! I'm so sorry. You aren't the only one I've been too busy for."

"Who else?" I decided to tell her what happened last night and boy did I not prepare myself for what she did next.

"Troy did what?! Hold up wait a minute! He kisses some thin ass bitch then you go on and give him some morning glory? I taught you better than that Naledi."

"First of all, there's no call to insult her like that. Secondly, I was in the shower and not giving him any...morning glory. Thirdly, I will deal with her properly after work."

"After work? No we going to her house right now."

"She's our neighbour."

"Say what?! Lord why me? Let's go now! Turn around so we can kill the bitch!"

I chuckle and make her calm down a little bit. Otherwise she's going to cause herself, and me, a heart attack.

"Relax. Besides, I'm not killing anyone I'm just going to talk to her."

She puts her hands up in surrender before climbing off the car but not before she says that I need to make a statement to Nancy later.

I drive off to my work with a lot of questions in my head, not about Karabo but about Troy's mom. This is going to be awkward for the three of us, and I know for a fact that she's

going to be staying with us until she gets home. I just hope that she's not the person I've painted her to be.

I get in and tell Rivonia I'm heading out again after updating Mr Cornish about the case. I head back to my car and drive to the detective's office that was handling the Reverend's murder. He might be a key witness he might be useless to the case, either way this drive is definitely going to be worth it.

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I don't even have time to describe the office and how the building has an exquisite taste in decor. I just tell the receptionist that I'm here to see the detective and she escorts me to his office after about 5 minutes.

I'm met by a tall, muscular man with a few grey hairs on his head and a brown suit on his back. This is my ultimate goal when I reach his age, be so healthy that my age shocks people.

"Detective! Hi I'm-"

"Advocate Mapulane. I recognize that sweet voice from anywhere. Please have a seat."

I don't know how to feel about that but I let it go and take a seat.

"Detective. I don't need to tell you why I'm here and what what. I just need to know what happened or what you think happened."

"There was a third person."

"Huh?"

"There was a third person at the scene of the crime. Lab results are still ruling out possible DNA but it looked like a strip of long black hair. Miss Kethe has short hair and Reverend Jeffrey Zono was a bald man."

"Wait a minute, so what does this mean?"

"If it's not Miss Kethe's hair we found at the scene of the crime, then that means that the killer is still out there."

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"Okay mamma. Lena kea go rata (I love you too). Okay bye bye."

I hang up the call and throw my phone on the passenger seat. Breathing in and out, I just stare at the leaves rustling in the wind and several shoes stepping on them. This case keeps getting harder each passing day, and I'm now stuck between a rock and a hard place. I hold the steering wheel and lean back to think, most of my productive thoughts happen in the shower and in my car anyway.

After the detective told me of this third person 'possibly' had been at the crime scene, my heart just skipped a beat. I asked him why my client is even on trial for the Reverend's murder but he kept giving me vague answers.

Long black hair. Long black hair? It could just mean nothing. I mean, the body was found in a hotel room with Miss Kethe in the bathroom. Although the the hair was found in the bathroom, Miss Kethe has short black hair, or did she cut it after the murder? No. I've already concluded that she did not do anything so suspecting her of foul play will bring me back to square one. The Reverend has many enemies which is why it's so difficult to pinpoint who did this to him. My initial thought

was that the Reverend's brother, Thulani Zono, had his reasons to do it. One, Miss Kethe was his crush but she ended up fancying his brother instead. Two, his brother was making more money than he was. Three, based on the background information, the Reverend has always achieved and been favoured more than Thulani has. Inequality causes hate in children's hearts, which is a lesson some South African parents are refusing to learn.

Anyway the detective has agreed to keep me updated on further developments, maybe by the time the trial begins the lab results would've brought us the blatant truth. I think momma could sense that my spirit was troubled when I was in the detective's office which is why she called 'just to check up on me'. I swear, without that woman's prayers I don't know where I would be today. I told her that I will be coming home this weekend, and that I love her. My line of work is too gruesome for me to be blabbing the cases I receive to momma. She already had her doubts when I chose to study law, I don't need her to start telling me to quit. I love what I do just like how dad loved what he did.

Back to the present, I just start my car and head back to the office to do more research. Before I turn left to where the office is, I decide to turn right and go pay Miss Kethe a visit. As

her lawyer, I should tell her the updates of her case so that she's in the loop. Perhaps she can tell me who was with them that night.

The same procedure happens whereby I fill in the visitors form, get my pass and wait for her to come through the door. Unlike last time, it took a bit longer for them to bring her but I push the thought aside and place a smile on my face.

She sits down and reciprocates the smile before I clear my throat and start talking.

"Miss Kethe. I hope you are doing well."

"What's with the formality ngoku (now)?"

"Miss Kethe. I said I hope you are doing well." I wide eye her and she looks at the prison warden behind her before turning back to me and putting a straight face on.

"I'm fine. It's prison, not church."

"Right. Miss Kethe, do you know the detective that was there the night of the incident?"

"Yes. Errr... I think his surname was Mpanga or something."

"Detective Maphanga yes. Well, I went to him today and he gave me some interesting updates partaking the case."

"Yes?" She sits up from her slouched position and shallows.

"Well, I was hoping you can tell me if there was anyone at the hotel room with you and the Reverend that night. I say this because they found a long strand of black hair in the bathroom sink."

"It's a hotel Miss Mapulane. People have used the room way before we came."

"You're not answering the question. Was there someone there with you or not?" "Not."

"Are you sure?" "Yes."

"Okay that's fine. We'll wait for the lab results to confirm your statement. By the way have you had any contact with Thulani Zono recently?"

"Thulani Zono? Bhut' ka Jeffrey (Jeffrey's brother)? No. Why?"

"Just asking. Anyway please prep for Friday when we appear in front of Magistrate Dialect okay? This marathon is far from being over. Have a good day."

"Yeah. You too."

She is led out of the room, glares at me one more time then disappears in the darkness of the prison walls. Waisting no time, I too stand up and head to my car to go back to the office. Thulani will strenuously deny that he had anything to do

with the murder so we should be war-ready to deflect his words. It's the only way.

I've been at this laptop for an hour now and I'm starting to get a migraine. Why? Oh I don't know, maybe it's because I haven't eaten breakfast this morning!"

I check the time and realize that it's lunch time, which will be breakfast time for me. I get startled by my phone vibrating on my desk, it's Troy.

"Hey!" "Hey babe. What's up?"

"Nothing. What's going on?"

"Nothing." "Troy Sebastian Lane."

"I'm on way to pick up Sheryl from the airport." We both keep quiet for a few seconds, just listening to each other's background noise.

"Okay. Be careful on the road and uhm... please apologise to her for me that I'm not there to welcome her."

"Nay this is hard. Shit!"

"I know but remember what we talked about? Be nice and respectful."

"I'll try. For you." "Works for me. I'll see you later."

"Later. I love you." "Love you too."

This is going to be a long afternoon for him. Imagine being this blue because your mother is coming, yoh! I'm still not saying anything, you'll see later why we are all dreadful that she's here.

After talking to Mr Cornish, I managed to knock off early from work. I did not want anything bad to happen at the apartment without my knowledge. Racing to the door I pause and look at my neighbour's door, I forgot that I still have to talk to Nancy. That can wait though, right now I need all the heavenly angels to be with me. Maybe I will speak to Nancy now. I knock on her door and wait for her to answer it. She opens it with a smile that quickly turns upside down when she sees me, an orthodox reaction I suppose. She reluctantly let's me in and I walk in and wait for her to close the door. Everything is happening in slow motion right now, I don't even know what to say. She signals for me to take a seat on her singular couch. I sit and look sound while she's possibly pouring a drink for me at the kitchen.

"Uhm... Nancy? Don't trouble yourself, I won't be here long!"

She stops what she was doing and comes to sit at the lounge too. I haven't had the time to properly analyze her, she's a beautiful coloured girl I must say. A little bit shorter than me too. "Nancy-"

"Mrs Lane." "Mrs Lane?"

"Uhm yeah... I thought you and Mr Lane were married."

"Even if we were, that still didn't stop you from kissing him didn't it?" She bows down her head as if to hide her shame.

"Look Nancy I didn't come here to attack you. I'm not that type of person. Troy is the one in a relationship, not you. He's still paying for what he did but I'm not going to leave him. Not even for you. I get that it was a 'mistake' but I don't take kindly to any form of betrayal. My mercy has limits and you do not want to see the limits of my mercy. Okay?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Honey we're almost the same age. Call me Naledi."

"Y-yes Naledi. I'm sorry about everything. I don't even know why I keep doing this. I... I'm just sorry. I have no evil agenda or any interest in your man."

"I know. Look I have to go but uhm... here are my numbers if you ever wanna talk."

She takes the piece of paper and does something I never thought she'd do, she stands up and hugs me. She hugs me for a long while and really tight. She even cries a little bit. After the 'hug' I bid her goodbye and go over to my apartment door. That was awkward yet satisfying.

I open the door and close it behind me and go to the lounge where I spot Troy's mom and some lady sitting beside her busy on her phone.

"Babe you're home early." He says and pecks my lips.

"Yeah I had to. Afternoon ma."

"Afternoon."

"Uhm... mom this is Naledi, the one for me. Nay this is my mom Sheryl and that is-"

The lady stands up and extends her perfectly manicured hands.

"Hi I'm Blandina. Troy's ex."

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"Uhm... excuse me." I say and start limping to the bathroom in Troy and I's bedroom. I barge in and throw my laptop bag on the bed, just to rush into the bathroom and close the door behind me. When I feel like my blazer is suffocating me, I take it off and throw it in the laundry basket. I don't know what's going on with me but I'm hyperventilating and feeling a little claustrophobic in this bathroom.

I suddenly have the urge to relief myself and when I do, I realise that I'm on my menstrual periods. Damn! The surprise I just received drove me to my periods, drove me to my 'bloody' nightmare. What in the world is Blandina doing here? When I was racing home, I was expecting to see Troy's mom, not Troy's ex! Well played Sheryl, well played.

"Babe! You okay?" He says as he softly knocks on the door.

"Yeah! Yeah I'm good. I'll be out in a sec!"

"May I come in?"

"T, I know you're used to not listening to me when I'm in the bathroom but seriously, I'll be out soon."

"Okay. I'll let you be... for now. Can we talk through this darn door then?"

"What's up?"

"Nay I know what you're thinking. I took your advice and I was nice through the whole ideal, even when Sheryl dropped the bomb on me."

"Okay."

"Babe I need you to say the word. One word and I'm kicking her out of here. Just let me not be nice for today."

"Errr...no. It's fine. Is she going to be staying here as well?"

"She's here for the night."

"Then it's okay." I say as I force the words out of my mouth.

"Babe you sure? One word Nay."

"It's fine T. She's here for the night and she doesn't know SA that well."

"What about Sheryl? I have a way to make her stay for only one night too." Something about how he said it didn't sit well with me.

"It's okay T. She's here for 3 days so don't worry. It's all good."

"You sure you're not too good to be true?" He chuckles.

"He he. Maybe I am."

"Let me give you space. I love you okay? I mean it."

"Thank you."

"Say what?! I'm not afraid to break this door you know."

"Haha! I-I love you too!"

When I hear his footstep fading followed by the bedroom door closing, I finally breathe out. Luckily the bathtub is in the guest bathroom and the shower is in here because a hot shower is definitely what I need.

After the shower, I kept throwing clothes on the bed to see which one is comfortable yet 'respectful'. I settle on my grey Nike tracksuit and my brown ankle boots.

I keep my afro as it is and gaze at my reflection on the mirror. Is my butt really that big? Oh Lord my thighs! My stomach is fine but my lower body needs some calorie burn. I've always been a thick lady but this will not do.

I include get out of the bedroom and head to the lounge with my tail between my legs. I find Sheryl watching Judge Judy on the TV, she doesn't shift her gaze until I sit down and clear my throat.

"Uhm ma... I'm sorry about earlier. I just needed to unwind."

"Oh that's okay sugar. It must be difficult to keep your high blood pressure under control."

"High blood pressure?"

She smiles at me and turns back to the television. What does she mean by that? I don't have high blood and I don't remember mentioning it to her or anyone.

"Errr... ma? Where's T?"

"T?"

"Sorry. Where's Troy?"

"Oh he went out with Blandina to go get us some takeaways."

"Oh. Well, let me get you something to drink in the meanwhile."

"I'm okay sugar. Troy offered me a drink earlier. It wasn't my style but I drank it anyway. I'm good."

This woman is impossible! It's so strange because in movies, African American's are these prayerful, kind and compassionate folk. Sitting before me is an African American woman that, I can tell, is not going to get along with me. However, I will remain respectful because she is the woman that gave birth to the man I've come to adore today. Plus my mom would literally come flying here to smack me and knock some sense into me.

"Okay ma. I'm just-"

"Ma? No sugar just call me Mrs Lane. I feel old when you call me that."

"Right. Mrs Lane, may I please make a quick call?"

"Go ahead sugar. You'll be giving me some space to breathe, this apartment is way too small. As a woman you should convince him to get a big house, especially now that he's making headlines."

I fake a smile and nod twice before brisk walking to the bedroom. Lord give me strength. I was thinking about getting Troy and I a house to live in instead of an apartment but then I'll just be disrespecting myself. I already moved in here and I'm already performing wifely duties around the apartment, getting a house is something I plan on doing after Troy and I are in that state of settling down. A couple of years more should do the trick.

Anyway, I go to my call log and notice that I have a missed call from Troy. I didn't need to make a phone call, I just needed to breathe for a few before heading back. My screen flashes again with his name and I answer the call on the second ring.

"T?"

"Babe! Hey we got Debonaires Pizza for dinner. Are you okay with that or do you want something else?"

"Wanting something else would seem kind of rude wouldn't it? The pizza's fine, just hurry back okay?"

"Sheryl driving you crazy already?"

I keep quiet while he's laughing on the other end. He then stops laughing when he notices that I've grown quiet.

"Alright babe. We're on our way."

"Bye."

I reply to messages on WhatsApp then throw my phone on top of the bed. The amount of blows my phone has gotten over the last 2 years

it's surprising that it doesn't have a scratch on it.

I grab my courage and open the bedroom door to go to the lounge again, but this time Sheryl isn't there.

"Mrs Lane?"

"In here sugar!" She calls out from the lit guest bedroom. It may be 5 O'clock, but it's already getting dark outside which isn't at all surprising. The winter season is upon us.

"Oh hi sugar. I thought I'd start unpacking to save you the trouble."

Unpacking? Save me the trouble? I wasn't going to unpack her clothes, especially if they come in large quantities like this.

"Oh. Thank you?"

"You're welcome. Sugar you don't mind if Blandina and I stay here do you?"

"I don't mind but I should talk to Troy first."

"That's alright, he won't mind. If he gives me lip I'll let Blandina talk to him."

"Oh. Errr... Mrs Lane? How long are you planning on staying? I'm asking so that I know whether I should take time off work or something."

"A week. If that's okay with you?"

Lord knows I wanted to say; "No, that's not okay! You told Troy and I that you're going to be here 3 days but now for some reason it's a whole week, with Troy's ex at that!"

I somehow composed myself and told her that it wouldn't be an issue. While she's unpacking I see the designer clothes from her clothing line. Yes, she's a fashion designer. Which is why Troy's style of clothing is always on top, except for his weird shoes. Like today, he wore a black jean, grey shirt with some print on it, a leather jacket and GREEN SNEAKERS!

"Hey you!" Troy says as he hugs me from behind. I didn't even hear him come through the door.

"Hey!"

I greet Blandina too since I never got the chance to earlier. We all head to the lounge and they start digging in. I silently pray before taking the hot slice and taking a bite. The cheese stretches out and i just feel at peace with it. They talked about childhood memories while I just smiled awkwardly and listened.

After dinner, Troy went to take a shower and Sheryl was fast asleep. Although we have a dishwasher, I felt like washing dishes today, maybe to soothe my anxiety... I don't know. I start wiping the plates and with the corner of my eye I see Blandina approaching the kitchen.

"Hey." She says while fiddling with her indigo silk night dress.

"Hey. Are you cold? Do you need more blankets?"

"No I'm okay. I'm used to the cold, it snows like heck back home."

"Oh okay."

She continues to fiddle with her night dress until she finally speaks up.

"Listen Naledi. I know how awkward this must be for you, it's awkward for me too but when Sheryl offered me an additional ticket to come here, I couldn't resist. I've always wanted to see the great sites of Africa and to see Troy again. After tonight,

I'mma head straight for the hotel downtown. I read about it online and the 5-star rating sits well with my stature. By the way, Troy and I are just unlikely friends. Anything romantic between him and I happened years and years ago. I just wanted to make things clear."

"Did you rehearse this?"

"Every fucking word!"

"It's okay Blandina. It's fine, maybe when I get a day off I can give you a tour for you to see North West."

"That would be great! By the way what do you do?"

"I'm an attorney. You?"

"Super model. Can't you see the way I strut my stuff?"

We both laugh and continue our conversation until I was done washing the dishes. She was great company, I'll give her that.

What struck out for me is that Sheryl bought an extra ticket for her, and never told us that she's bringing someone along. I can't help but feel that she brought Blandina here on purpose. Maybe to make Troy and Blandina rekindle their relationship or try to ruin mine. Either way, hell would freeze over before I let that happen.

I use the guest bathroom and take a long, hot bath before heading to bed where I find Troy completely topless.

"Are you okay?"

"Are you okay? You're not wearing a shirt and it's so cold."

"The shower got me hot."

I roll my eyes and join him but instead of instantly sleeping I check my e-mails to see if I have any important ones.

"Work in bed? Come on Nay!"

"Give me a second."

He grabs my phone and climbs on top of me.

"If you want this phone, you're going to have to work for it."

He smashes his lips against mine and I obviously respond with soft moans in between. When the kiss gets heated, Sheryl barges in and ruins the moment.

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She stares at us without moving a muscle, I look up to Troy and he's just relaxed with no worry nor embarrassment on his face.

"Oh! Sorry for disturbing y'all." She says as she clears her throat and escapes the trance she was in.

"What do you want ma?" Troy says in an annoyed tone. Sheryl ignores him and turns to me.

"Sugar I was just wondering if I could get an extra blanket. That bedroom is colder than a cemetery."

"Sure. Errr... I think I have one for you."

"Great. Thank you."

She closes the door and heads back to her room. Although that was invasion of privacy and she should've knocked, Troy and I laugh it off. I get up and go give her my pink and white winter blankets. I bought them when we moved here. After a brief moment I head back to the room and close the door.

"It's okay T. It wasn't even going to happen." He smirks when he gets the idea.

"That time of the month?"

"No. Your mom is in the other room and you're still on probation."

"You're so cute when you lie."

"I'm not lying!"

"You're on your periods and let me tell you how I know. One is that your emotions are all over the place, you're a woman that does not usually show emotions unless you're vulnerable, like how you kept holding your stomach throughout dinner.

Another thing is that you bathed at least 4 times today and spent so much time in the bathroom. One more point is that your boobs are bigger."

I sigh and fold my arms in frustration, I even get a little shy while I was at it. His eyes don't leave me and I find myself blushing, weird. I really do love this tall, handsome, animal-lover of mine. He pats a free space next to him before I get in and cuddle close to him. We watch a bit of his favourite series on Netflix before dozing off.

I wake up early to make everyone breakfast since I felt bad that Sheryl had to eat takeout on her first day in South Africa. I made a simple breakfast of French toast with scrambled eggs, sausages and a fruit salad just in case.

"Morning y'all!" Sheryl walks in on Blandina, Troy and I eating in the kitchen on the bar stools.

She wraps her silky gown around her before sitting and indulging the food in front of her with her eyes.

"Oh this is lovely. See why I had to teach you how to cook son?"

"Actually ma, Nay made this." He says with a mouthful and smiles at me.

"Oh. Well it's great sugar but maybe next time you can lay off the grease."

"Errr... sure." I fake a smile and push my plate aside before gulping my coffee in one go.

"Troy squeezes my thigh in reassurance and they continue eating, well more like they ate with Sheryl giving me more criticism about almost everything.

"Ma. If you don't like the food then don't eat. It's simple."

"Troy are you talking to your mother that way?"

"Are you my mother?" He says casually and takes another bite of the toast.

Sheryl gasps and stomps to the guest bedroom before shutting the door behind her.

It's okay. It's fine. You got this Naledi, just... don't blow your top and you'll be fine.

After breakfast, I go to the bathroom to take a shower and leave for work. Not forgetting my water bottle.

Before I left I told Troy to apologize to his mother for disrespecting her like that. I didn't want to get in between their conversation, but I think they found common ground. Hectic.

Troy took Blandina and Sheryl at the game reserve to go see Miracle's albino cub this morning. I can't help but feel like her calling me 'sugar' is condescending. Is she trying to say I'm fat? I mean think about it, she made a remark about me having high blood pressure yesterday, then made another comment of the breakfast having too much grease. Even though she would have never said it had it been Troy who made breakfast. I thought having Blandina over would be nightmare but so far it's 'Mrs Lane' who's giving me a hard time.

It's okay though, I prayed about it and asked God for direction with this one. Besides, I have a ton of work to do to distract me from... everything. I walk in to the front desk and catch Mr Cornish staring at Rivonia while she's on the phone with probably a client. This old geyser is truly disgusting. Anyway, it's not like anyone has noticed it so I smile at both of them and head to my office. The remaining place to keep me sane from the shenanigans of my life. Now I really can't wait to go home-home and maybe get some advice from momma on how to go

about the situation with Sheryl, maybe momma is the direction I asked from God.

Speak of the devil, momma calls me and I answer almost immediately.

"Momma."

"Ngwanake (my child). Go tsamaya yang (How's it going)?"

"All good momma. How is everything ko gae (at home)?"

"Haii ngwanake (my child). Tshedimogo is going to be the death of me."

"What did he do now?"

"Naledi, Tshedi o nale girlfriend (he has a girlfriend). Heeeee!"

I can't help but laugh at mom. That was fast though, 15 years old and he's already chasing girls? Jeez! Or maybe that's how it is now?

"Momma relax. He knows what's right from wrong."

"Does he?"

"What do you mean? You gave him 'the talk' didn't you?"

"I did but I never thought he would do this thing he's doing now."

"Wetsang (what is he doing)?"

"Ngwanake (my child)

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your little brother is now a thief. O utswa di TV (he steals TV's)."

Tshedimogo Mapulane! Since when is he a thief? Does he know what the community will do to him if he's caught red-handed? They don't care if he's only 15, they will beat him up and if not that, then momma will have to face the music. How ironic is it that I drag thieves to prison yet my very own brother is a thief himself.

"Momma please don't tell him that I'm coming on Saturday. I want to talk to him."

"Hey! That will be great ngwanake (my child). You would've helped me a bunch."

We bid our goodbyes and I just lean back on my chair to think. I don't usually do this but I start swinging on it. This Thursday morning began on a wrong note but I am determined to make this a productful day. I push myself closer to the desk and get to work.

"My phone rings as I'm about to head back home. Unknown number? I answer it anyway, it could be a client or something.

"Hello. Advocate Mapulane here."

The only sound I hear is a bit of shuffling before the line goes dead. I try to call the number again thinking maybe the network cut us off. No reply. Well if it's an emergency then they'll call back.

Reaching the front desk, I say goodbye to Rivonia and Victor (her old old old old- okay I'm sorry. Her boyfriend), and get in my car. Reminder: I need to make sure that Miss Kethe is still determined to see this through.

I park my car at the prison but before heading out, I catch a glimpse of the speeding ticket I got the other day. Imagine me paying R250 because I refused to bribe a traffic officer. What a joke! I see that the court date is tomorrow, the same day of the hearing. I am ready for him.

I get inside and wait for the wardens to escort her here. She gets in and I notice her eye bags and tired demeanour to even walk. Prison really isn't for the faint hearted.

"Miss Kethe. I just came to see how you are doing."

"I'm doing okay Naledi. Just nervous for tomorrow you know."

"I know. It will all be well, we can do this! The road is only going to get bumpy so I suggest you hold on okay? Hold on momma ka Tshego (Tshego's mom).

She faintly smiles at me and we further discuss tomorrow's agenda. Upon conclusion, we go our separate ways. I hold my blazer close to me and sprint to my car, it's still cold remember.

Time to head home. Yay.

I never thought I'd be one of those people that dread to head home, but here I am. Troy kept updating me through the whole day on what they were doing. I know that they are now eating out to some seafood restaurant. He offered to pick me up, but I lied to him and said that I was still in the office. I guess I just want him to bond with his mother, perhaps this day will be the start of a mother-and-son relationship they both never had.

I get home, take a quick shower and drink a few painkillers for the menstrual cramps. The apartment is already clean so I just defrost the boerewors and grill two. The garlic and paprika scent fills up the house, I almost feel sorry that Troy is missing out.

I put the wors in a hot dog bun, and spread the tomato sauce and barbecue sauce paste on top. Just as I was pouring myself some juice, a knock disrupts me. That can't be them, right? Unless they are 'fast eaters' or brought take out.

I want to go change this black top but I leave it and go open the door. The reason why I wanted to change was because the top is a crop top jersey that goes with the tracksuit pants. It was a bit warm inside.

Anyway I open the door and I'm met by Troy's friends, Oscar and Thabang.

"Hey guys! What's up?"

"Dumela (Hello) boss lady. Boss man said we should drop these documents today." Thabang says.

"Oh. I will be sure to give him. Thank you."

"Errr... boss lady? What's that smell?"

"Oh I'm grilling."

"Eish... weitsi (you know) boss lady, Oscar and I haven't eaten since yesterday."

"Yeah we've been feeding off the animal's love all this time." Oscar says. They both hold their stomach so as to suppress their 'hunger pains' and I invite them in.

I close the door and place the documents on the bed before heading to the kitchen, only to be horrified by what I see.

"Hey! Those were mine!"

I shout at them and fold my arms in annoyance.

They stop chewing and keep apologising. I just chuckle and take out four more boerewors and start grilling.

"Ah! Ah! Ah! Boss lady! Hape this is tickling my fancy. Kere (I'm saying) it's sending shivers down my spine. Hey! My toes are curling in excitement! Ah!"

I look at Thabang trying to comprehend what he was saying.

"Don't worry about him. He's been reading novels." Oscar says before munching on his food, staining his shirt with the sauce.

"Boss lady! Boss man knows how to pick a woman. At least we know boss man won't starve."

I laugh at him and continue pouring juice for them. No wonder Troy enjoys their company there at the game reserve.

"Thabang just call me Naledi. What's boss lady?"

"He's too forward this one." Oscar says.

"Okay wena (you) you're too backwards then." Thabang says leaving Oscar's mouth wide open.

"Thabang nare wareng nare (what are you saying)?" Oscar asks.

I laugh and leave them arguing in the kitchen, I just heard a soft knock while they were debating.

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I open the door and find Nancy fiddling with her jacket zipper.

"Nancy."

"Hi Naledi. You busy?"

I invite her in and direct her to where the boys are.

"Hey guys! This is Nancy, my neighbour. Nancy this is Oscar and-"

"Thabang Kekana!" Nancy finishes my sentence.

"Nancy Diale." Thabang says and stands up from the bar stool to face Nancy.

They stare at each other creating this thick atmosphere and at that moment, every living thing grew dead quiet.

Everyone is still not saying anything nor moving a muscle. Nancy and Thabang just keep looking at each other as if they are hypnotised or something. I clear my throat and assist all of them to escape the mini trance they were in.

"Nancy. How about we talk in the lounge huh? Does that sound great?"

She agrees and starts walking behind me all the while still staring at Thabang. She blinks several times before sitting down on one of the couches. I want to analyze her but with the way things turned out in the kitchen, I hold my tongue and wait for her to speak.

"I'm so sorry about that Mrs Lane."

"Naledi." I correct her.

"Naledi, I'm sorry about that. Thabang is another one of my exes."

"Oh. That must've been awkward for you then."

"Not as awkward as it was a year ago when his girlfriend caught us in bed together."

"..." I open my mouth to say something only to close it again.

"Yeah, I was speechless too. This is the problem that I have, going after men that are already taken. Sometimes I wouldn't even know that they have girlfriends, I would eventually find out when I'm at the mercy of their partners."

"When did this... thing of yours start?"

"Damn! I'm sure it's been about a decade now. Since the beginning of high school."

"Have you talked about it to anyone?"

"Not really. I didn't think it was a psychological factor."

"It might as well be. Did you suffer any trauma or something along those lines?"

"I... I don't think so. I don't have suicidal thoughts or depression. I'm actually fine upstairs. The problem is this curse of dating taken and even married men." She keeps explaining more incidents and keeps wiping a tear every time it escapes her eye.

"You know one day, there won't be a girlfriend as forgiving as you. One day I'm going to meet a guy with a girlfriend that's going to take me to a sangoma (witch doctor) or kill me or-"

I hand her a tissue and she blows into it before continuing.

"I know how it sounds, this isn't psychological anymore Naledi. This is a curse."

"Power of the tongue Nancy. Stop saying that. When was the last time you went to church?"

"I'm an atheist."

"Oh." I didn't expect that.

"Sorry uhm... I better get going. I wanted to hang out but I can see you're busy. Rain check?"

"Yeah. No problem." I fake a smile.

"Thanks. You're really easy to talk to."

She gets up and keeps her head down till she reaches the door to go out. Hectic.

I head to the kitchen and find Thabang and Oscar laughing at something.

"Uhm... you guys mind excusing me. I have a case to prepare for."

"No progress boss lady!" Thabang says.

"Progress?"

"Yeah. Errr... boss lady? Nancy-"

"It's non of my business Thabang. I don't even want to know." I interrupt him.

"Oh sure sure! I just want you to know gore (that) I'm a changed man boss lady. Serious."

Oscar laughs so hard, tears abruptly fall down his face. He keeps stomping and clapping his hands like a retard.

"You? Changed? Haaa! Don't do that boy. Yoh! Heeee!"

"Voetsek Oscar! Boss lady dankie (thanks) for lunch neh. Sure." Thabang says and hugs me goodbye before heading out. Oscar just waves at me and continues laughing down the hallway of the flat. I just chuckle and eat what was left then cleanup and get to work.

After two hours, I finally feel like I'm prepared for any possible contingency for this case. The lab results are the only things standing in my way to solving this jigsaw puzzle.

Still in thought, Troy and Sheryl get in laughing and head to the kitchen. I close my laptop and follow the laughter.

"Who does that? I would've told him to finna get up out that car!" Troy says.

"Seriously. South Africans are so stupid!" Sheryl says with in between chuckles.

"Ma really? You had to go there? Argh!" He says and catches a glimpse of me standing behind them.

"Babe! You're here?"

"Yes. I'm here. I knocked off early to prep for tomorrow."

"The Reverend's murder?"

"You were listening?"

"I always listen attentively when you talk babe."

"Oh. I just thought with the developments that keep popping up, you might just assume that South Africans are... I don't know, stupid." I smirk at Sheryl who looks rather annoyed.

"Sugar how are you?"

"I'm okay Ma."

"Sugar I said call me Mrs Lane remember?"

"Ma please call me by name then. It's very simple even a stupid South African can say it. Na-le-di."

She grits her teeth and forces my name out of her mouth.

"Then I am great Mrs Lane." I smile and turn around to continue with work in the bedroom. Troy gets in and high-fives my hand before taking a shower. Since I was prepared

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I just simply double-check some documents. Blandina came in later to take her bag before leaving with a couple of friends to

the hotel downtown. I guess her bubbly personality gained her some friends. Sheryl must be disappointed.

I receive a call from an office number which I answer almost immediately.

"Hello. Advocate Mapulane here."

"Evening. Yes. This is Detective Maphanga. I'm calling in connection to the Reverend's murder case."

I sit up and swallow the lump in my throat.

"Y-yes?"

"The lab results are back. Would you like to know over the phone or in person tomorrow?"

"I'd like to know over the phone. I will be busy tomorrow." I say without even thinking twice.

"I understand your anticipation. I've been waiting for them too, I've even missed 5 episodes of SpongeBob Squarepants because of these."

I laugh at his statement and tell him I've missed them too.

"Right. Well, the hair we found at the scene of the crime belongs to-"

"Hello? Detective? Hello?"

Argh! What now? Why? It's not even load shedding.

I don't know why but I just grab my keys and head to the front door. As soon as I'm about to get out of the apartment's door, Troy grabs my hand.

"Whoa! Where are you going?"

"To the detective's office."

"Say what?"

"He was about to tell me something but the call got cut off. I don't know if it's a power shortage in their part or not, either way I'm going to find out."

"Is what he wanted to say that important to the case?"

I blankly look at him and he goes to the bedroom to grab sweaters for him and I.

"Let's go!" He grabs my car keys and opens the door for me.

"T, it's okay. I-"

"Naledi, I said let's go."

Okay, he called me by my full name. I oblige and we both race to the car and out of the flat's front gate.

On the road, Troy is driving and I'm still trying to call the detective's office. My heart is pounding right out of my chest. I just hope nothing happened to him. Tell me why is his office 30 minutes away? Argh!

.

We arrive and my heart drops as I see the red and blue lights illuminating the night sky. Ambulances and cop cars?

No.

No.

NOOO.

I didn't wait for Troy to stop the car, I just unbuckled my seat belt and sprinted inside. I pass the reception and race to the detective's office. I'm met by a bunch of men at the door with white gloves on and assorted suit colours.

"What's going on?!" I disturb the commotion.

They all look at me and one of the men recognizes me from the earlier visitation this week.

"Advocate? What are you doing here?" He asks.

"Detective Maphanga was about to tell me an update partaking the Reverend Zono's case an hour ago but the line died before he can tell me. What's going on here? There's a freaking helicopter outside, even the media is there!" At this point I'm yelling at him.

"Calm down ma'am. Someone attacked Maphanga earlier. The paramedics are trying to resuscitate him."

"What?!" I shout and startle both him and the men at the detective's door.

I push him aside and wait by the door, the police tape restricts me from getting inside. Troy rushes to me and holds my waist from behind. He then wide eyes something. I follow the direction of his eyes and there on the floor in the detective's office lies Detective Maphanga. His chest has been stabbed multiple times and blood is oozing out of his wounds, eyes and open mouth. The paramedics keep putting bandages over the stab wounds to stop the bleeding. Then they said something that echoed through my ear canal so as to haunt my realization.

"Time of Death?" One of them asks.

"19:17

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"I... I don't know. Maybe it's connected, maybe it's not. Can I just go home already?"

"Just a few more questions ma'am." The detective says.

I sigh and hug myself to suppress any body heat leaving me and causing me hyperthermia. My tears keep glistening with blue and red lights of the ambulances and police vans. You should have seen how Detective Maphanga's wife was crying, it was so heartbreaking. She cried so much, she passed out. The 3 men followed their mother, who was in an ambulance, in their own cars and I kept getting interrogated by the police. They took Troy elsewhere, I guess to see if our stories correspond. This night couldn't possibly get any worse. Yes. It can. The documents carrying the lab results are missing, and so is the hair. How convenient. This is going to be difficult for me to crack.

I can see Troy talking to someone on his phone, probably Sheryl. I painfully close my eyes when I remember that we left her alone at the apartment. We're totally going to get it. What I also notice is some of the women that are on duty keep glancing over at him, undressing him with their eyes. 'Thirsty bitches' is what I say inwardly. I would never swear with my

mouth, I can't even do it. I feel dirty when i swear, but for these girls that keep looking at my man I might just get a whole lot dirtier.

Soon after the detective writes something down, he stops scribbling and looks up. Troy is behind me and looking at him dead in the eyes.

"Detective. If that will be all, we'll be on our way."

"Actually-"

"I wasn't asking, I was telling. My wife is traumatised and tired and yet you keep bombarding her with these fucking useless, repetitive questions instead of looking for the perpetrator."

"But sir-"

"But nothing. Come on babe, let's go."

He grabs my waist with his one hand and opens the door of my car with his other for me to get in. That poor detective, but I'm glad Troy came to the rescue. I too would've blown my top. THE women that kept staring at Troy look disappointed when he gets in the car with me. Yeah! Y'all better know! Anyway, he gets in; starts the ignition and drives out.

"You okay? Argh, wrong question."

"No, I'm fine. Just really sad for the detective's wife you know?"

"Yeah, it was pretty intense. Poor woman. Losing the love of your life is dangerous."

"Dangerous?"

"Yeah. Imagine waitin' on your love to come back home from work and just when you're ready for them, you get a phone call that they've been murdered. I would never recover from that."

I smile at him and hold his left hand while he's driving with his other one. A thought crosses my mind though, my line of work is getting more lethal with each passing day. God be with me.

He drives on and misses the turn.

"T, where are we going?"

"You'll see."

"What about Sheryl?"

"She'll survive. Right now, you're my priority."

He gets off the highway and starts driving on a gravel road uphill. I want to ask, but I keep quiet and choose to trust him. Think I might've even squeezed his hand a little. He keeps driving up the hill towards a cliff and stops the car when he gets too close.

"Uhm..."

"I wanna show you something."

He opens the door for me with a blanket over his shoulder.

Okay. He's acting weird.

I reluctantly get out and when I peek my head, I'm met by the view of almost the whole city. The view is so breathtaking. I can hear the cars hooting and some faint club music down below. The flashing lights of every house, building and car just adds the cherry on top for this view. The air up here is even more fresher.

"Come on get on top." he says.

I climb on top of the car and face the view of the city. He then plays some soft RnB music on the radio and comes to join me. I grab the blanket and cover both of our legs.

"Wow. This view is so incredible." I am astounded really.

"Look up."

I raise my eyebrow and shift my gaze skywards. The stars are so visible, and it's a full moon! Am I dreaming?

"Pinch me."

"Say what?"

"I need to know that I'm dreaming, so just pinch me."

To my surprise, he pinches me on my arm and I softly punch him on his arm.

"What? You said I should pinch you."

"Well, I didn't think you were actually going to do it."

He chuckles and shakes his head. It's when he chuckles that I see his one dimple on his left cheek. I just lean my head on his shoulder and snuggle close to him.

"I brought you here because I thought you might want to reconnect with your siblings. I don't even know this place but once I saw the hill

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I had to bring you here so that you can clearly see your siblings."

"My siblings?"

He points to the stars and I can't help but smile. I gave him a task last night. I told him that he should find out the meaning of my name, Naledi, without the assistance of Google or someone else. I guess he found out that my name means star.

"Nay, I need you to be careful. This case of yours is getting out of hand. If anything were to happen to you... I..."

I look up to him and kiss his lips before finishing his statement.

"Nothing is going to happen to me. Matter of fact, this case might just be postponed. If the magistrate puts one and two together, they'll see that Emmarentia shouldn't even be in prison. That she didn't kill the Reverend."

"Who do you think did it?"

"That's the needle in the haystack. The Reverend gained so many enemies after his congregation found out that he paid a bunch of people to act like they were ill and disabled so that he can pray and 'heal' them. The killer could be anyone."

"Jeez. So he was one of dem fake reverends?"

"I guess so. Right now though, I don't want to talk about that. I just want to enjoy this incredible view with my incredible guy."

"I am incredible, aren't I?"

"Whatever."

"You know you love me."

"Can't argue with that one."

We both laugh and enjoy each other's company till the sun came up.

We ended up sleeping on top of the car.

I wake up and check my phone, it's 02H34.

"T? T! Come on, let's go back. Sheryl must be worried."

He rubs his sleepy eyes and climbs down the car. I guess I'll be the one driving us back. I help him get in the passenger seat and chuckle when he kisses my forehead 'goodnight.'

Troy and his romantic gestures. That's another thing I love about him, he always knows how to handle me, make me feel better. I'm a sucker for his love, no lie.

By the time we reach the apartment, he's wide awake and even telling me that he dreamt him and I were somewhere tropical with no worries and no stress. Right now, I wish his dream was a reality.

We get inside and he goes to take a shower, I approach to join him but my phone ringing stops everything.

"Babe, you coming?!" He asks.

"In a minute!" I reply back.

I pick up the phone and force myself to answer it.

"Mr Cornish, good morning."

"Morning Miss Mapulane. I trust you heard about what happened to Detective Maphanga no?"

"Yeah. I heard."

"I trust you also heard that the magistrate postponed the hearing for Miss Kethe today?"

"No, no that's news to me."

"Well, they did. In fact, they postponed everything to Monday. If all goes well, they might just release Miss Kethe since she's no longer a primary suspect."

"Really?" I'm so happy to hear this.

"Yes. However, your life is in danger. This aerial killer might strike again so I'm having a board meeting today to ensure that everyone that is involved in this case be provided with bodyguards, or some sort of protection."

"Oh."

We finish our conversation and I promise myself to be on time for the board meeting at 08H00. I was happy at first, but now I don't know what to feel. I have mixed emotions. A bodyguard? serial killer?

I put my phone down and join Troy in the shower, my logical thinking will be activated once I'm at that board meeting.

After the very LONG shower, Troy and I head to the kitchen to make breakfast. I'm making his and he's making mine. Our love bubble pops when Sheryl comes over the kitchen fuming.

"How could you leave me here all alone Troy?!"

"Ma, I already explained to you what happened."

"So you chose to go with your GIRLFRIEND and leave your mother here? Son?"

"Ma are you serious right now? You know what, I'm not having this conversation with you."

He quickly eats the breakfast I made for him and although it was 06H00, he just kissed me on the cheek and drove to work.

I understand how he's feeling though, it's next to impossible to be kind to this woman.

"Errr... Mrs Lane? Can I make you something?"

"No." She flatly says and fixes her gown.

I just drink the coffee T made and cleanup, I lost my appetite either way.

"You know sugar, if you know what's good for you you'll leave Troy alone and just go date your kind."

I nearly choke on my spit after she said that.

"What did you just say?"

"Nothing sugar, nothing at all."

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"Sir. I just think that now that this case is on National News, Advocate Mapulane should step down. It's getting way too big for her and it should be given to someone more... experienced."

"And who might that be hmm?" Mr Cornish asks.

"Me. I will carry this tremendous burden." She says.

'She' happens to be your typical A-star office girl. If there's a problem, she handles it. If there is a case that requires a higher level of intelligence, she got it. She's won over 7 high-profiled cases and lost only 1. I guess she lost that one case, she just kept winning so as to overshadow the one that's tainting her flawless report. I knew her name before I even knew Rivonia or anybody else for that matter. Realeboga Goapele, but everyone calls her Rea.

"Miss Goapele, this is unprofessional. Advocate Mapulane has been educated and trained to handle cases like this. She knows what she's doing and according to her report, she is close to cracking the puzzle no? Thank you. Advocate Mapulane, would you like to add anything."

You know how after an argument you start thinking of fiery clap backs you could have thrown to make you more right?

Not me.

These clap backs came to me immediately, but I somehow compose myself to speak less and observe more. God knows I wanted to tell Realeboga where to get off but like always, I decide to hold my tongue and let the board meeting be concluded.

After the board meeting, Mr Cornish promised to give me a new case since this one has been postponed. Something I can solve quickly with no serial killers or evidential hairs or multiple conspiracies. That was basically what half of the board meeting was all about, everyone had their own theory about the Reverend's case, including Rea.

Based on the hypothesis that I was a small fish in a big pond here, we never clashed heads or gotten into an encounter where we talk to each other.

As I'm heading to my office, she's heading my way too. The whole building is covered with a carpet on the floor but I can still hear her heels scraping when she walks. She's a thick lady, very thick but she loves herself. I love how she embraces her thick self but then the line is drawn there. Other than that, she's... she's just not a good person you'd want to come across okay?

"Advocate Mapulane! Well, well, well. I must say you surprised me." She says with a condescending expression on her face.

"In what way?" I ask.

"Well, Mr Cornish usually takes my side when I speak, because I speak the truth. Today however, he put me on the side line and defended you instead. "

"So?" She's getting on my last and final nerve.

"So it can only mean one thing. You're sleeping with him too."

"Too?"

"Are you deaf?"

"No. I'm starting to think you're blind. You clearly cannot see my worth so why should I worry about your opinion about me? That thing you just said could land you in trouble, I'm not even remotely afraid to point you out for Defamation of Character. By the way, I'm not stepping down on this case."

I look her dead in the eye and pass her to get inside my office, once I'm in I shut the door and take deep breaths. I don't like loosing my cool like that, I save that part of myself for the court not outside of it. Which is why when Sheryl said what she said this morning, I just let it go and joined her into pretending like she didn't say anything. I won't even dare tell Troy because I

know he'll just lose it. That was racist or her, but I'm not sure she was aware of that.

I sit down and think about what Sheryl said, "You should leave Troy alone and just date your own kind."

Her words keep echoing through my head but I brush it off and grab my car keys. I need air. Maybe I should pay Miss Kethe a visit and update her about what happened, though I doubt that she doesn't know yet.

I head to the prison and wait for wardens to bring her forth. The repulsive scent of this prison just never gets old. Anyway, she comes in looking even more drained than the last time I saw her. Due to her postponement, she will have to spend another weekend in here but it doesn't look like she's going to make it till noon.

"Miss Kethe. Are you okay?" I worriedly ask.

She nods her head and deeply sighs.

"Did you hear the news?" I ask.

She nods her head again and wipes a tear with her shoulder.

"Miss Kethe. There's no need to be despondent. Remember, this is a marathon. We are close to the finish line, I can feel it. Just hold on, okay?"

She nods her head again and gives me a painted smile. Why is she not responding with words? Yes

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this is a slight setback but there's still a light at the end of the tunnel. The killer just proved that Miss Kethe did not murder the Reverend. I know the prosecutor will say otherwise but we have the upper hand here, I just hope she sees it. She gets up and smiles at me one more time before going back to the dark hallway leading to her cell. Other people that came to visit inmates can also see that she's not okay. If you ever find yourself in a situation that could land you in prison, by all means, find a good lawyer to get you out. Prison is not for the faint hearted. You will be abused emotionally, physically and even sexually every single time the sun rises until it sets.

I check the one on my phone, it's 12H34. At 13H00, my own court date will commence for the speeding ticket. Wish I had a camera to capture the look on Officer Mthembu's face when he sees the kind of ticket I have in store.

I arrive in court and take all my notes and 'evidence' with me inside. I can see that there there's several of his that are to appear in front of the judge. They divide us so that the ones that need to be solved quickly are one sided, and I happen to

be there. The judge calls out my name was I come forth with my prideful walk.

I stand behind a stand and to my right, the traffic officer is menacingly standing there too. Before the judge can say anything, I link my phone to a loud speaker and play Troy's voice call recording when the officer was demanding a bribe. Even the sexual comment was clear to hear by all. The voice call recording is even echoing in the building, that's how tangible and true it is. Once it finished playing, I put my phone down and put on my serious face.

"Your honour. I didn't pay anything. Just like how I did not do anything illegal. There's lack of actus reus and the mens rea to constitute a crime here. This recording is not risque, but the law enforcement is. I tried to dissuade the officer as you heard in the recording but he persisted in getting a bribe from me. I didn't race off, I didn't forget to buckle my seat belt, my speed was under the limit, my phone that I was calling with was not on my phone so why am I here? Hmm? Why am I here your honour? Why am I here Officer Mthembu? He clearly failed to provide evidence or confession and avoidance. Well, I am not susceptible to any form of corruption- especially from a law enforcement officer who should be the one strenuously defeating corruption. Your honour, officers like Mr.Mthembu need to be locked up as an example to other law officials that

bribing is against law and that you and other judges are practicing what you preach. In this document is a portion of the many bribes he has requested and gotten from law abiding citizens. Thank you your honour."

I've never seen it before but the for the first time ever, the judge is speechless. If you can see him right now, his mouth is wide open but no words are coming out. As for Officer Mthembu, well he's sweating like an athlete after a 60-minute run.

I look over at him and mouth the words, "Got you" before turning back to the judge who looks rather angry after he saw the document.

"Well, I have heard your side Miss Mapulane. Mr.Mthembu, is there anything you would like to add in your defense?"

"Errr... no sir. I mean your honour. It's just that- eish hades (sorry) your honour. I didn't know she was a lawyer. Eish! Errr-"

"Then I hearby find Miss Mapulane not obliged to pay the speeding ticket. Security! Take Mr.Mthembu away.

Mr.Mthembu, you are under arrest for the crime of I bribery on multiple accounts. You say anything in my court and I will add contempt of court on your head. Final wording of your case will be in 3 working day. Case closed!" He pounds his hammer and

calls out for the next case. I smile at the officer one more time before heading out to the office. It's a beautiful day, isn't it?

I'm at the office, trying to see if there could be a serial killer amongst Reverend Zono's circle. The brother? Well, he's been smart... laying low. I look at his profile and check his picture to see if the hair found at the crime scene could be his. Argh! He has short hair, or maybe he cut it.

I look through my laptop and so a history search on the Reverend one more time. I take my time and scroll down slowly until I see something that catches my eye. I display the picture in landscape to clearly take a look.

Wait a minute, the Reverend has a wife? There on the picture is the Reverend and his wife, Precious Zono. The Reverend and his brother, left Kwa-Zulu Natal to come to Johannesburg and make money. The Reverend left his wife, his children and his community to make a name for himself at the City of Gold.

So Miss Kethe was just a side chick? A fling?. Could it be that she-?

Wait another minute, Precious has been married to him for 13 years, Precious has 5 children for him, Precious has a criminal record and most of all... Precious has long black hair.

I... I can't believe it. I actually cannot believe it. This is exactly what this case was missing, a love triangle! Could it be that Precious Zono found out that her husband is chasing after skirts instead of money in Gauteng? When she found out- she resolved into killing him and then pinning the blame on Miss Kethe? Does Miss Kethe even know that there's a Mrs.Zono somewhere? If she did, wouldn't she suspect her first? What if she didn't know? The security camera's were tampered with so whoever did it was not working alone.

I'm getting a migraine just by thinking about all this. As if he could sense it, he calls me.

"Baby, hey." I say.

"Hey babe, you good?"

"Yeah yeah. You?"

"I'm alright. You sure you're good?"

"I'm okay T. Except for how you totally left your mom with me at the apartment this morning."

"I had to get out of there Nay. If I stayed one second longer, I was going to break my promise of being nice."

"She doesn't like me, does she?"

"Errr...no. I mean you know-"

"T, it's okay. I don't like her too."

"You're so sexy when you get mean and vindictive."

"I'm not mean, I mean I'm sexy yes, but definitely not mean."

"So you agree with the sexy part? Okay." He laughs.

"Of course I am. Anyway, I don't want us to disagree on anything since I'm going back to Gauteng tomorrow."

"You know we could just go there and leave Sheryl the entire weekend."

"T!"

"What? Them old ladies there seem to like her (weird), she'll have some company there by the flat."

"No, T. This is your chance to bond with your mother."

"With the old hag Sheryl."

"You know how disrespectful it is in African culture to call an elder by their name?"

"Sheryl! Sheryl! Sheryl!"

I hang up on him and wait for him to call back, Troy is crazy. As I assumed, he calls me back.

"Sheeeryl!"

"Sheeeryl!" I shout back.

We both laugh at our silliness and finish the rest of our conversation.

I gave Mr Cornish the heads up about my new findings concerning the Reverend's case. He said he will look into it, which was kind of disappointing. I don't even know why I'm doing the police's work here but, I'm glad we have a new lead now. I also heard that there's a new detective that's going to take over from Detective Maphanga. May he rest in peace.

The new mission objective is to find out who this serial killer is.

I'm thinking of going to Miss Kethe to ask her a few questions but her mute mood might just make the drive useless. I'll wait for her to let everything sink in.

In the meantime, I can keep digging just in case I stumble upon another lead.

I knocked off early again, that's twice this week... not that I'm complaining.

I wait for him to check my car for any 'odd or unusual things.' Yes, Mr Cornish assigned a bodyguard for me, but only when

I'm at work. He's not a very friendly huge man however, I understand that's he's kind of supposed to look this scary.

I just happened to get the bodyguard with the scar on his face and multiple tattoos on his neck. Black suit, black shoes, black shades, black gun... you get the idea.

"Alright ma'am. The car is clear." He says with a very deep voice. Troy has a deep voice but not even remotely close to this guy. It's kind of scary.

"It's Naledi." I say, hoping to strike a conversation or at least get his name.

"See you on Monday ma'am." He says and walks back inside the building.

Well, you can't blame a girl for trying.

I'm on the road heading home to go prepare something for tonight. It's been a while since I willingly slaved over the stove. I decided to treat Troy to a meal made by yours truly before I leave tomorrow, so he can remember me by. I made the dumpling dough this morning so all that's left is to cook it, alongside sweet potatoes and a thick beef stew. My tummy rumbles just thinking about it!

I told Troy to get me a few things at the mall close to the reserve when he's driving back home. I want to make it just like how momma used to do it for papa.

No time to shower, I just change my suit into a high waist jean, Troy's pink hoodie and my book sleepers. I tie my afro into a bun and get to work. Sheryl went somewhere to see a few African designs she can incorporate with her clothing line.

I connect my phone to the TV and play 'Topsy' by Odunsi & Raye to hype me up. I absolutely love this song

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no lie. It makes you sway your hips and get in a groove mood.

"Topsy!

I'm the only one that want when you got vibrations.

You better get ready, better get ready!" I sing along to it and at this point, I'm dancing more than I'm cooking. This hoodie is even starting to chafe me. Just as in I'm the mood, Sheryl walks in and looks at me shaking my butt to the rhythm. It's not when I make a turn do I instantly snap out of it and stop dancing.

She's just there, holding bet shopping bags with a look of annoyance on her face. I go over to the lounge and switch off the TV. I return back to the kitchen and talk to her.

"Mrs Lane, good afternoon. You look quite lovely."

"Why would you play such ratchet music in my son's apartment? Huh? Are you retarded? The neighbours might file a complaint. If that's not enough, you're busy swaying your big bottom in the space we make food in. Don't do that sugar, it lowers your standards even lower." She exclaims and heads to the guest bedroom.

Like always, I shut my mouth and continue with cooking. I play the song again, but lower the volume so as to 'accommodate my already noisy neighbours.' I open the fridge to get milk and make her tea but close it again when she switches off the music. I go to the lounge and look at her confused.

"Mrs Lane, is there something wrong?"

"Yes. You were born." She says.

"Excuse me?" I ask.

"I have been nothing but nice to you all this-"

"Wait, wait. You have been nice to me? You've been nothing but nice to me Mrs Lane." Please tell me this woman is actually Leon Schuster in disguise.

"Yes I have. Firstly, you've been keeping my son away me. Secondly, you kicked out his one and only valuable true love

out of his apartment. What? Was she threatening you with her beauty?"

"Mrs Lane, I-"

She slaps me and continues her rampage.

"Shut up I'm talking! On top of everything else, you decide to use your herbs and spells on my son! He's never loved anyone like this, not even me his own mother. So right now I need you take your dirty African ass and all your crap out of my son's apartment. Blandina is coming soon. You don't know me like that girl, you better ask somebody sugar."

She shouts and points her finger at me before pushing my forehead with her fingers. She folds her arms and waits for me to get out of her 'son's' apartment.

God I tried.

I tried but I just saw red. I started feeling like how I did when I found Troy kissing Nancy. I snapped.

Before that, I actually clapped my hands and walked once around her. I don't know why but I just did. I wasn't in control of my actions at that moment.

"Sheryl. Poppy. Lane. The world's most important person. Well, this African ass ain't going anywhere and you wanna know why? Ha! Well that's because I'm in love with your son, Troy

Sebastian Lane. I don't own any herbs nor able to fathom any spells to bestow upon your son, I don't even need to. He loves me anyway and that's by the Grace of God. The reason you say that is because you don't show any love to him so he does the same. All this time, you think he's happy and jolly? No. He didn't want you coming here, he didn't even want to call you 'ma' when you got here. That time when you were asking for a loan to multiply your dying clothing line, he didn't want to. I convinced him to. I even added a few more thousands from my pocket for you. The money that was meant to add to my savings to buy momma a house. That 'true love' you're talking about used to milk Troy like a cow when they were dating. Yeah he told me. A try gold digger. She's better now I must say. It's funny because you told him that she wasn't good enough for him yet, years later you're trying to rekindle his love?"

"But-"

"I know you tired it again today. You think I didn't see you eavesdropping on our conversation when I told Troy to go to SpringWater Mall? All of sudden Blandina is posting some snaps on Instagram about how fun SpringWater Mall is. How run it was with you and her shopping. I bet since you're here, she's with Troy right now. You tried but failed. Just like how you slapped me yet I right now I still respect you to the highest R. Momma told me that you'll never be able to bring down a tree

with strong roots, no matter how powerful the wind is. You've been trying to deform my character but everyday I pray for you and keep smiling... and I will continue to do so. Thirdly, I never took your son away from you, he just didn't want to be surrounded by negative energy. Think about Mrs Lane, Troy is loaded Now and he could've bought a First Class tickets 5 years ago to come to America to see you- but he didn't. Why do you think that is? Why do you think that is Mrs Lane? Yeah, that's what I thought."

I walk away and stop in my tracks.

"Oh and by the way, momma and papa didn't name me 'sugar'. Ke Naledi wa ga Mapulane (I'm Naledi Mapulane)... you better ask somebody."

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"Close your eyes."

"Why?"

"Just close your eyes and turn around."

"T, just tell me-"

"Please trust me."

I sigh and close my eyes with my hands then shift on my seat to turn around. I feel something solid and cold around my neck.

"Okay turn around and open your eyes."

I do as I'm told and I'm met by his hazel eyes. I look down and get teary when I see it.

"T, how did you-"

"A magician never reveals his secrets."

"Momma's cross necklace. I broke it earlier this week, how did you even know it was broken?"

"You stopped wearing it."

I smile and hug him so tightly. Out of all gifts, this is the most special one to me. Remember, how I said that I always wear momma's cross necklace? You know the one she got for me for my first birthday after papa's passing? Well, with all the huffing

and puffing complications in my life, I woke up one morning and stepped on it. I guess it fell off the dressing table beside the bed because when I was getting ready for work, I just stepped on it with my high heel.

It broke in two and so did my heart, but because I have to keep face I just ironically safely put in my jewelry box.

"And so that it doesn't break again, I had the guy place something in the middle of the cross."

I look at it carefully and even raise it up a little to see.

"T. Is this a diamond?"

"Yes."

"T mara (but)-"

"Nay please, I wanted to. You're my lady- I would do anything for you."

"Anything?" I smirk.

"Anything except leave you or remove that diamond."

I pout but smile again when I look at it. It's so beautiful, I can't believe it.

"Thank you babe. I... this really means a lot to me. For real."

"You're welcome. Thank you to you too for the dumpling and stew combo. It was freaking delicious!"

I smile at him and stare.

"What?" He asks.

"You've toned down the cursing. I'm glad."

"Your prayer came true."

"How'd you know I was praying about it?" I ask him, fully stunned.

"You still don't get it, do you?"

I smile and lean in to kiss him but Sheryl interrupts us yet again. This time her face looks more... humble. I guess she pondered my request for her to smoke her cigarette outside, for my sinuses.

"Oh...errr sorry. I was just about to call it a night. Goodnight son."

"Night ma." He says in an annoyed tone.

She walks over to the guestroom but stops herself from holding the door knob.

"Goodnight to you too Naledi."

"Errr... goo-goodnight Mrs Lane."

She smiles and opens the guest bedroom door then closes it behind her. That was... odd.

"Did I miss something?" Troy asks.

"Uhm... no. I guess two of my prayers came to pass."

No. I'm not telling Troy. You don't know him, he'll miss all I said and just focus on the part where Sheryl slapped me. It's too late to kick out someone on the cold streets of this Autumn evening. He asked this the first time Sheryl joined us for dinner and ate the food without uttering a word. The only thing she said was, "Thank you Naledi. This was divine."

If that wasn't unorthodox enough, she actually put the plates and everything before heading out to have a smoke. I guess she took what I said into consideration, that showing love and compassion attracts love and compassion. Perhaps she's just faking it? I don't know. What I do know is that she even called Blandina not to come over anymore. I don't have a problem with that girl, even though I didn't invite her over, I just like her from a distance.

'ROARRR!'

"Babe! Can you get that? Babe!"

"T, wake up! It's 06H00."

He looks at me all disorientated like, then shoves his head into pillow again. I can't help but laugh when he does that. Yes, I'm already fresh and dressed for the road, I usually take two hours to reach there but I'm still determined to reach there before 12H00. It's the 8th of Mary today.

"T! Argh fine, I'll just give your mom a kiss goodbye and leave."

He bolts out of the bed and heads straight for the shower. I just chuckle and make the bed. I reach for my cross and fully display it on my chest.

I'm wearing black jeans, a black leather jacket, a red top and my black and pink Puma sneakers. The weather outside is mild anyway. I leave my Afro and just comb it outward.

"I'm ready, let's go!"

I turn around and find him already dressed with my car let's in his hand.

"That was fast! You sure that you showered?"

"You like my scent either way

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don't you? You look amazing, by the way." He smirks and gets way too close to my face. Naledi, snap out of it! If you go down that path, you're only going to go up for air... only to go back down.

I peck his lips and exclaim that that was his goodbye kiss before going to the kitchen.

"Oh no, you don't!" He says and starts kissing my neck. Kissing someone's neck sounds intimate to some, but that's a tickle gesture to me. He keeps kissing my neck and I'm just laughing while trying to get away from him.

"This is adorable." Sheryl says.

She's standing by the hallway and it looks like she's... going for a run? She's dressed like it.

"Ma, not today." Troy says and stands behind me, he really loves doing that.

"I need to talk to you." She says and looks directly at me.

"Oh. Well T, just carry my bag to the car then-"

"No no. I need to y'all. Both of y'all."

Troy and I look at each other then follow her to take a seat at the lounge. She clears her throat and exhales before talking.

"Now sugar-" She pouts her lip and closes her eyes before continuing.

"Naledi. I cannot begin to explain how sorry I am. An old woman like me has been gettin' reprimanded of her immoral behaviour ain't right. I guess... I guess when Troy's father died a party of me died with him. Naledi, I'm sure you know that I have two sons, but honestly I started favouring Troy the most. Tory starting hating me and Troy moved away. I just grew bitter. They don't have a brother relationship because of me. Favoritism and racism got me thinking that I really am a bad person and I'm sorry. I knew Blandina wasn't good for Troy but she forced me and the thought of losing him too drew me to take drastic measures. Son, there's no one I'd rather have you spend your forever with than Naledi. I bless your union."

We talked some more and I did the unexplainable, I hugged her. Just like how I hugged Nancy, I also hugged Sheryl. It was awkward when I left her embrace, but I knew my heart had already forgiven her by the time she said 'I'm sorry.' I just hope it all ends here. I just hope she meant it all.

Troy grabs my travel bag and I grab the car keys to the car.

"Let me drive." He says.

"Why thank you dear sir." I reply with a grin.

He chuckles before starting the ignition and heads out. It's now 07H24 but I don't mind, I'll be there before 12H00 anyway. He drives on until we reach a petrol station.

"Hello. Fill it up please, full tank."

"Yes sir." The petrol attendant says and I don't know if it's me, but she actually blushed. Iyoh! People are thirsty out here.

"T, I'mma head inside. It's weird but I'm craving for an ice-cream." I open the door but he grabs my hand.

"Kiss me first, then you can go."

I chuckle and lean over to kiss him before heading out. That poor petrol attendant looks annoyed. Hades (sorry) girl.

I go in and see that he's now standing outside the car looking at my direction.

I take two Magnum ice-cream packets and two Redbull energy drinks too.

Guys!

Gas Station foods are expensive! Ah! Ah! Ah! Even the cashier was smiling at my astonishment of the pricing here. Jeez!

"I know. Di (the) prices are insane." She says.

"Girl. I thought maybe I was seeing things and needed to get my glasses."

"No glasses needed. That's the real price."

"Ha!"

"You look beautiful by the way! I love your outfit!"

"Thank you!" I shout back before reaching for the glass door.

That compliment just boosted my self-esteem a little, I even changed my walk. Anyway, I exit and quickly join Troy in the car.

"Let's go!" I say as I buckle my seat belt.

He drives on and we're just making casual talk until he stops by this other park and parks the car. He orders an Uber and the app says that the driver is 10 minutes away.

"You good?"

"Yeah yeah I am. What a bombshell your mom threw on us."

He raises his hands and starts laughing too.

"Seriously babe, it was so odd and totally un-human. It was like a scene from one of Tyler Perry's movies or something."

"Ha! She surprised me too.

"I'm gonna miss you, you know?"

"T, I'm gonna be away for two days. Matter of fact, I'm coming back tomorrow." I laugh at his silliness.

"I know. I just fucking love you." He says with his deep voice and a serious look on his face.

I sigh and watch him go on and on with the love showering and cursing in between. For the first time though, I keep quiet and fall harder for him. I can't be without this guy so whatever that we have has to work. Seriously.

I want to engage in the conversation too but my heart is in Gauteng. I know what awaits me there, all those memories will come rushing in... including the fact that today, the 8th of May, is papa's birthday.

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"Hey. It's going to be okay."

"What? Huh?"

"Your mind is elsewhere and I know why. Are you and ma going to visit him?"

"Maybe, maybe not. I know we do it annually but I don't think I want to talk to him this year."

"Nay, you have no idea how much I would love it if Sheryl and I went to go to my father's grave site. You should go."

He wipes a tear on my cheek that I didn't notice. I didn't even know I was shedding a tear. He's right though, perhaps talking to pappa will shed a light at the end of life's tunnel.

"You're right, and thank you."

"For what?"

"For being you. For being there for me, loving me, caring for me and even tickle-abusing me."

He starts laughing, revealing his dimples.

"You don't have to thank me babe, I did all that out of love."

"It's not fair!"

"What now?" He chuckles.

"You have two dimples and I only have one." I pout and fold my arms

"You know... recent research suggests that kissing someone will help you develop dimples." He smirks.

"Are you serious right now T?"

"I'm serious. The lip muscle stretching and tongue wrestling from kissing will help your cheeks develop deeper and more refined dimples."

He leans closer and looks at me with a, 'So what's it going to be,' expression. I just chuckle and lean in to kiss him. The kiss deepens as we smile in between and occasionally lip bite each other. I hold his face closer and his hands travel around my waist although we're still seated. Of course, we get interrupted by the hooter of a car across the street and it turns out to be the Uber he ordered. I pull out and see that his pupils have dilated from the kiss. Shame.

"I will make it worth your while tomorrow evening when I get back."

"You better not be joking because I'm definitely holding you to that."

"I'm not joking. Now go, I'm going to be late and you might just never get out of this car." I smile and bite my lip.

"Argh! This Uber driver and his bad timing!" He looks so annoyed I can't help but laugh at him.

I get out of the car and join him at the driver's where he's at already standing. I stand in front of him and we just stare- like literally stare into each other's eyes. The Uber driver gotta once again.

"Yo'! Will you give me a minute? Who's paying between you and I?!" He shouts at him.

I just mouth 'sorry' at the Uber driver who looks rather mortified. He hugs me and we just stay in that state for a while, I'm even starting to smell like him. His English Blazer cologne should be on my clothing right about now. He wraps his biceps around me even tighter. It's so hard to let go though, it's not even our first weekend apart but I swear we do this almost every year. He once came along when I felt sorry for him that he'll be all alone.

Again, story for another day.

I let go first and he kisses me one more time before jogging across the street where the Uber is.

"I love you!" He exclaims and I just smile and wave at him before getting back in the car. I slowly drive on and I can see by the rear view mirror that he's waiting for me to make a turn of

drive further before he gets in and leaves. I drive one but abruptly stop the car and reverse back. I get out and run to hug him again, he looks so surprised it's adorable. I break the embrace and look at him before whispering, "I love you too."

He smiles and I hurry back to my car to drive off again. I'm so in love it's crazy.

That probably looked like a romantic scene for that Uber driver, that would explain why he was grinning at us like that. Well, I hope he enjoyed the show.

North West is almost always hot but Johannesburg? It's so cold here

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I remember the times when I would bath in front of a heater on a school morning listening to momma sing for me. That was a great time to be alive.

Speaking of which, I've officially arrived in Johannesburg, Kagiso- the place I basically grew up in without pappa. I check the time and it's now 10H28, I check it because I just saw a man with an alcohol bottle in his hand. It's so early, yet he's one bottle away from being completely drunk. Kagiso! It's a fun area to be around, although there are a few negative attributes but which place doesn't. Since everyone knows everyone, I find

momma waiting for me outside our RDP house with her traditional Tswana blanket around her waist. Someone must've told her I'm around. I speed up a little she park on the gravel area next to our house.

I get out and leave the door to just sprint to her and hug her like there's no tomorrow.

"Momma!" I exclaim as I hug her around her neck. She's a little shorter than me but still qualifies under the 'tall old woman' category.

"Ngwanake! (My child)"

I take in her scent and I'm instantly hit by Deja Vu. She must be cooking a feast in there due to the Robertson's Steak and Chops Spice I can smell on her doek.

"Naledi! O tlogela koloi yana? Ba tla e tseya! (You're leaving the car like this? They will take it!)"

I laugh at her astonishment and go back to the car to fetch my phone, travel bag and a doggy bag of Mugg n Beans' chocolate muffins before locking the car and heading inside.

I bought the muffins on my way here because I once took her there and she could not stop raving to the waiter about how delicious they were. She said the same thing to the manager

who gave her two muffins for free- as a thank you for her comment I guess.

"Momma. Bona (look)." I say and hand her the bag.

She takes the bag and I sit on our old couch waiting for her to say something.

"Tjo! Tjo! Tjo! Muffin tsa ko Bean n Muggs (muffins from Bean n Muggs) . Kea leboga (thank you)."

I chuckle at her and just watch her take a bite from one of them. I love this woman. I love love love this woman!

"You still have it?" She asks as she comes to sit next to me.

Momma may speak Setswana a lot but she most definitely knows English. Apart from her being a domestic worker before, she was also in a choir that had 80% of white women. She started learning to add to her vocabulary of the language.

"I still have what?" I ask.

"Necklace. I thought you lost it or broke it or iets (Afrikaans word for 'something'). You were always so rough when handling things."

"Ma!"

"Ke bua nnete Naledi (I'm telling the truth Naledi). Why do you think I bought you the same toys as your brother instead of dolls and tea cup sets?"

"Ah!"

"Tswala molomo (close your mouth)."

"O kae ena abuthi waka? (Where is my brother?)"

"Soccer practice. He's coming now-now."

"In the meantime, let me dress up."

"Okay ngwanake. Yoh di pitsa tsaka! (My pots!)" She exclaims and rushes to the kitchen.

He-he. I just grab my travel bag and head to my old room. Actually, since our house has 2 rooms, I shared a room with momma when Tshedi was getting older.

She still has the same duvet I gifted her last Christmas. It was expensive but worth buying for her. Anyway, I take off my clothes and put on my long black dress which hugs my butt like a bear with a black doek and a pair of black pumps.

You know I just realized... I have a lot of black clothes. Black is appropriate for today but seriously, I have a lot of black clothes excluding my suits. I need to go shopping, maybe I'll take momma tomorrow before leaving.

"O ya lenyalong nare? (Are you going to a wedding?)" She shouts from the living room.

"No!"

"Then etswa ka mo! (get out of there) Bathong ngwana o! (this child)"

Eh. Five minutes here and and I'm already getting shouted at. Home Sweet Home.

I go out and see that Tshedi is back from soccer practice with his soccer uniform and a soccer ball next to him. I may be caramel but he's way lighter than me. He has a dimple on his right cheek and mine is on the left. He has a neat hair cut and a piercing on his nose. He's on the same spot of the couch I was on. I remember we used to fight for that spot almost everyday, until we came up with the strategy that we will exchange the spot everyday.

His eyes are on the television and he doesn't seem to notice me until I speak.

"Today is my turn to sit there, you know."

He shifts his gaze at me and instantly rises from his seat.

"Ousi Naledi?"

"O nale o mong gape? (Do you have another one?) Come say hello."

He smiles ear to ear and comes to hug me. He's almost my height yet he's 15. I guess we both took pappa's tall height.

"When did you come?" He asks with a deep baritone.

"I'm sure ke nale (I have) 20 minutes. You're so sweaty, go change and you'll bath when we get back."

"Change for eng? (For what?)"

I give him a death stare and he almost squirms. I swear if he forgot that it's pappa's birthday, I'm killing him.

"Ai no. I know. I was testing you." He nervously says and hurriedly goes to change in his room.

"Ma, he wasn't this tall last time I saw him. Which wasn't so long ago."

"Iyoh! He even started calling me ou'lady (a term used for a mother meaning 'old woman')."

"It's going to be like he's my older brother now."

"He Heee! O sharpo mara ngwanake? (Are you okay though my child?)"

"Eya mme (yes mom)."

"Okay. Tshedimogo!" She shouts.

"Ma ou'lady?!" He exclaims from his room.

"Ma ou'lady ke mmago! Etswa ka mo! (Ma ou'lady is your mother. Get out of there!)"

I chuckle at her upset demeanour and continue texting Troy on the phone.

"So how's ma?" He asks.

"If Tshedi doesn't come out of that room, I'm afraid we won't have a house anymore. She's about to explode!" I text back with laughing emoji.

"Haha! Tell him to get his ass out of that room."

"Too late. Ma is in his room shouting that he's wearing his new sneakers to go to the cemetery."

"Shouting is temporary. Sneaker drip is forever."

"Really T?"

"Yes really. Look I gotta go. My own mom is giving me problems. Can you believe that Blandina is back here?"

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"Hello? Babe are you still there? Are my texts going through?"

"Yeah, I'm here and you're there with Blandina."

"Oh, I'm sorry I upset you. Look, I was just kidding okay? Not even Sheryl is here. I'm just watching soccer highlights with the boys."

"Are you?"

"Let me video call you."

He goes offline and within a minute, I get a video call request from him.

Since momma is still in Tshedi's room, still shouting at him, I just answer it and raise the phone to my eye level.

"Hey babe. Like I said, just having a game day with the gents. Say hi gents." Oscar and Thabang plus an additional guy I don't recognize all say hi as they raise their beer cans towards the phone.

"Sure sure boss lady. O pila yang (you're so beautiful)." Thabang says.

"Do you want to live till 30 Thabs?" Troy asks in a dangerous tone.

The gents laugh at Thabang's fearful reaction then Troy goes to our room, I suppose.

"Do you believe me now?"

"Why'd you lie?"

"It was meant to be joke. Relax."

"It wasn't funny. You know how I felt about her appearance in your life and even spending a night there."

"Why are you so uptight now? I said I'm sorry okay? Jeez."

I end the video call and put the phone in my pocket. Yes, my dress is one of those that have pockets on either side of it. Great timing too, because momma comes out the room with a very grumpy Tshedi.

"Bro, you okay? You look like you ate sour worms?" I chuckle.

"Ou'lady made me wear these." He says and lifts up his one leg for me to see the show. To be honest, they don't look so bad. In fact, they look like his old running shoes but they're still in good condition. No holes and they're squeaky clean.

"O nteka tumelo Tshedimogo (you're testing my patience)."

"Ma, let's go. Ke 11 nou (it's 11 now)."

Momma switches off the stove and we all head out to the car. I reverse it and switch off the navigator, I'm not going to need it.

On our way to the cemetery, I notice how momma has grown rather quiet and yet Tshedi is talking non-stop. He started talking when he called shotgun but momma beat him to it and now he's just going on and on about how beautiful the cars are that pass us by.

I'm guessing momma is in that state where you realize that it's been ages since your husband passed on, yet his death still impacts your life. If you think Troy and I love each other then you haven't seen my parents. They loved each other so much, they didn't even hide it or need to show off. You could see it, you could feel it.

I get irritated when I think about Troy. That was bad move he pulled on me. He knows how I feel about Blandina, she's a nice girl for now but you never really know people's true intentions. When I raise my concern, he acts as if I'm being melodramatic. I wonder how he would feel if I told him that Tebogo is here. Yerrr! He would grow wings and fly here in 10 minutes. I chuckle by just the mere thought of it.

"Nore eng (what were you saying)?" Momma asks.

"Huh? Niks (nothing)." I snap out of it and continue the drive.

We get to the cemetery and I grab momma's bucket from the boot. For some reason it starts getting a bit hot but I suppress it and lock my car.

I tell Tshedi to fill the bucket with water and then we both follow momma behind. She didn't even spot the wrong tombstone, she just slowly walked to it. All three of us stand in front of the tombstone, careful not to stand on any graves surrounding us. We all grow mute and I just grab the bucket and start pouring all over the tombstone. Momma dips her hand in too to clean those spots that aren't visible just by looking at the whole thing. We all start cleaning it while momma is just humming a tune. I recognize the tune she's humming from the choir that was singing when pappa's casket was being lowered. I never saw momma cry the way she did that day, I feel like I was crying not because pappa was gone but because momma was painfully crying herself into a coma.

We see another family placing flowers on someone's grave and I instantly curse under my breath for forgetting to buy some.

"Tshedi take this. Go buy a bunch of flowers from that old man outside the cemetery."

"Sure

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but nna (I) I don't remember the way back."

I wanted to reply about how he's being a baby when I remembered that I too forget sometimes how to spot the tombstone.

Momma offers to do with Tshedi and adds to the fact that we've run out of water too. They both head back and I'm left alone so I just sit on the edge of the tombstone, not caring that it might make a damp spot on my dress.

"Pappa. Ke nna, Naledi (it's me, Naledi). It's been a year, again. Pappa...pappa I-"

I choke on the lump in my throat. I always get emotional when doing this, all the time.

"Pappa, I miss you so much. Every year I come to you with problems instead of just talking about your absence made a hole in my life. I'm turning 25 this year, but I still remember the year you left us. I was 15, Tshedi's current age. To think that the 8th of May was both your birthday and your death day. I was planning on telling how I aced my Afrikaans test, the one you helped me study for that week. Hehe. I was never really good at that language. When you took too long to get home that day, I just switched on the television to pass the time. Imagine my devastating when I saw that the Chief of Police, George Mapulane, was shot on duty during a riot that happened in

Marikana. Why were you there pappa? You were supposed to be like, with us, but you decided to go do damage control on damage you never caused. Your family disowned us- blaming momma for your death. Momma's side or the family grew tired and we were left all alone. It's okay though, because had you not been there then that riot would have never reached the government's ears- it would have been all for nothing. The little girl you saved from being shot would've been dead. I tried locating her but I reached a dead end. If only I could just see her, I would... I would- I don't know. What I do know is that I love you, love you so much it hurts. I-"

"To think gore (that) that man charged us R100 for these fake flowers. Iyoh!"

"Tshedimogo give your sister her change marn!" Momma bellows.

I wipe a tear from my eye and tell Tshedi to keep it. I take the flowers from him and place them in the middle. Tshedi says happy birthday and then starts walking back to the car. He even steps on graves as he counts the money in his hand. Momma just used her woman power to pull him back for a chain prayer. After the prayer- Tshedi just walked back to the car and said 'Amen' on the way. This boy!

I pat momma on the back and follow Tshedi back to the car. We always give her space for her to talk to her 'husband' before we head back. I get in and find Tshedi sitting on the passenger seat busy clicking away on his phone. I take this opportunity to raise the thief issue.

"Tshedi?" I say with my eyes forward.

"Huh?"

"Huh mang (who)?"

"Ousi Naledi."

"Wa tsenwa (are you insane)?"

"Ah! Rhetorical question on a day like this?"

"Who taught you to be a thief?"

He goes mute and starts shifting uncomfortably on his seat so I continue.

"Yeah, momma told me. How do you think it looks when people know me for putting thieves away yet my brother is becoming one? Huh?"

"Eish, ke gore (it's just that)-"

"It's just nothing. Momma is too old and too tired to be dealing with you. You were 10 when you saw it but you still remember that day. That day when the community caught that man

stealing Koko Deborah's money. They beat him up until he stopped breathing. I'm just telling you to stop it. Listen attentively dear brother: if you get caught by the community, I will willingly hand them a whip to tackle you with. If you get arrested, don't even think for a second that I'm going to represent you in court. I won't. I have spoken."

Momma comes back with an empty bucket and sits w5 the back. She looks sad but that happens so I start the car and drive back home with everyone in a foul mood. Not really the weekend I was looking forward to but... whatever. I'm just glad I got to talk to my dad, I feel like something has been lifted off my shoulders. Talking to him was what my soul needed, I guess Troy was right after all... but I'm not telling him that.

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My phone makes a water drop sound in my pocket and I already know that it's from Rivonia. I ask Tshedi to read the e-mail that was sent.

"Errr... yeah. So... yeah. Entlek a ke verstaan'e Engels neh mara mo ke gossip fela (actually I don't understand English but it's just gossip here)."

"Stop being a voluntary idiot and just read."

"Ah! You watch The Adventures of Noko Mashaba too?"

"Tshedi!"

"Okay. It says: Greeting Miss Mapulane. Your schedule has an additional early meeting with Mrs.Precious Zono on Monday morning. She says that you have some talking to do and it's... it's for the utmost importance you don't miss the meet-up. Good luck mo'girl. Kind regards, Rivonia."

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"Precious Zono! Eh, eh, eh. Daai case ya mo'Rev e deal'e ke wena (that case about the reverend is being handled by you)? O strong mos, hape nna (you're strong, I)-"

"Shut up! You don't even what you're talking about. I'm the... assistant. Advocate Goapele is the one handling the case."

"Oh. So wena (you)-"

"Anyway, how do you know about the case?"

"It's all the news ever talks about these days. I'm sure the whole country knows."

I was asking him because I know that he doesn't watch the news, he must've seen it when momma was watching them or something.

I gaze over at my rear view mirror to see if mom is wondering about what Tshedi is talking about. To my surprise, it looks like she wasn't even paying attention to our conversation, she's just blankly staring outside the window. She even gets comfortable and leans her chin on her palm, still staring outside as cars and pedestrians pass us by. I'm getting worried about her, it's a difficult day for her but I'm still worried. Whatever is preoccupying her mind better end soon.

Again with the silence, the only sound we hear is the engine of the car. We're a pretty crazy family- as you've noticed earlier- so when silence strikes like this, it really becomes a problem.

As we're approaching the house I nearly suggest we all hit the mall but then I remembered that momma cooked today, it would be kind of disrespectful to go out and eat takeout.

I'm not even going to waste my energy thinking about my Monday meeting with Precious Zono. Whatever she wants to know, I will tell her. I must be careful though, she might not be an advantage to this case. In fact, it would be a great opportunity for her to come, that way we can detect if she had a hand in this murder or not- and also solve this hair issue once and for all.

I park my car in the manner which I did this morning. We all go out in a zombie-like state. Tshedi and momma get inside the house and I just lean on my car to check my phone. No call nor text from Troy. Nothing. Was I wrong to just hang up? Seems like I tend to do that to him lately. Argh, he just drives me crazy! Right now, I just want to punch him arm and hug him at the same time. Talk about mixed feelings.

"Naledi?"

I look up and instantly smile.

"Bandile?"

"Obvious."

I walk over to him and well... he hugged me. It was awkward but I just brushed it off and hugged him back.

"It's been so long." He smiles, revealing his gold tooth.

"Bandile I saw you a year ago."

"Exactly! A whole 12 month period. Yoh, I'm unable to can!" He dramatically exclaims.

I just laugh and we take a trip down Memory Lane. Bandile is... was? Is? Was? Whatever. He was my male bestie, we became friends when Koko Deborah and momma became close friends. Koko Deborah is his mom, and the lady that used to babysit Tshedi whenever I was at school and momma was working late. Every time I come over, we just greet each other and exchange numbers because he changes his numbers like underwear. So because of that, we lose contact and eventually ghost each other.

He opens and his umbrella to block the sun's unbearable rays and continues talking.

"You're getting more beautiful as the years go by. I heard from your mom that you live in North West (NW) now."

"Yeah, we went there immediately after I graduated law school."

"We?"

"Why are you acting surprised? I may not have told you that I live in NW but I did tell you that I have a partner."

"Oh! Bhari la se US neh (that idiot from the US)?"

"If you're going to talk like that, perhaps we should just call it a day."

"Eish me and my beautiful big mouth. Sorry, I didn't mean it like that. I just thought you were going to date an African man wabo (you see)? Preferably a proud, tall

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dark and handsome Zulu man wabo (you see)?"

I roll my eyes and lock my car. If we continue this conversation, I'm afraid we'll no longer be friends. Are we even friends?

"Sharp (bye) Bandile."

"Okay okay. Take my numbers, I lost yours last year. Actually my girlfriend deleted them. Hehe!" He takes my phone from my hand and asks me to unlock it. I do so with a finger print scan and when unlocked, you can see that his heart sank. My wallpaper is Troy and I laughing at something.

He clears his throat and dials his numbers in and then saves them as 'Bandi' with a heart emoji. Don't worry, I'll rename it later back to 'Bandile'. He then calls his phone and then hangs up.

"Now I have yours and you have mine."

"Okay." I'm getting bored.

"Sharp geh (bye then). Ndiyak'thanda okay (I love you okay)?"

I look at him totally shocked.

"As u'mngani yoh (as a friend jeez)!"

He says and laughs at my astonishment.

He waves one more time before walking back home to Koko Deborah's house, I know this because we used to take walks to his house after-school. Bandile is one of those high school friends that change as soon as they finish school. Getting money from gambling and horse bets fed his ego sky high, as if it wasn't already that high. Thus I'm not as excited as he is. Things between us began to spiral after I broke up with my ex in 12th grade and took comfort in him. Maybe I'm delusional, but something tells me that he started seeing me more than just a friend from that day.

Troy already does not know that I'm still communicating with him, he just that he was my high school male bestie and that's it. I have nothing to hide though, I did nothing wrong.

Tshedi comes out of the house to call me.

"Ousi Naledi! Ou'lady is calling you!"

I nod and keep looking in the direction Bandile took. 'Proud Zulu' man huh? Well he got that part right.

Anyway, I go inside and join Tshedi on the couch. Seems like momma is in her room so I just make myself comfortable next to Tshedi. He changes the channel before I could see what was on.

"And then?" I ask.

"No, eish. It's just that you won't like what's on."

"How do you know that?"

"O ousi waka akere (you're my sister)."

"Okay well, as your sister... I plead you tell me who this new girlfriend is."

"Ah! Ou'lady tells everything! I'm gonna have to talk to her about privacy and boundaries."

We both look at each other and burst in laughter. Yeah, there's no way momma knows or even wants to know about privacy. I once told her about privacy when she barged into the room while I was putting on my bra. I regret saying that that day because of the endless speech I got from her that this is her house and we are her children and 'go lla setlhako sa gage (what she says goes).'

Endless speech!

"Eish okay, she's one of those outgoing type of girls wabo (you see)?"

"What happened to that other shy girl? She was pretty."

"We broke up, I broke up with her. It's just that this new one matches up to my level and energy. Plus she's beautiful and has an ass of a horse yoh!"

"Hey! Language!"

"Hades (sorry), point is nna ka mo rata so yeah (point is that I love her so yeah)."

"Does she love you too?"

"Ke dink'a so (I think so)."

"You think so?"

Momma walks out of her room and sits on the singular couch beside us. I'm still not done talking to Tshedi though.

Back to momma, I guess she prayed again so as to, I don't know, seal off the deal for today.

"Ngwanake kopa tea ya hao e monate asseblief (may I please have that delicious tea of yours)."

"Oh so nna yaka hae monate (oh so mine isn't delicious)?"
Tshedi asks.

"Hai! Okare e yentswe ka metsi a toliet (yours tastes like it was made out of toliet water)!"

"Tjo ou'lady!"

Imagining that this is how they normally communicate, I get up and plug the kettle to make her tea.

"Who were you with outside?" Momma asks.

"Oh. Bandile. He came to say hi."

"Oh! Hey that boy is husband material weitsi ngwanake (you know my child)? Girls here are fighting each other for him."

"Serious?"

"Ka nnete ngwanake (honestly my child)."

"Oh."

I chuckle at her earlier statement of how he's husband material. Shame. She doesn't know that 'trouble' is Bandile's middle. The girls fight she's talking about would probably be his girlfriends battling when they find out that they aren't the only woman in his life. The sad thing is that, because he has money- the girls keep coming back to him. He's the type of guy that can get in a pub and make it seem like he's the owner. By the way, he drinks like a fish. I knew he would go along that path when he started making 'friends' that own pubs, according to his Instagram posts.

Enough about him now, this weekend is about my family- nothing more, nothing less. While I'm stirring the tea I open one pot and see that she cooked spicy lamb. Yes! I close the lid and carefully walk back to momma to give her the tea. Rooibos tea with two teaspoons of sugar and lots of warm milk.

She takes a sip and starts smacking her lips together in enjoyment.

As we're watching momma's Nigerian movies, a knock descends from the door. Since mom and I don't seem to move a muscle, Tshedi gets up to open the door and the burglary door too. If a Nigerian movie has the actress, Patience Ozokwo, then you already know that she's not missing it.

"Tshedimogo Mapulane?" A rough male voice comes from the door.

"Yeah." Tshedi casually replies.

"You're under arrest for multiple accounts of theft. Put your hands behind your head and get down on your knees. Ngoku (now)!"

Momma and I stare at each other before racing towards the door in a split second. Chineke mo (oh my God)! What has my 'broda' done now?

"Nxa voetsek (Afrikaans word for 'go away')! I have rights!"

"Mfana (boy), whatever you say will be used against you in the court of law. Cuff him!"

Momma and I stand by the door and watch as some policeman drags poor Tshedi inside the police van. Since mom is paralyzed in shock I step outside and tap the... well the one in charge.

"Officer, what is going on here?"

"Your son is being arrested for theft. In fact, you should come along too. By the way, we have a warrant to search your house."

He hands me a piece of paper which indeed was a valid search warrant. I just stop reading it and follow him.

"Officer, if you have a search warrant then why are you arresting my brother? Having a search warrant means that you're looking for incriminating evidence you don't have."

"Your brother? Oh sorry, I thought he was your son. Women these days can't seem to keep their legs closed. Anyway I arrested him because I know we're going to find what we're looking for in there. We've been surveiling him and his friends and I know that there's TV's or money or guns or something in your house. Why waste time?"

"Officer, that's preposterous! You cannot arrest a citizen with insufficient evidence or because your hunch tell you that the suspect is guilty. If you don't find TV's in there, what will happen? Will you say sorry? Will you pay for my brother's therapy fees because he would've been traumatized by how you dragged him and accused him of something he is suspected of doing?"

He stops clipping on his bullet proof vest and surprisingly looks at me. I guess he wasn't really expecting that.

"Who are you?" He annoyingly asks.

"Advocate Mapulane. Now release my brother before I sue you."

He clicks his tongue at me and tells the officer who handcuffed Tshedi to uncuff him. Tshedi runs behind me and I can see that he's terrified- and I'm not going to lie, I was too. The head officer tells his men to get ready to raid our home but before they go inside he menacingly walks towards my brother and I.

"When we get those TV's in there, your sister won't save you from me." He then turns around and kicks open our door before the rest of the squad follows him inside with a German Shepard. All of this is unnecessary really. Momma steps outside the house and comes to join me and Tshedi by the corner of the house. At this point almost every person has gotten out of their

house to witness the madness that's happening here in our yard. Everyone like the whole street is just standing outside with their visual perspective all on our yard. Some women are even still wearing their evening gowns although it's 14H00 in the afternoon. Aside from the clatter of pots and metallic objects falling inside the house, a few teenagers have started live streaming us as we wait for the police to... raid? Destroy? Search? Whatever this is, it must be some kind of joke. I mean I'm not a criminal mastermind but I think even if I was 15 and I stole something, I wouldn't exactly come home with it. Duh! This search is unnecessary... I repeat. Tshedi is very surprising though, it could be that he did exactly what I just said- if he did, then the police man is right, there will be nothing I can do.

You can see that momma is both fearful and furious- as soon as the police leave, she's releasing her clouds of anger to rain all over Tshedi.

After half an hour, the clattering and heavy footsteps of boots slow down until... they all come out and get in the vans. The German Shepherd dog is loaded onto its personal van and nobody moves but the police man in charge. He wipes something off his moustache and walks over to us.

"Errr... we didn't find anything. That doesn't mean that you're off the hook- one day, is one day."

He turns to momma and puts a disturbing smile on his face, "Thank you madam." He says before doing a rotating signal in the air and driving off with the rest of the 3 vans following.

They leave a dust trail behind as well as a lot of questions in mind. I can see everyone walking back to their houses and closing their doors. Silence. This silence from momma is terrifying, even Tshedi looks like he's about to bail.

Koko Deborah comes rushing to our house wearing a blanket around her waist just like momma is. She stops in front of us and huffs and puffs before speaking up.

"Mmabatho! Mmabatho weh!" Koko says. Momma isn't saying anything, she's just looking at Tshedi like she's about to...

"Mmabatho! O tla bolaya ngwana (you'll kill the child)."

Koko tries to calm momma down and stands in front of Tshedi so as to shield him, because she was about to strangle him. Literally, her hands were reaching for Tshedi's neck in a split second.

"Koko Deborah, ke kopa o tswe mo tseleng yaka (please get out of my way). Ngwana o wang tella ka gore ke soft, wang tella (this child disrespects me because I'm soft, he disrespects me)!"

"Yanong o nyaka go mo bolaya (so you want to kill him)?"

"Maybe that will knock some sense into his ivory thick brain. Oh why did you leave me to deal with this alone George? Why?" Momma says this with a few tears in her eyes.

Koko Deborah moves from Tshedi and hugs momma while patting her back

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she whispers something into her ear and then momma goes back to house.

"Naledi weh! Ngwanake (my child). Please take Tshedimogo elsewhere for a while. I want to speak to your mother without the both of you. Ka go kopa (I beg of you)."

I nod my head in respect and head to my car with Tshedi following me. We get in the car and honestly I don't know where to go, but I find myself driving towards the prison in Krugersdorp where I used to visit during law school.

Tshedi doesn't say anything until I park my car in front of the large gate. When he notices what the place is, he begins panicking and swallowing multiple times.

"Get out. Let's go!" I say and wait for him to pull himself together. He eventually gets out and closes the door behind him. I lock the door and start walking to the prison's main

office. He's following behind with his tail between his legs. I want to show him something... I don't want to say anything, just show. The guards let us in and tell us to wait while they go call the 'man' I said who knows me. We sit down on a bench and listen to the screaming of inmates and the clattering of chains at the back of the building. These walls are huge but still need improvement in terms of sound penetration.

"Ousi Naledi. What-what are we doing here? Are you... are you going t-t-to get me arrested?" He says that with a trembling voice.

"Shhh! Just observe, that's all I need from you."

He looks at me and shifts a bit closer to me. I just smile and wait.

The prison warder comes back but he's not alone- following him is Mr Man, the man in charge of the prison. I don't know his surname and he never really disclosed it to me. I could have found out his name and surname the moment I walked out of this prison the first time but I thought his mysterious enigma was exhilarating.

"Mr Man!" I get up to shake his hand.

"Ah! My favourite prisoner!" He walks closer and shakes my hand back.

"I never got arrested." I chuckle.

"Yet you came here like you were one of my boys. I consider you one of my prisoners."

I laugh at him and shake my head when I remember what I came here for.

"Mr Man, this isn't another visit for me. My brother here, needs the presentation."

He raises his eyebrows at me and then looks at Tshedi.

"Problem?" He asks.

"Nearly." I reply back and indicate for Tshedi to rise up from his seat.

"Okay, I'll be lenient and only show the-"

"No! No. He needs to see it all."

"Errr... you're sure?"

"101%"

He eyeballs me for a while and finally gives in. He says something to the prison warder who quickly runs and disappears into the hallway. Mr Man tells Tshedi to follow him and he reluctantly does so. I just follow behind them and place my hands behind my back. This will be a life-changing experience for him, I hope.

Mr Man walks into the hallway where there are prison cells in both sides. While we're walking some inmates make sexual comments about Tshedi, calling him a 'bottom bitch' and the 'light skinned chicken'. I can see that he's already dead scared but this is only the beginning.

We walk over to where some prisoners are breaking stones with a sledgehammer. Some look tired and keep lighting up their cigarettes while the rest are just working away in the blazing sun. We observe for a while until it starts getting boring. After a few minutes, Mr Man continues walking again and stops at a cell where it appears that some inmates are making one of them wash laundry for them, they keep laughing and spitting in his direction when he starts washing slow. The pile of laundry next to him looks a lot that I start feeling sorry for him. If you can't fight for yourself then you're already considered weak! When they catch us staring, Mr Man walks into another hallway and goes down some stairs. I'm still following behind and just taking everything in. Yeah, my first visit was traumatizing too that I nearly quit criminal law. However, the disturbing flashbacks just made me pursue it even more so that I can prevent innocent people from getting inside this hellhole. This isn't even South Africa's most notorious prisons, but it still gets the job done. No one is talking, we're just walking and taking in the odour of urine and pine gel. Mr Man stops yet again at another cell and by the sound of the springs I hear I already

know what's going on. I stand next to Tshedi to confirm my presumptions. There at the corner is a very scary man having anal intercourse with another inmate. What made this more disturbing is that the scary inmate is laughing and moaning while the one on his fours on top of the bed is crying with a bruised face. Looks like there's another one waiting his turn. They keep going until he stops and we continue.

To say that Tshedi is scared would be an understatement, I may not have my glasses but I could've sworn I saw him wipe a tear or two. As if that scene wasn't horrifying enough, Mr Man gets a warning from his walkie talkie that there's trouble back there where inmates were working with stones. He rushes back and we follow him to the back of the building. The metallic doors open and we see a group of men fighting another group that looks like its coloured dominated. They keep talking in some language I don't understand with the occasional 'gazi (blood)' in between. When they go head to head everyone starts stabbing everyone. There's blood, knives and groans everywhere- even a prison warder on duty gets stabbed on his abdomen. Mr Man tells a bunch of prison warders to escort us out because it's getting too dangerous for any visitors to be roaming around. Understandably, I follow the warders and head to the same spot we started there by the benches. Tshedi and I take off our

visitors pass before getting in the car and getting back on the road again.

I drive and we both just keep quiet while listening to Radio 2000. I don't know whether I fixed him or broke him, either way I'm glad I did that. He got to see what it was like inside S prison. It wasn't even a maximum prison but I can tell that he's already thinking long and hard. I heard that juvenile is a real nightmare too. He didn't even call shotgun, he just got in the back and kept quiet.

"Ousi Naledi?" He finally breaks the silence.

"Abuthi (brother) Tshedi." I reply back, careful not to keep my eyes off the road.

"If I ever steal anything ever again, even if it's a R1 coin, please slap me. Slap me so hard that I won't feel my cheek anymore."

"Sure abuthi (brother), sure."

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'I say you the, you the best

You the, you the best

You the, you the best

You the, you the best

You the best I ever had, best I have had, best I-'

"Ah! I was listening to that. You know it's total disrespect to pause one of Drake's songs, it's the ultimate disrespect if people keep replacing the swear words like that. What has the world become?" Tshedi exclaims and folds his arms in irritation.

I look at him on my rear view mirror and just shake my head. It's nearly impossible to be serious with this kid for more than an hour I tell you. Since the visit from the prison, he wasn't talking to me nor responding in his usual charismatic tone when I asked him a question. Seeing that Koko Deborah asked me to keep Tshedi away from the house for a while, I suggested we go to Milky Lane and get ourselves some bomb ice-cream cones- and boy did that work! He came back laughing and talking non stop that I eventually took that as a sign that he's not as traumatized anymore. It's still going to haunt him, there will be times when he has to make a decision to steal or not. The good thing is that when he goes to bed that night, flashbacks of the

prison visitation will haunt his dreams to the core. He might even fear falling asleep ever shabbily until he stops his shenanigans. When we went back to the car, I checked my flashing phone for any important messages. Apart from the phone telling me it's 16H23, it also notified me of an audio from Troy that was sent 12 minutes ago. I went out of the mall parking area and played the audio with my phone on my left hand because I was steering with the other. The song that played is the one above by Drake, which Tshedi got angry at me for pausing. He actually had the explicit original version of the song in his phone but I guess he downloaded the clean version for me to listen to. That was really sweet of him, I know Troy is not one to express his emotions willingly so him sending me a song to do that for him is kind of sweet. Well, because I'm still driving, and Tshedi is here with me, I make a mental note to call him when I reach home. If the situation doesn't allow me to call then I'll at least text him. I don't know what I would say, since I prefer talking more than texting, but I'll cross that bridge when I get there. I don't know what Koko Deborah is going to be saying to momma but I definitely know that she'll try to console her and maybe calm her down with what happened. Here's a thought though, if the police were surveiling Tshedi all this time, wouldn't they know that he was at home and not out gallivanting in people's home? Why did they only go to Tshedi's house and not his accomplices? Tshedi might not know this, but

I definitely smell a rat in his group of friends. In fact, who's to say they aren't all rats? I stare at him once again as he continues devouring the ice-cream cone. Is he that hungry? Naledi! Your eating habit is not normal remember? You only eat in the morning and at night when at work, while normal people eat 3 times a day. He must be starving where he is right now, I arrived here in Gauteng around 11H00 and I never saw him put anything in his mouth. It's just that too many things were happening and it totally didn't hit me that Tshedi and momma might be hungry. Argh! With the way the police raided our home, I'm sure momma's spicy lamb is ruined where it is. That's kind of disappointing but once we arrive at the hotel, we'll order room service or just buy takeout. Yeah, I'm not cleaning the wreck the police left behind at home- no sir. We'll just go to a hotel and come back the next day to tidy up before I leave for North West. I should also call one of those people at the hardware to install a new and improved burglary door, just in case.

"Alright, Tshedi I need you to follow behind me okay? You saw how messed up momma was before we left so to not step on any toes, you will not speak unless spoken to. Wang kutlwa (do you hear me)?"

"Yebo (yes) momma Naledi." He says.

"Don't patronize me Tshedimogo, this is a crucial situation which needs nothing more than our outmost respect in an attempt to slowly reach momma's ears so YOU can explain yourself. Furthermore-"

"Okay! Okay. Sorry. Tjo, sekgowa sa tla sa n'shaya ding dong (English just made me dizzy)."

I roll my eyes and get out of the car

I knew throwing in some moderate English would penetrate through his ear so he can listen to me. As we approach the door, I can hear my heart attempting to leave my chest. This is so scary, it's like one's official date or something. I'm nervous to go inside my home because I'm unsure on how momma's state of mind is, she might still want to strangle Tshedi like she wanted to earlier. I exhale and open the door.

To say that I'm shocked would be an understatement, I mean I may have not seen how it looked inside but by the sounds of furniture being turned upside down a few hours ago, I'd expect to see the place... in a physicalu conundrum.

"Uhm... go nale spoko sa go clean'a mo ntlung (there's a ghost that cleans in our house)."

"Yeah, how did it get so tidy this quick? Maybe there's a ghost Tshedi." I say in total amazement.

"On the contrary, there's only two hard working women in here."

I look over to my right and see Koko Deborah and momma having... a tea party? I mean there's scones, chocolate chip cookies and a teapot filled with Rooibos.

"Errr... momma? O sharpo (are you okay)?" I say in a whisper.

"Eya ngwanake (yes my child). Wena (you)?" Momma replies with a grin on her face.

"Tjo ma weeh! I broke my mother. Ah! I'm finished! I'm finished-ooo! It's over for me. Naledi, we no longer have a mother and it's all my fault. Let's run before we get a sleeper or a wet vaslap on our ass. Iyoh nna ka tsaba (I'm running away)!" Tshedi exclaims and keeps going on and on.

"What did I say of speaking only when spoken to?" I turn and ask through my gritted teeth. I'm trying so hard not to laugh at the way he was being overly dramatic but my fear of momma retaliating kept me at bay.

"Homola before ke go tlhaba ka klap'a (keep quiet before I slap you)!" Koko retaliates instead.

Momma laughs at our reaction which made the whole thing even more daring. Do we even dare laugh?

"Naledi, Tshedi, I'm sorry about what happened earlier. That was out of character and there's no excuse. I'm sorry my babies okay?" Momma says.

"Heh? Did you just say sorry. Naledi, a whole African parent is apologizing to us! Ah ah ah! Nna serious ka tsaba yanong (I'm seriously running away now)."

"Tshedi shut up!" I exclaim.

Anyway, Koko Deborah finishes her tea before bidding us goodbye and leaving. Now we're at the lounge and momma is still at the kitchen table, sipping on another cup of tea. We can still see everything despite us being in the lounge and that's what makes this whole thing surreal. Momma has never been one to lay a hand on us or threaten us with anything so you can understand how we feel about this foreign situation.

While she's sipping her tea and Tshedi is watching TV, I take the opportunity to text Troy about the song he sent.

"Hi."

He sees it almost immediately like he was waiting for my text.

"Hey."

"I got your message."

"I got your heart"

I smile a bit before continuing.

"Troy I don't want us to ever fight over something so petty."

"Troy?"

"Sorry. T, I don't want us to ever fight over something so petty."

"Yeah, that was dumb."

"We both were."

"No no, my joke was dumb. It wasn't even a joke. Can u forgive this foolish and my sweet melanin baby?"

"Sweet melanin baby?" I add laughing emoticons.

He sends a voice recording and I look over at momma who's still sipping her tea. I excuse myself and go outside. I know it's going to be difficult for Tshedi to be in there all alone with our mom but I'm getting in the mood with texting Troy.

Since it's a bit chilly now, I get in my car and close all windows before listening to the recording.

"Sweeeeeet melanin babyyy! I love you so much babe."

I squirm and keep stomping my feet in excitement. I listen to the recording one more time and yeah... I squirmed again. It's like I'm a teenager in love or something. The last part of the recording, "I love you so much babe" is the one that makes me melt. The first part sounded like he was singing but the last

part, the last part where his full base amplifies the sentence is what kills me. Ah! I really miss him.

I tried making a voice recording but I just end up dragging them to the trash bin every time. I finally settle on a 'I love you too' text with heart emoji.

We continue to text each other with how our day went and what we're up to now.

"Can I call you?"

I bite my lower lip and think about how our conversation might last hours and my family is know there starving and so after beating myself up, I reply to him.

"Maybe later, mom is throwing weird vibes on us and I got to make sure she alright. In fact, let me go back in."

"You're outside?"

In my car yes."

"Why you in your car?"

"To take a breather."

"Speaking of breathers, let me take Thabang home."

"Why?"

"He's drunk. Very."

"Oh okay. Drive safe."

"Thanks. I love you!"

"I love you too."

He goes offline and I take a deep breath before exiting my car. Right before I can do that, an unknown number flashes on my screen and because I'm used to receiving phone calls from strangers who happen to be clients, I answer it without hesitation.

"Hello. Advocate Mapulane here."

"I'm guessing you don't have my numbers stored in your phone."

"Uhm..."

"Oh don't be alarmed. It's Sheryl."

"Mrs Lane? To what do I owe a phone call from you?"

"I just wanted to make sure that you're safe sugar, I mean Naledi. You never really told me if you made it safely to your home."

"Oh, my apologies. I thought Troy told you. Anyway, I made here safe ma'am. Thank you."

"Terrific. No problem. You're coming back tomorrow afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Perfect."

"Why what's going on?"

"Okay I was waiting until you get here to tell you but I'll just tell you now. As you know, I've been looking at some of the local African designs around here. So with a lot of brainstorming, I finally made my first ever African design."

"Really? Why that's great!"

"I know. Now I need you to be my model."

"Oh. I'm flattered really but I'm not a model Mrs Lane."

"Nonsense. It's an African design so it needs an African lady to strut it."

"There are several qualified models in South Africa, I'm sure if-"

"Look. This is more than just modelling. This is my way of saying thank you for what you've done for me and my clothing line. Your words still ring in my head every night so I figured this would atleast show my gratitude towards you."

"Well uhm... I don't know. It's sweet but I don't how to-"

"That's okay, I have a model trainer for you on set. Everything is setup so all I need is the A-girl."

"Uhm..."

"Just think about it. Think about it and you'll get back to me. Just inform me beforehand so that I can find a model in case you decline okay?"

"Alright ma'am. I will. Thank you for opportunity either way."

"No problem. Have a good evening."

"You too."

I hang up and stare at my blank phone for a while.

That was odd. Me? A model? Of course I'm flattered but I can't help but assume that she has an agenda at hand. I silently pray that she's not up to anything because that would be the pivotal moment of Troy and her relationship. It would totally destroy everything they've built up to this point and increase the chance of it never building back.

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"Hello?"

"Yeah! Yeah! You! Wena (you)! Jy (you)!"

"Who is this?"

The person on the other line starts fiddling and fidgeting with something, I look back on my screen which instantly hurts my eyes. After adjusting the screen brightness, I open my eyes widely and try to fathom the name that appears. 'Bandi'? Oh, Bandile! Wait, why is he calling me at... 23H28?

"So how do you feel heh? How do you feel?! Hahaha! Yoh life is good! Yoh God take me now!"

"Bandile have you been drinking?"

"You know if you were my wife then I'd be answering to you but you're not, so I won't answer to you. Ha! How does that feel? Yeses! It's time you got hurt a little bit marn!"

I sigh and just put my phone a little further away from my ear. The music and chatter in the background is too much for my ear.

"Bandile please don't call me when you're like this. I'm gonna hang up now."

"You know what neh? Nna ngiyak'thanda and not as u'mngani (I love you and not as a friend). There I said it! Say something now Miss Lawyer since you always have something to say."

"Bandile can we talk about this tomorrow? Please?"

"Haaaa! I knew you loved me too. It's okay mamake, you don't need to say it. In fact, let me come to you."

"Are you driving?"

"Hao! How else am I going to get to you? You silly wife you! Silly silly silly! Hahahaha! Hey! Where are my keys? Fuck!"

"Bandile don't you dare!"

"Okay I got them. I'm coming neh sweetheart? I'm coming. Which one is my car? Eish, you married a dumb, rich fool here. So many cars, I don't even know which one to car. I mean I don't know which one to drive. Voetsek (go away)! I don't want you, I'm going to wife! Move away!"

"Bandile! You're intoxicated! You'll hurt yourself."

"Shhh! I said I'm coming. I'm in the car now."

"No! Errr... let me come to you. Okay? Let me drive to you."

"Nonsense! What kind of husband would that make me? You and brubrbru! Haaaa! Nkulunkulu (God)!"

"Uhm... no it's just that I too want a drink. So just send me your location okay? Please wait for me, please!"

"Ncaw! You sound so cute when you beg. Okay, okay I'm not driving neh? I'm not driving? I just threw my keys in the pool."

"Pool? What pool?"

He sends me the location and keeps on talking about how the place he's at has a swimming pool, a Jacuzzi and all the works. I keep asking dumb questions so that he engages with me and doesn't think of passing out or driving here. If it's the latter, than I'm afraid Bandile will be no more tomorrow. The madness of the streets in Johannesburg intensifies when it's a Saturday, him driving here might cause an accident or an arrest for drinking and driving. Either way, his life will be in danger.

I dress in my black tracksuit and brown ankle boots, I don't care. I put on my black doek and make my afro bun stick out then grab my car keys. The one day I get to have the opportunity to obtain my beauty sleep, and Bandile just happens to swoop in and steal it from me. Argh!

"Where are my keys?! The fuck are my keys? It's probably Mpumi who stole them. Let me go find her."

"No! No, stay in your car. I'm coming over remember?"

"Look, Mpumi may be my 2nd girlfriend but you're the main lady neh? Don't get jealous now. You're making me blush." He says with a few hiccups in between.

I ignore him and quietly get out of Tshedi's room to tip toe to the front door. At the corner of my eye, I see him sleeping on the couch with a pizza slice in his hand- the television is still on. I smile when I remember how he offered me his bedroom after I ordered pizza for dinner, Tshedimogo is a real character I tell you. Someone who's also a character is this man who's singing on the phone

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I don't even know what he's singing but it sounds like a gospel song. As long as he's still on the phone, then I know that he's out of harms way.

I start the ignition of my car and follow the directions Google Maps is giving me. I drive onto a highway and in some secluded area. Twenty six minutes pass and I finally arrive at some double story house which happens to be the location Bandile sent me. When I hear the music that's playing and what he's singing on the phone reciprocating each other, I know that I'm at the right place. He stopped singing gospel and starting singing some upbeat song by the artist, Sha Sha. I get out of my

car and enter through the gate. The gate isn't even closed, it's so full that there's people inside the yard and even outside. It's a brightly lit house with a petite garden that has been polluted by alcohol cans and glass bottles. No time to admire the house, I walk inside and start searching. I try to ask around too but nobody knows who Bandile is.

"Bandile?"

"Sthandwa sam (my love)!"

"Where are you? This house is huge and there's too many people!" I exclaim so that my voice is higher than the surrounding sound.

"I told you, by the pool."

Pool? Okay. I slide through the crowd of people dancing and kissing as the music grows louder and so does the party people's screams. It's a mixture of skin colours too.

Anyway I keep looking around not caring that I'm the only female that doesn't have a short skirt or dress on. I go at the back of the house and I'm met by only a handful of people, unlike inside the house, and instantly see Bandile by the pool like he stated.

I rush over to him with a few people staring at me.

"Bandile what are you doing?"

"Hao baby baby!" He says and continues with whatever it is he's doing as he gets on both his knees and faces the pool. His hands are in the pool and it looks like he's holding a...

"Die and live again marn!"

"What are you doing?"

"Mlungu (white person) said that cats have 9 lives so I'm trying to see if this one will die 8 times and relive again. Ifa marn!"

"Bandile!" I exclaim and try to pull his arms so that the cat can breathe, and because he's drunk- it doesn't take a lot of effort to.

He falls on his bottom and the cat hisses before running away into the bushes. He just laughs and laughs like he's a retard. Well, at least that's how these people are looking at him. I help him on his feet and drop his arm over my shoulder so that he walks accordingly and doesn't fall into the pool. The music changes and gets even louder but the voice I heard behind me was as clear as day.

"What are you doing with my man?"

I turn around with Bandile still disorientated and immediately think that this must be the 'Mpumi' girlfriend.

"Oh uhm... I'm Naledi, just a friend of his." I smile.

"Oh. Naledi? Yeah I've heard your name once or twice out of his mouth. For your sake I hope you're telling the truth. Give him to me, I'll take him back to our house."

"Baby!" Some girl shouts as she gallops to Bandile and starts kissing him and asking if he's okay.

I already know that it's about to go down now so I move few feet backwards and leave Bandile with the girls.

"Who the fuck are you?" Mpumi asks with a very dangerous tone.

The girl looks at Mpumi from head to toe and continues talking to Bandile who's unable to keep standing on his two feet.

"Hey hey! I'm talking to you! Is your earwax that bad that my voice is impenetrable?" Mpumi retaliates.

"Stop embarrassing yourself tuu. I'm talking to my man here."

"Your man?! Bandile what's going on?"

Both ladies and surprisingly the whole house looks to Bandile for answers and it seems like he's snapped out of it because his eyes are wide-open in shock.

"Errr... eish. Baby look, I can explain."

"Okay explain." The mysterious girl says and folds her arms. She may be short but you can tell that she packs a punch.

"She was talking to me sfebe (hoe)!" Mpumi retaliates.

"What did you just call me?" The girl turns slowly and faces Mpumi.

"I said, he was talking to me sfe-"

Before we know it or even blink, the girl gets on top of Mpumi and tackles he with punches and slaps. They may be fighting on the grass but when Mpumi pushed the girl off and she landed flat on her back, we already knew that she's going to feel that in the morning.

Mpumi gets up on her feet and runs towards the girl until they both startle back and land in the pool. You'd think that the fight would be over but... No! They keep fighting and slapping each other. One of them, I don't know who, keeps saying that they can't swim but the fight is still going on. The splashing of the water and the people cheering is making it hard for me to detect who is drowning. Bandile is just there shouting that they should stop fighting. Useless!

Since nobody is trying to stop the fight because clout is more important, I quickly take off my shoes and jump in the pool. I don't know what I'm doing and who I'm holding but I just push 'someone' away. The splashing stops and I see that the girl I pushed out of the way, is Mpumi. Everyone stops laughing and screaming when 'the girl' is nowhere to be seen around the

pool. I take a deep breath and dive in to the bottom of the pool. I may know how to swim but I can't open my eyes under water so I just started feeling with my feet and hands for any form of life. I kick something and grab 'it' as I swim to the surface before I too drown. I splash out to take deep breaths and clear out my eyes with my other hand. When I turn around, 'the girl's' body is floating lifeless on top.

Everyone goes silent and some start panicking and calling an ambulance. I grab her body out of the water and the guys help me to lay her on the grass. She's not moving nor breathing.

"Tshepang! Tshepang!" Bandile shouts at her but to avail. I guess her name is Tshepang.

"When will the ambulance arrive?" I ask one of the guys that happen to have a phone in their hand.

"Errr... they said we should give them 15 minutes." He says.

That will be too late. I get on top of her and start performing CPR and mouth to mouth after pumping her chest 5 times. She doesn't respond for a whole minute. Sixty seconds is too long. I keep performing CPR with the hope that she'll respond. Mpumi is just there sitting in shock with tears in her eyes.

I blow air in her mouth one more time before she gurgles out water and coughs vigorously.

I get off of her and help her sit upright so that all the water can come out and she can breathe properly without coughing. One of the ladies that were taking a video of me trying to stop the fight hands me a glass of water so that Tshepang can drink.

"Uhm... no. She shouldn't take in anything until her airway is cleared up." I say and move a strand of my wet afro hair to the side.

She continues coughing out water and finally looks up at me.

"Th-thank you. Thank-" She coughs yet again.

"It's okay. You're alive now." I say and stand up as her friends surround her and put a blanket over her shivering body.

Some guys keep whistling and clapping hands for me as I start walking back inside the house. I'm flattered but I also want to get THE HECK OUT OF HERE. I cannot stay here and watch the ambulance lights to come remind me of the night Detective Maphanga was murdered. No.

I leave Bandile there standing like an idiot and rush to the front of the house and in my car, since he's sobered up he'll take himself home. Thank goodness that he doesn't live with Koko Deborah anymore otherwise, Kagiso would turn into the wild west. She would shout at him until the sun rises.

I drive out of the estate and drive back home, a bunch of ambulances pass by me in a rush heading towards the same direction I come from. Bandile and I have some talking to do. We need to start re-evaluating our friendship and if we should even continue being friends or cut ties.

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~Naledi~

"Where are you?"

"I'm about to leave now."

"You've been saying that for the last 27 seconds."

"Modimo (God)!"

"Nah, don't bring God into this."

"Goodbye T!"

"I'mma call you in a few. When you answer you better be at the front door of this here apartment."

"Uhm... T."

"Yeah?"

"To tell you the truth, something happened and I won't be back till Wednesday."

"The fuck you are. Yo' fine ass better be at this apartment by today!"

He hangs up the phone and calls again after a few seconds.

"T?"

"By the way, I fucking love you."

"I love you too."

This time he let's me hang up which took way longer than what was required but I guess hearing each other breathe on the other line was... reassuring? I don't know, either way I really do miss him and cannot wait to be in his arms after the weekend I just had. By the way, the excuse that I'm staying here was a lie, I was just teasing him. I actually cannot wait to leave, not because of my family but because of the scandal that happened from last night till the early a.m.'s which made me re-evaluate Bandile and I's friendship.

It's 09H00, I'm guessing, and I'm about to leave but honestly it's getting harder now. Momma keeps giving me Bible verses and Tshedi keeps asking me when am I going to be back. If momma wasn't so difficult then I'd actually let them live next to me in North West, but she says that this is her hometown so she couldn't possibly leave.

"Tswara (take)."

"Momma? What's this?"

"Ke R500 ya gao (it's R500 for you)."

"No no ma-"

"Naledi. Please take it and say thank you, nothing more."

"Thank you momma."

"You're welcome ngwanake (my child). Don't tell Tshedi. Shhh!"

"Haha! I won't."

She pats my back and carries my travel bag to the car, leaving me alone in her bedroom and pondering on whether to accept it or give it back. Momma is a true sweetheart honestly. I know this is mostly about the fact that I paid someone to install a new burglary door and all, so now she feels obligated to... repay me? It's weird really, since I'm the one that mostly sends money here despite her saying that they're okay. I know they don't exactly need it but I sleep better at night knowing that there's money she can access in case something sudden happens. She didn't give me any money after university because I told her that I'm okay financially and she was teaching me a lesson to not be dependent on anyone- heck, it worked!

Anyway, I clench my fist tighter to make sure that the money doesn't fall or something- I'll add it to my savings for building her... us a house, a home.

Alright! Let's get this show on the road. It was really fun staying over though, the jokes, the food, the drama, the board games, the church. Yeah, she made us go to church after I was done with my phone call yesterday. It was a Saturday prayerful night

event which was absolutely heavenly to be honest. I've been so busy, that by the time Sunday hits and I'm supposed to go to the house of the Lord, I basically sleep in unintentionally due to exhaustion of the week prior.

"Ousi! Ousi! Tswara (take)."

I get out of momma's embrace and turn to Tshedi.

"What's that?" I ask.

"Bottle." He hands me my transparent water bottle.

I smile widely and thank him. I nearly forgot my water bottle?
I'm losing it!

I hug him too and promise to come visit around June which is only a few weeks ahead. I hug momma again and get in my car, well I got in after she said a mini prayer even though we were outside- she's not shy nor even embarrassed to showcase her love to God. That's why I love her so much.

"Bye you guys!"

"Bye bye ngwanake (my child). Come back soon so we can play Monopoly again!"

I chuckle to myself and drive out, she beat us more times than I can count when we played that game.

I look at my rear view mirror and see that they're still waving me goodbye. I wipe a tear that managed to escape my left eye and beep my car before punching it until they're out of sight. I'm already missing them, it's really heartbreaking every time I need to go back and leave them. I don't know why momma doesn't just listen to me with her and Tshedi moving that side, I can't keep doing this to them. Anyway, that's a topic for another day, I turn on the radio and sit comfortably for the road ahead.

Of course, it's cold. You know I'm starting to think that if Jo'burg is cold then North West is warm and vice versa. I even turn on the heater to keep my hands on the steering wheel from freezing. Speaking of freezing, after the pool incident where Bandile was, I was freezing and shaking like a leaf- despite turning on the heat in the car. I saw a few pictures and videos of the fight until I starting performing CPR on Tshepang. Funny how no-one spoke about the near drowning and how I saved a life, they just kept throwing bomb shells on Bandile and how we women let men control us till we reach the grave. Some kept criticising the women that they should know their worth and stop fighting over a guy just because he has money

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which I totally agree with. They fight each other instead of teaming up and tackling the common denominator, Bandile! Unfortunately, you can take a horse to the river but forcing it to drink will make you seem like the idiot even though it clearly needs to freaking drink the water! Okay I need to calm down, I'm driving and it's too early to be getting frustrated over my ex friend. Yeah, I broke our friendship off this morning when he kept calling like a telemarketer. He promised to change and all that crap but I wasn't having it. He should change for him, not for me and if he does then good for him but I'm not taking two steps forward and three steps back. No way. How many times have I been caught in his scandalous affairs? One too many and now a life was nearly lost. I hope Tshepang and Mpumi will wake up and realize that some people will never change. I didn't even tell momma about this, I just went back home and changed just to sit in front of the TV. I wanted to take a bath but that would've woken her and Tshedi up which would've landed me in hot water. I hope Koko Deborah doesn't find out about this too, otherwise all will break lose. She's a prayerful woman but when it comes to disciplining a child, even a grown man, she does it with so much willpower.

I park my car and get out to fill the tank, I'm by the petrol station Troy and I were at when I went to NW. I'm just going to

fill it up for tomorrow so I don't have any problems. I tell the petrol attendant to fill it up which isn't a lot but it doesn't hurt to be sure. I head inside the garage shop to purchase a Red Bull energy drink for what I'm going to face in a few minutes. I go to the counter to pay and find the same woman that complimented me about my outfit yesterday.

We glance at each other obviously recognizing each other but we say nothing, she rings it up for me and gives me my change and a drinking straw. I thank her and head out to my car. I text Troy that I'm nearly there and pay before taking the direction of the apartment.

~Sheryl~

Sugar will be home soon, I simply cannot wait. This will show my gratitude towards her helping my business and all. I was a little disappointed when she told me that Troy didn't even want to help me in the first place, but I guess I deserve that a little. Still, I want to mend our relationship and have no secrets between us. He is my son after all. I know what's best for him. Alas, we come down to sugar. I inwardly call her that because well, I'm already used to her responding to that name. Anyway, sugar is... well she's a good girl but I think I know what my son deserves and he deserves me. I know that pink is his favorite colour which is why I bought lingerie of that colour, I looked so

good but I never got to use it since he was with his buddies most of the time. I know he would've liked it anyway. It makes me even madder when my therapist tells me that I'm suffering a psychological issue known as... I don't even know what he said, all I know is that I simply cannot help it. Saying this would put me back to group therapy back home about 'mothers that fall in love with their sons' so I should try to keep it down on the low. It's wrong? I don't care anymore because I have nothing of sentimental to lose, I mean have you seen him?! It gets really difficult by the day to see her and Troy portraying their love in front of me, so when I think of doing something my mind keeps resetting back to the bigger picture- Troy. I loved my husband but I loved Troy even more, especially considering the fact that he's not my biological son yet his brother, Tory, is of my blood. When my husband came home with him as an infant I immediately fell in love with him, he was so adorable and such a bundle of joy. It got worse when his voice deepened and he gained muscles, height and a beard- although he kept trimming it. Lord knows I wanted him to take me but I resolved to helping myself instead. This weekend was supposed to be about us but his friends kept getting in the way that I eventually went out and spent the day with Blandine while the team was setting up everything. I don't like Blandine by the way, but she was plan B when Troy wouldn't come back home. Her spoilt ways and her robbing my son nearly made me kill her but I left

her for future reference. We went about shopping while I kept checking in with my team. Oh yes, the shooting is the real deal and I do want sugar to be my model, after that she will be the internet sensation. I really don't hate her I just hate was she has that I don't, and that's Troy. I'm being fair either way, I give her fame and she gives me my man. It might be tomorrow, it might be next month, it might be next year but at the end of the day- Troy will be mine, my next husband. I'm his mother after all, my job is to love him and I will absolutely do so. Nothing will stand in my way and I'm not a quitter either, you better ask somebody.

27

~Sheryl~

"Make sure that everything is set up okay? Is Mikey there? Okay good. Yes yes she will be arriving shortly and- yes I will be there to see everything. This is a pivotal moment for my clothing line boy. Okay okay I'll see you soon. Okay bye!"

I hang up in total frustration and anxiety. What's taking sugar so long? She told me that she'll be here around 11H00 and now it's 12H00! Okay maybe I'm being a bit hasty but one should be punctual for certain things because I had to pay a couple more rands to attain her tardiness. Goodness, what did Troy see in her?

Speaking of Troy, he barged into the apartment a few moments ago just smiling away with his phone in his hands. I know that he's probably texting with sugar by the grin on his face, he didn't even notice me in the kitchen as I was preparing him his breakfast. I'm not a woman for the kitchen but I figured that it's been a while since he's had good food so I woke up early to prepare everything. Imagine my disappointment when I found his bed empty this morning. Last time I saw him was last night when he was taking this other drunk friend of his to his house, and I instantly thought that he would come right back. I eventually fell asleep waiting on him that I even forgot to change into my pajamas last night.

"Hey mom!" He comes into the kitchen with his bouncy walk that shows that he's excited for something.

"Hello baby! Would you like some breakfast?" I ask when he sits on the bar stool opposite me.

"Yes please! Thabang doesn't have any food at his house so I basically starved the entire night."

"What exactly happened to you last night?"

"I have no fucking idea!" He exclaims and massages his temple like he's thinking long and hard. I know I want something of his that's long and hard and that is-

"Mom!" He interrupts my day dreaming.

"Yes?"

"Naledi is on her way right now. She's about 5 minutes away I think. Please be on your best behavior! I don't beg but at this point I'm on my knees and asking that you have a little decency for my woman."

I nod and smile at him indicating that the message is thorough and clear. It hurt me a little bit when he said that sugar is his 'woman' but like always I just compile my emotions and think on the bigger picture.

"Baby?"

"Mom?" He asks and looks up to me with his hazel eyes. Oh my God I never really got used to them eyes and I still haven't.

"Do you love Naledi?"

He chuckles a bit and reveals his dimples. If I wasn't such a respectful woman I was going to take him right on this counter.

"Mom. I love Nay with every fibre in my being. I never loved a woman the way I love her. She brings out something in me like-

"

"I asked one question Troy! I expected only a yes or a no!" I shout not realizing that I'm basically yelling at him. He looks at me like I'm some sort of alien, so I just exhale and put a smile on my face before talking.

"Sorry baby child. I just didn't get enough sleep last night so I'm a bit cranky. Forgive me."

"Yeah it's all good you know what I'm saying? Try to get some sleep."

"I can't, Naledi and I have a shooting to do remember?"

"Oh yeah! She told me you told her. I thought it was going to be a surprise or something." He says as he takes a bite of the wheat toast I prepared for him.

"Change of plans." I shrug and put the toaster back where it belongs.

"By the way I forgot to ask, why is you doing this again?"

"Uhm... to thank her for... being my son's happiness and for apologizing for my behavior towards her." Nice save Sheryl.

"Oh, okay. I'm still surprised she said yes."

"You and I both."

"Did you tell her about the special shoot with 'her'?"

"Uhm... I think so." I unsurely reply.

"Hello!"

Troy and I look at each other and before I can say a word he's already up and at the door. Oh it's sugar... yay.

Anyway they continue talking by the door with sugar saying "stop it" and giggling a bit. They both come towards the kitchen with Troy hugging her from behind.

"Morning Mrs Lane." She says with her usual charismatic tone.

"Afternoon." I reply back.

She wide eyes me and checks some rose gold watch on her wrist.

"Oh. I'm so sorry Mrs Lane, since it's Sunday there was a lot of traffic you know people going to church and some driving back home."

"It's okay sugar, I mean Naledi. What matters is that you're here now. Shall we?"

"Oh let me go take a quick shower first, just to freshen up." She pecks my man's lips and goes trotting her big, plump ass to the bedroom. I wish I had that type of ass, and I know that hers is original and organic whereby mine took \$10 000 to get. I never thought of getting plastic surgery but when I saw my son's girlfriend, I knew I had to up my game. I'm still not happy with it but it's an improvement nonetheless.

Troy disappears to the bedroom too and my mind already tells me that sugar is going to be late. He's probably going to make love to her the way he's supposed to be doing with me. I can just imagine him and I in the shower just half way to heaven.

I shake my head so as to escape my epilogue and throw a bunch of dishes in the dish washing machine. It's not exactly my taste, but it'll do. I too head to my room to change because day dreaming about Troy left my panties in a puddle.

"Mrs Lane, I could've driven us here you know. There was no need to pay for a rental car."

"Don't worry honey

I got you. Besides, you drove all the way here from home and now you want to drive again too? No, you deserve a little pampering."

She smiles at me and looks out the window as we pass the tall trees and exquisite mansions. Look, their apartment is nice but this neighborhood right here is definitely my kind of taste. South Africa isn't so ugly after all.

Okay I've got to say, she has some talent in her. The way she poses in front of the camera after only being trained for an hour shows me that it might be in her genes. We took a few practical snaps so that we can see the resolution of the camera and how she looks as a model.

"Okay people! Let's get the dresses out and make sure the makeup artist is here! It's time to make history for 'Lane Clothing Line'! Let's go!"

Everyone starts moving around the mansion and I walk Naledi to the other room so that I can fit her the dresses myself. No one was to touch the material anyway, I get her into my first ideal red traditional Zulu dress. The colourful beads was the perfect touch-up she needed to make her look like a goddess.

It's exquisitely long and has no sleeves, that works well with her chest area.

Surprisingly it fits perfectly and there's no need for any alterations.

"Wow. This is beautiful Mrs Lane, how did you come up with this design?" She asks in total awe and I must say it boosted my confidence about the design even more.

"You want to know the truth?" I say as I keep analysing the dress. She nods her head and reveals her perfect pearly whites.

"I got the inspiration while I was in the bathroom."

She laughs for a second then stops when she sees my dead serious look, after that, she laughed again. I join her in the laughter and I make her turn around once more. I love the way it holds her curves and hips so beautifully, that's why she's the perfect fit for the dress.

She puts on a gown as the makeup artist works her magic.

"Okay we're ready Mrs Lane." The cameraman states.

I nod and go to the room she was being preped in.

She goes out and we set the scene up with her sitting on a beige couch under a chandelier. I call Troy to see how far he is because he's going to be needed here after a few snaps.

~Naledi~

"How many more?" I ask the cameraman.

"This was the last one." He says.

Thank you God! I came here at 12H30 and now it's 17H48.

"Mrs Lane! We're done!"

"Oh no, we're not honey!"

I raise my eyebrow in question and wait for her to say something.

"There's one more dress." She grins and grabs my hand to the prep room.

"Uhm. One more dress? I thought I wore all your designs"

"It's a limited edition dress. Quite expensive for my expensive fan base."

"Oh..."

She goes to the closet and takes out a dress in a plastic sealing. She then slowly unzips the plastic and takes out the dress.

I don't really know if I should even be wearing that, it's so white I feel dirty for even touching it.

She puts it on me and again like all dresses it fits perfectly, the mermaid dress hugs my butt a bit tight but it's not too chafing. The design in front is some sort of Setswana 'thing' but it has a big isiXhosa hat and Swati taste to it too. The hat is also white and I'm ordered to put on with white high heels that reveal my toes, which were painted rose gold by the way. They look good, I knew my toes would come in handy. Thank you mamma!

I'm told to get in a pool and start walking out of it on the stairs, I'm guessing they're taking another video or something. After that Sheryl does something to the dress which instantly becomes dry again and I'm led to another room that is sooo fancy! The chandelier is there and a white piano with white couches and some champagne in an ice bucket.

"Uhm... Mrs Lane?"

"Yes?"

"What are we going to do in here? Just so you know I don't know how to play the piano."

She laughs for a bit and then calls... Troy?

"Honey there's one more shooting to do and you'll be with 'her' in it."

"Her?"

"Yes. To capture the dresses uniqueness we need an animal that's also unique."

"Animal?" I ask with my heart beating so fast it feels like its about to explode.

"Yes. You'll be posing right next to Miracle, the albino lioness with no cage."

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~Sheryl~

"Uhm... well I thought I told her, I just..."

"Mom! I thought you told her! What is this shit? Look now she's traumatized! We're out of here!"

"Troy wait..."

"No mom! I've had it! Look now she's shaking and everything. Now that you got your photographs I need to take my lady home before she needs therapy!"

Troy stomps out of the fancy room we were filming in and shuts the door behind him. Seriously, Naledi is being dramatic now. Sure I never told her but I didn't think it was such a big deal to mention that she'll be taking photos with Miracle. Now Troy is mad as hell. My Troy. You see how she keeps getting in between us? Everything was going good but as soon as she makes a 'peep' sound, my Troy jumps up. I'm starting to think that she maybe did use one of those African herbs to bewitch my man.

I keep going up and down trying to think of how I'm going to go about this issue. Maybe I'm being a bit dramatic myself, I mean the lioness did try to charge at Naledi when Troy let it go so...

"I'm ready Mrs Lane." Naledi comes in through the door with a glass of water in her hand. She puts it down and picks up the dress on her with both hands so that she doesn't fall.

"Babe, what are you doing?"

"T, just make sure it doesn't charge at me again and we'll be good. A few more snaps should be good right?" She looks at the cameraman who confirms her statement by nodding.

"Then let's continue." She sits down on the white couch as the makeup artist reapplies the makeup on her face.

"Babe!" Troy roars that his baritone voice echoes through throughout the room. I see he still has a temper.

"T, please... for me." She looks up at him and he exhales before stomping out yet again. I've never been able to calm him down when he was in a foul mood before, I guess sugar's herbs are really powerful.

I walk over to her with my head held down.

"Naledi, I'm so sorry. I thought I told you but-"

"It's okay Mrs Lane, a busy woman such as you is bound to forget a few things. It's totally natural. I've forgotten a few things myself."

"So you're okay? You're not mad?"

"What? No! I mean I am a bit startled still but definitely not mad." She smiles at me and leans in her head so that they can apply the eyeliner. The natural look is working wonders for her.

I nod and walk over to the cameraman to get his brief update. As he's talking, I keep glancing at sugar sitting there by the piano. I must say, her acting skills through this whole thing with Troy are exceptional. Game on, bitch!

~Naledi~

"Are we done yet?" Troy furiously asks.

"Just one more... aaand we're done! Congratulations everybody! We did it!" The cameraman exclaims.

The people around the set start whistling and clapping hands for the done and dusted project.

Troy, Thabang and some game reserve employees take the tranquilized Miracle and her cub over to the van she came here in. I don't blame Miracle for nearly mauling at me, I mean I'm not too close to her and I figured that she would cause a little havoc after she realized that her albino cub was also going to be taking a few snaps with me outside. She nearly took charge but Troy was able to... I don't know, communicate with her and they tranquilized her before she caused anymore destruction. After Troy went on to yell at his mother, I just came back inside

so that we could get the photoshoot over and done with. The last scene was supposed to be outside on this other hill under a big tree with Miracle's cub fast asleep on my lap. The background was beautiful because it was basically the grand view off all the mansions here. While the photoshoot with Miracle was supposed to appear bold and brave, the photoshoot with the cub was an affectionate scene for the entire project.

I'm still jumpy from the incident but I'm just glad that we're done and I can finally go home to my boo. He was so mad, I thought he was going to let Miracle loose so that it mauls Sheryl but a little kiss and puppy eyes from me got him a little calm.

"That was wonderful Naledi! You're a natural, I knew you were the right person for this!" Sheryl says and walks over to me.

"Thank you Mrs Lane, I had fun too. When will the photos be out?"

"Well, my team and I need to edit a few pictures and see if we can enhance them so they look 'high-definition' appropriate. After that we need to have a board meeting with Drum magazine and Scarlet magazine from the states to set up the photos."

"I'm going to be on Drum Magazine?"

"If we're lucky

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the front cover." She winks her eye and takes the dress away. I put on my original clothes and bid everyone goodbye.

Troy holds my hand and we walk out to his car at the front gate of the mansion. He reverses the car out and takes the road back home.

We say nothing to each other the entire ride home, although he's still mad, he's still a gentleman so he opens the door for me, holds my hand again and we walk up to our apartment in silence. He unlocks the front door and indicates the 'ladies first' gesture. I walk in and head straight to the couch at the lounge. He closes the door behind him and throws his keys on the kitchen counter before joining me on the couch.

"So."

"So." I reply back.

"Why?"

"She's your mother. I respect her that much. Plus she's a 53 year old woman who happens to forget some basic things so forgetting to inform me about Miracle is understandable."

"Nay, that was dangerous."

"I know, but was it bad?"

"Yes!"

"Did I die?"

"..."

"Good. Then let's drop it, please T. Please?"

"Fine."

"Thank you baby baby." I get on his lap and hug him tightly. He hugs me back and after the embrace he gives me his devilish grin.

"The shower. You forgetting what you did to me in the shower?"

"Really? Mind refreshing my memory?"

I shake my head and lean in to kiss him, he pulls me closer and holds my butt so that I don't fall off the couch.

Despite my extra gained weight he's able to put his arms under my thighs and pick me up while we're still kissing. Next thing I know, I'm on the bed and he's on top of me with only my moans filling the room.

A few seconds later the front door opens and closes again. Heels echoing on the tile floor doesn't disrupt the mood but we're definitely aware of the aura. After what seemed like the

best kiss I've ever gotten, Sheryl screams from the kitchen. Troy pulls out from the kiss as we both rush out of the bedroom to the kitchen where we find a panicky Sheryl standing with a spatula in her hand.

"Ma? What's going on?" Troy hurriedly asks.

She looks at us and blinks a few times to stop the tears forming to escape her eyes.

"A snail!" She exclaims and we both calm down and laugh at her silliness.

"Stop laughing Troy!" She retaliates.

"Mrs Lane, our apartment building has a flower garden there at the back. This is probably where this little guy came from." I try to reassure her but she's still not letting go of that spatula. Troy picks up the snail and goes to the sliding door at the back of the apartment before throwing the snail.

"T!"

"What?"

"We're about 3 floors high yet you just threw that snail down the balcony!"

"So?"

"So it's probably dead by now!"

He looks down at the balcony and looks at me before doing the 'Oh shit!' face. I pat Mrs Lane on the back and head to my room to call momma, maybe her voice will soothe me down.

"ROAAAR!"

"Baby! Baby!" His sleepy voice muffles through the pillow. He then sits up from the bed and looks up at me.

"You're already up?"

"It's Monday morning. I have an important meeting in a few." I say and fix my collar blazer and look at the mirror before going to the kitchen with my laptop bag.

I fill my water bottle and look at the schedule Rivonia sent me on my phone, this is going to be a busy Monday! Lucky me, I take out momma's lunchbox and eat the scones Koko Deborah baked over the weekend. This will go great with hot coffee, yes! I bite into it and sip on my coffee- I'm in Heaven.

"Morning!" Sheryl comes in the kitchen and sits on one of the bar stools.

"Morning Mrs Lane. Scone?"

"Don't mind if I do!"

I put 4 on a saucer for her and pour coffee in her mug.

"This is good. You made these?"

I chuckle and put the coffee kettle down.

"No, my grandma back home baked them and insisted I bring a couple of them back with me."

She flutters her eyes in enjoyment and all I can do is just laugh at her reaction. That's how I was a few moments ago.

Troy walks in and instead of sitting he comes to me and hugs me from behind. He whispers an apology and knowing me, I can't help but forgive him for the petty thing about the snail yesterday. Also his voice is sexy so it works out both ways. I turn around and give him his coffee.

"Thanks babe." He says and sits on the bar stool next to Sheryl while sipping.

"You're welcome." I say and grab my handbag, suitcase and water bottle to go. My car keys are already in my handbag so I kiss Troy and bid Sheryl goodbye.

Before I can close the door I hear Troy asking, "So when are you leaving ma? It's been more or less a week."

Before I'm caught eavesdropping, I close the front door and head to the office.

"Morning Miss Mapulane."

I'm astonished by his voice but I quickly get out of the car and lock it.

"Mr. Bodyguard! How are you this Monday morning?"

"Shall we?" He indicates we get inside the building and I sigh before getting inside. This bodyguard seriously needs to chill maybe get a little whiskey in him to loosen him up.

"Morning Miss Mapulane."

"Morning Rivonia. Do I have any messages?"

"No but there's someone here to see you."

"Who?"

"Precious Zono."

"Oh, she's super early?"

"Like a bird looking for a worm."

I chuckle at her statement and walk over to my office where I find Precious and Mr Cornish. How did they get in there?

"Morning."

"Morning advocate. This is Precious Zono, the wife of the late reverend." Mr Cornish says.

I put my belongings down and extend my hand towards her but she just looks at it and right down her feet. I ashamedly revert my hand and notice that she's quite troubled. Her eyes keep looking at me and back at her feet.

"Right. Well, how can I help you Mrs. Zono?" I ask.

She looks at Mr Cornish and then shifts her gaze back at me.

"Who did it?" She finally speaks up.

"We're unsure for now but-"

She puts her face in her hands and keeps taking in deep breaths. She starts fanning herself and Mr Cornish goes out to get her water. When he's out, she takes off her jacket and the sun hat on her hair to minimize the heat she's experiencing.

Right before I can ask anything I notice something odd. The long black hair I was hoping to get a sample out of... is gone. She's gone bald.

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"It's lunch time you know."

"I know. However, some things have got to wait Rivonia."

"So hunger, mental health and all that. That waits right?"

I look at her and go back to packing away my handbag. I'll leave my laptop bag here because I'm coming back anyway.

"Where do you have to go that's so important?"

"My client." I reply back.

"Miss Kethe?"

"Yes."

"Wait so you're starving yourself because of a criminal?"

"Hey! Innocent till proven guilty. Besides, I'll get something on the way. Happy?"

"I thought you believed in guilty till proven innocent."

"Not in this case. This one's... different." I reply and grab my handbag and water bottle out, Rivonia follows me to the front desk as I pen down that I'll be meeting with my client- just for formality.

As I walk out to the parking lot, I feel a certain presence behind me. I can feel that there's someone staring at me and it's quite

unsettling when you're in a dim parking lot with no one around and no form of weapon to protect yourself. I try to walk faster and as I suspected, the heavy footsteps grow louder and quicker too. At this point I'm ready to just turn around and face this 'person' head on. As I'm approaching my car, I reach into my handbag and grab a pair of scissors I use to cut paper when I file a written document about a client, it's not as long or sharp as I hoped it to be but it'll do. My intake of oxygen grows heavier as I plan on what I'm going to do. I reach my car and stop, the footsteps don't stop however and I grab my courage and scream as I turn around and threaten whoever is behind me with a scissor.

"Ma'am ma'am! It's me!"

The adrenaline rush made my eyes a bit hazy but I can definitely recognize that voice. It's my bodyguard!

"Dude! Don't scare me like that!" I say as I heavily pant in relief. I put the scissors back in my handbag and put my hand on my chest to feel my unnatural heartbeat.

"You're still not used to being followed around?"

"Well no. Couldn't you come faster and just walk beside me instead of behind me. You know how many homicides happen in a parking lot annually?" I ask as I keep catching my breath.

"Sorry about that. Just doing my job."

"Well could you do it less creepier? So I'm guessing you're coming with me to see Miss Kethe?"

"Affirmative."

I sigh and let him in, he offers to drive me to the prison and I let him be. I got a bodyguard and a chauffeur!

On the road, he keeps looking at the rear view mirror then back on the road.

"Just make a right here." I direct him.

Instead of taking a right he takes a left and still keeps looking at the rear view mirror. I follow his eyes and try to look behind us before he startles me.

"Don't look!" He roars.

"What is going on? Why'd you take a left?"

"I think we're being followed. That black car has been on our six ever since we took the high way turn. That was about 8 minutes ago yet it's still on our tail."

I start panicking and ruffle through my handbag.

"What are you doing?"

"Calling 10111!"

"No! Don't! Well, not yet. Let's see if they really are a threat. I'm going to take a turn into that farm over there. If they take that route too then you can call for help. Okay?"

I throw my handbag on the seat and fold my arms. This is insane, and dangerous! Why me? Why now? So many things are going through my mind. If they take that route, what exactly is Mr Bodyguard going to do? Shoot them? Ask them politely? No... he's going to shoot them.

He takes a slow turn into the farm gravel road where it looks like a farm where they keep livestock and grow crops and stops the car. I can't help but turn around to see if they too took that route but to our satisfaction, the car continues along the highway until we cannot see it anymore. I do my breathing exercises and smile at him when he asks if I'm okay. Of course I'm not okay, that was way too odd. Just like how odd it was when Precious took off her sun hat earlier. It was like she was trying to show me or tell me ,with no words, that she's not a suspect. Which would make her a suspect anyway because we haven't disclosed to the public that the killer 'might' have long black hair. She drank the water Mr Cornish brought for her then told me to keep her updated before she left. I didn't even get to ask her a few questions because apparently she had an emergency with one of her children that she needed to attend to ASAP.

"Ma'am?!"

I look up at him and force a smile.

"Ma'am just say the word and I'll turn the car around. If you feel unsafe, then we can go back to the office building."

"No. No. I-I need to... see my client so... just- yeah just go. I'm fine."

"You're sure?"

"It won't come back?"

"No."

"Then I'm sure. Let's go."

He looks at me for a while to see if I'm really okay, which makes me even more uncomfortable. After he's sure that I'm calm, he drives onto the road and heads for the prison. That... was not okay. I take a mouthful of water from my bottle just to calm the nerves.

"You're coming in too?" I ask.

"Affirmative." He says and locks my car before putting the keys in his pocket. Who made him the owner of my car now?

Anyway, we do the usual procedure of signing in and getting our visitation passes before we're led to the all-too-familiar

area space where we usually meet. I sit down and look back at my bodyguard who's just standing a few feet away from me, menacingly. Hectic I tell you.

I wait a bit longer than expected but I'm glad by the way she looks when she comes to sit by me at the metal table.

"Miss Kethe."

"Naledi. How are you?"

"I should be asking you that?"

"Well... same old, same old." She smiles at her statement.

"Miss Kethe. I did some digging and it turns out that the Reverend had a wife by the name of Patience."

"Isn't her name Precious?" She closes her eyes when she realizes that she just confirmed that she knows the wife.

"So you knew about the wife?"

"Eish..."

"Miss Kethe?"

"Yes! Yes

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I knew about Precious."

I take a deep breath and furthermore discuss a way forward for her. Although we're still waiting for a court date, we should not be despondent. The case is still in our favour.

I ask her to retell me what happened at the hotel just so that I know we didn't leave anything behind.

"Okay so we had booked the top floor and we instantly just made ourselves comfortable. He changed into comfortable clothing and I took a shower because we had travelled to get there. We used to live in Johannesburg but came this side to... let our hair down. It hasn't been easy. Anyway, we ordered room service and the food came."

"Do you know the name of the person that was bringing your food?"

"No. I didn't even see him because Jeffrey was the one that went to go attend to him. I heard his male voice when he thanked Jeffrey for the tip."

"Okay, carry on."

"It was about 8 then and I was feeling drowsy so I told Jeffrey that I wanted to sleep. He didn't listen to me but instead turned the volume of the television even louder, making it impossible for anyone to fall asleep. We started arguing and I just told him that he was being childish while he said that it's his money that brought us here so if he wants to take the volume high then he

can. Eventually I grew sick of his sight so I got up and went to the bathroom. I had to pee anyway. While I was busy doing my business, I heard the door swing open and then close again. I thought that maybe he walked out until he asked who the 'invader' was. Last time I checked we locked the door so obviously my anxiety started rising. He gasped loudly before I heard him gag and choke as the sound of a weapon penetrating him grew faster. His body made a loud thud on the floor, then there was silence. I didn't make a sound, all I could do was just hold my breath so that I don't scream or anything. Then another one came through the door too."

"Wait what?" I interrupt her.

"Yes. I heard the door open and then close again."

"Did you hear them talking?"

"No. All I heard was a 'hm' as they were walking up and down the room."

"Did it sound like a female or a male?"

"I don't know. It could be both. I was too scared to even notice. Anyway one of them walked to the bathroom door and then knocked like 10 or 11 times before they both left."

"10 or... may I ask why I'm hearing about this additional person now?"

"I thought you knew. Sorry."

I massage my temple and we continue talking till the visitation hour was over.

"Miss Kethe, I will find whoever did this." I promise her.

"Even if it's the last thing you do?"

"Even if it's the last thing I do." I reassure her.

She smiles and thanks me for the work I've done so far. We bid each other goodbye before I head out with Mr Bodyguard to the front desk to hand in our visitation passes and also sign out. While I'm signing something tells me to look at the pages before today's date. I see that someone has been visiting Emmarentia for a while now. In fact, it looked like the person would visit after I've paid her a visit. The signature keeps becoming more faint as I page through and it also seems like the person tried different signatures everytime they had to sign in. Who keeps paying her a visit? I go back and keep insisting that I need to see my client but they won't budge. Lord knows I wanted to go back but visitation hours are over so even if this 'person' or 'people' wanted to come over, they wouldn't be able to talk to her. I can't believe Emmarentia would keep this away from me. She even kept the fact that there were two people at the scene of the crime instead of one. Ah! This is bad. I trusted her but now... I don't think she's being honest with

me. The story about the 2 people seemed genuine though, I knew the killer couldn't work alone on this. She was even whispering when she was retelling the story, as if the walls had ears or something. I'm coming back tomorrow though, I need answers!

"Let's go back to the office. I got some digging to do." I order Mr Bodyguard who instantly gets in and starts the ignition. He reverses out of the outdoor parking and heads out the prison gates.

While on the road, my mind keeps pondering on that black car, what if that's the person that keeps paying Emma a visit? What if it's not? What if Precious' sudden appearance is nothing short of a strong coincidence? Argh! I need food, to fuel my mind for the day ahead.

Troy texts me that Miracle refuses to let her albino cub out of her sight after the photoshoot yesterday. I just laugh and tell him to be careful around her, at the end of the day she's still a wild animal and she's still a protective mother.

"Here?" Mr Bodyguard asks.

"Yes!" I exclaim and leave my handbag inside. I take a R100 note and gallop inside my favourite café, Mugg&Bean! I order the chocolate muffins and two cappuccinos to go. Hey! Mr

Bodyguard may be on duty but no-one can resist a cappuccino, so the 2nd one will be for him.

I get an uneasy feeling as I'm waiting for my order but I shake it off and just take in the homey scenery here. I just absolutely love this place, if I could, I would move in next door!

"Here you go ma'am. Have a wonderful day!"

"Thank you. You too." I say back at the cashier after she hands me the food to go. I pay and exit the place to find Mr Bodyguard holding his pistol in hand, just waiting outside. Some people begin to walk away from us quickly because he just looks ready to pounce on someone at this point.

"Hey! What's going on?"

"Ma'am we need to leave. Now!"

"Wait! What's going on? I just got you coffee."

"Ma'am please listen to me. I'll explain in the car."

As scary as he sounds, I follow his instruction and get in the car. He backs up and in no time we're already on the road.

"You want to uhm... tell me what's going on now?"

"Apologies but your phone rang while you were inside and I answered it for you."

"Uhm... okay. I hope you were polite."

"It was from Rivonia concerning the prison lady."

I stop sipping on my coffee and look at him as I wait for him to finish his statement. He's talking in riddles and it's frustrating me.

"And?"

"It's your client, Emmarentia Kethe or something like that."

"W-what about her?" I ask and start shaking uncontrollably.

"She's been stabbed, she's dead."

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~Naledi~

"Take me there."

"Ma'am?"

"Take me there right now. I want to see something."

"Ma'am it's a murder scene there and-"

"Please!"

He blankly stares at me then makes a U-turn, heading towards the prison's direction. I keep fanning myself with my hand hoping it will make my hyperventilating state ease down. How could this happen? Visitation hours were over so who stabbed Emmarentia? Could it be that she got in a fight and an inmate stabbed her? What if the killers have spies inside the prison? For all we know the prison wardens could be hired assassins. Oh Lord, why? I hope they do something to save or... ah! This is traumatizing. I was just talking to her a few minutes ago and now... now she's-

"We're here." Mr Bodyguard says.

I hurriedly climb out of the car and rush inside but of course, they won't let me in. There's a siren that's going off in the prison that it gets really hard to talk to the prison warden that I'm Emmarentia's advocate.

"Ma'am! Please exit the building! It's not safe!" The prison warden shouts so I can hear her. I slowly walk backwards and just watch as all the employees of the prison go up and down the hallways. I didn't even get through the first gate so getting to Miss Kethe is next to impossible. With a heavy heart, I walk back to the parking area with a security guy behind me. I thank him and get inside the car in silence.

"Ma'am?"

I look at him on the rear view mirror before turning away. The tears prompting to escape my eyes would make me lose face in front of him. So I wipe a tear with the sleeve of my blazer and tell Mr Bodyguard to take me back to the office. The ambulance here is giving me bad Deja Vu.

"Honey. I'm so sorry."

"It's okay. She-"

"No need to explain. Mr Cornish wants to see you in his office by the way."

"Okay. Thanks Rivonia." I walk past the reception and take the elevators to Mr Cornish's office. I may have gone there only twice since I've worked here, but I definitely know my way up there. I'm trying to keep it together but it's getting harder to act strong. This is heartbreaking. The one person that was a victim

in all this crime massacre and she just so happened to die in the most cruel way and place. Sure, she had her flaws but I still believe that she was innocent in all this.

Lost in thought, I didn't even realize that I was at the top floor up until someone stopped the elevator doors from closing with their arm.

"Hey! Get your head out of the clouds!" Rea exclaims.

You remember Rea? The woman that wanted to take over this case at the board meeting.

"Oh. Sorry." I say and instantly get out of the elevator. She gets in and fixes her red leather skirt before pressing a button, she then smirks before the elevator doors close in front of us. What was that all about? Is it because Miss Kethe is dead? Even if she was assigned to the case, I have a feeling the killer would've gotten to Emma way before she could. I feel like she's in competition with me and Lord knows that I. Couldn't. Care. Less.

I walk to the tall, brown wooden doors of the main office before knocking 3 times on it.

"Come in!" He bellows from behind the doors.

I take a deep breath and open the door before closing it behind me.

"Advocate Mapulane. Please take a seat." He says.

I stare at his zipper on his pants that is wide open, you could see his white underwear.

"Oh! My apologies." He ashamedly says and stands up to zip his pants. He couldn't zip them up while sitting because of his pot belly that has grown a bit over the last 2 weeks, but I throw away the thought.

Now you can already tell what was going on in here. The desk is a mess, the whiskey bottle is half, Mr Cornish has unzipped pants, Rea just came back from his office with a relatively short skirt that she kept fixing as she was walking. I'm not insinuating anything but I hope we're on the same page about what 'could've' been happening in here.

"Now I'm going to be honest with you. This is not looking good." He says.

"Sir?"

"The case. It's not looking good."

"Oh. You heard?"

"Yes. So I'm thinking that we should hand the case over to Miss Goapele."

"Rea? But why?!"

"Mapulane, calm down. You and I both know that this case is getting way too dangerous, even for you no?"

"No! The case was- it doesn't matter anyway. The client is dead." I spill the bitter words out.

"On the contrary. She's not dead yet."

"What?" I ask.

"She was stabbed yes

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but she was taken to the hospital where they found out that she was still alive."

I put a hand over my mouth in shock and this time, I let the tears flow right down. They weren't tears of sorrow but of happiness. I cannot believe this!

"Yes, we all thank Allah." He says.

"Uhm... whatever you say sir."

He looks at my cross necklace then rubs his neck in embarrassment. Instead of continuing to talk, he lowers his gaze at my chest area and just stares. I loudly clear my throat which makes him snap out of it.

"Yes. Uhm... so the case will be handed over to Miss Goapele. I hope you will give her the notes and information you have so far so that she can keep up."

"But sir-"

"Miss Mapulane, please don't make this harder than it already is."

"But you said- you said that I was able to handle it."

"... and you are, but you are one of my brightest here. If anything were to happen to you, this legal firm would topple."

"Oh please! Stop with the modesty."

"I'm serious. Miss Goapele has dealt with a serial killer case before which is why I'm handing it over to her."

I look down as my breaths keep getting heavier to intake. This is not fair! So she just gets to sleep with the boss and suddenly the case is- okay, I need to calm down. Saying this out loud without any proof could get me into some serious trouble.

"Hey. Don't be discouraged no? You did your best, I myself wouldn't have gotten even half way to the truth like you did."

"Will that be all?"

"Yes. You can take the rest of the day off then we'll assign a new case to you tomo-"

"No. Please give it to me now. I need to keep my mind preoccupied." "As you wish."

~Sheryl~

"Ma! Hurry up!" Troy exclaims from the front door.

I growl through my teeth and just stare at my reflection in the bathroom mirror. How could Troy do this to me? After sugar left this morning, he asked me when am I leaving. I know he was still upset over the Miracle and photoshoot incident but to lack common courtesy is just so disrespectful. I told him that I needed to book a plane then I'll be out of their hair, only to find out that he had already bought a ticket for me and the plane would take off in a few hours. He had already planned to get rid of me even before the photoshoot. To say I was heartbroken would be me lying to myself. I was shattered, and I still am. My baby has seriously been poisoned. It doesn't matter though, I've already concluded with the magazines that sugar should be on the front cover and all. It's only a matter of time before she gets to do an interview with them then sign on the dotted line before her life would be 'revolutionalized'. It's not a real word but you already know what I mean. I take my makeup kit and exit the bathroom to find Troy nowhere in sight.

"Troy? Baby?" I shout.

I look at the wide open door and head towards it where I find Troy loading my suitcase in the trunk of his car at the front parking lot.

I look at him lifting his strong arms to close the trunk that I already know what I'm going to do to myself the minute I land in Los Angeles. It's time to go I guess and even though I came here with an agenda, I thoroughly enjoyed my stay here. It was good to see the mistress that took my Troy away and even pay her back with gratitude. Yes I know, I'm a nice person. I'm an even nicer lover. "Ma?!" He exclaims down below.

I wave at him and close the door of their apartment before making my way to the elevator. As it's going down, I realize how brilliant this whole thing has unfolded. I'll go back home then draft a watertight plan that will prepare for any possible contingency sugar can throw my way. Truth be told, I was running out of patience and nearly confessed my love for Troy this morning. The night gown I was wearing this morning? I had my strawberry lingerie underneath. That would've been a stupid move purposely directed by emotions. So I need to go back to the drawing board and figure out how I'm going to claim my man from that voodoo woman. Now that I've paid sugar back, my conscious is clear. Now nothing... and no one can stop me.

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~Naledi~

A few weeks later

"What are you doing?!"

"Making a koda, what did it have again?"

"T, a 'kota' does not have peanut butter in it!"

"It doesn't? I tasted a bit of peanut and some butter when I ate it so..."

"So you decided to add peanut bu- how come you're hungry when we just ate out anyway?"

"The doctor said that I'm healthy so... bring on the junk heat!"

I laugh at him as he takes a bite of the sandwich and starts cringing at its foul taste.

"We're going to be late for the movie." I remind him.

"Oh, yeah. Let me just finish this."

"You're really going to finish that?" I ask.

"Yep."

I shake my head and go to the bedroom to fetch my leather jacket, I didn't look at the weather update but it's better to be safe than sorry. The sun may shine once in a while but it's still

June and it's still the winter season. It's the 20th of June to be precise, and may I say that this has been a bitter sweet season for me. When I came back from work, I found Sheryl gone and it kind of made me both happy and guilty. Especially when Troy told me that he's the one that bought her the plane ticket home. I know he was still mad about the Miracle incident and... everything else she did. However, based on the recent posts on Facebook, I'd say that Sheryl's clothing line has definitely picked up. She called me the other day when Scarlet Magazine put me on the front cover wearing her 'special dress' and told me that I'm a fashion icon. I was humbled but told her that her clothing line picked up because of her killer dress and not me. I may have been modest about it but I seriously couldn't sleep that night. I was so ecstatic about it that I hardly couldn't contain myself. I just started crying tears of joy on how beautiful I looked despite me bringing myself down because of my curves and all. However, Troy was still mad and I could see by the way he just smiled then said nothing when I told him about it. I know he was excited for me, but his anger and disappointment in his mother revealed themselves quite clearly.

Furthermore, Drum Magazine was a bit of a tackle to deal with so Sheryl decided to let them go since she was receiving enough publicity anyway.

With her gone though, Troy and I were able to rebuild our relationship, not that it needed any fixing but there's always room for improvement. We've been spending time together and we just came from our annual medical check-up which is why he was eating... that. Honestly, it's been amazing. Tshedi hasn't gone back to his theft ways so it's been good.

Well, not all good. Rea took Miss Kethe's case right from under me. It was difficult to let it go, especially when I heard that Emmarentia has been asking for me, but I had to. Mr Cornish may be an unfair pervet but he is a smart man, giving the case to a professional was the way to go. Too many lives were lost and our main client nearly knocked on Heaven's door because I couldn't solve or think of something fast enough.

"Please don't tell me you're changing again!" Troy exclaims from the kitchen.

I snap back into reality and grab my phone and leather jacket before joining him again at the kitchen. He may be a little dramatic but after my appearance on Scarlet Magazine, I've been getting a few eyes being drawn to me. I'm not a celebrity, God no! It's just that it gets overwhelming when you cannot go anywhere without someone taking a picture of you or smiling very creepy-like at you or even seeing people talking about you in broad daylight. I've had my fair share of publicity when I was appointed Miss Kethe's lawyer and when Troy's game reserve

surfing the web. Just not like this though. It's not everywhere and it's not by everyone, but you start hallucinating people looking at you when you've already experienced such a thing.

"Okay. Let's go!" I say to Troy.

"Wait, I'm still eating."

"T, I know you don't wanna eat that. No need for you to act all tough on me. Just... throw it away."

"Really? You're not going to scold at me for wasting food?"

I chuckle at his dismay.

"I say don't waste food if the food can be fixed and eaten. That right there, is human poison."

"Mxm! You're just jealous that I'm a better cook!" He says with annoyance before dumping the sandwich in the bin.

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We reach to the cinema still debating over who is the best cook between the both of us.

"Tell you what, how about we do a cook-off and Thabang will be the judge?" He asks as he opens the car door for me.

"If you're bringing Thabang then I'm bringing Karabo. It's fair that way." I add.

"We'll need a third taster though, someone who we know for sure doesn't take sides."

"How about Nancy?" I ask.

We both look at each other and burst out in laughter. Yeah, no way we're doing that. Thabang and Nancy in the same room would make the whole evening awkward. I told Troy about their history and he just kept laughing and saying he's going to be doing a bit of teasing to Thabang the next day at work. If I'm being honest though, Nancy needs a professional therapist so that she can deal with whatever is bugging her so much. I tried to take her out but the date ended very quickly when she saw another ex of hers in the same coffee shop we were at. She just said that she's fine it's just that she was 'uncomfortable' there so I played along with it.

"Two tickets please." I say and buy the movie tickets while Troy gets us popcorns.

Now usually I get a bit eye drama but sometimes it's Troy who gets stared at, and it so happens to be 100% females who do that. I never told him how it uncomfortable it makes me feel, but then if I did what should he do? 'Un-make' himself hot? It wouldn't be fair to pin the blame of jealousy on him, especially if he doesn't even give the girls his attention. So whenever that happens, I just smile to myself and go about the rest of my day. It gets even funnier when he comes to me then stands beside

me or holds my waist with his one hand. The look on their faces is 'priceless' everytime.

"Hey, I got the popcorn." He says.

"Hey, I got the tickets." I say and we both go in and take our seats. We don't like the back row or the front row

so we sit right in the middle and wait for the movie to start. It's a full house, mainly because Gabriella Union and Taraji P. Henson are the stars of the movie. Which are two women I absolutely adore!

So paying close attention, the movie begins and the drama starts.

Of course, there has to be that one person that spoils the entire experience for us. Sitting two seats away from me is a guy that started loudly typing on his bright phone and making yawning gestures whenever the movie goes on an action scene. He also chews on his popcorns loudly and burps too. Many people around him tried to reprimand him of cinema etiquette but he would just ignore them and continue desecrating the entire film experience. I could see that Troy was a bit annoyed too but not as annoyed as I was. This is Gabriella Union we're talking about!

So when he went over the line by calling his 'friend' and loudly complained about how the movie 'sucks' I took a deep breath and leaned in so that he can see me.

"Sir can you keep it down please? We're trying to watch the movie. You can outside to finish your phone call if it's important." I whisper to him.

"Mind your business kaffer!" He loudly scolds me then continues with his phone call.

Troy nearly stood up but I made him sit and told him I got this.

I stood up from my seat, not caring if I was blocking anyone's view, and went to stand in front of the 'movie bully'.

He stops talking to his 'friend' when he notices me and it seems I've drawn attention to us both.

"Hey! If you don't respect yourself that's fine, but respect other people that are trying to watch the movie. You've been a nuisance since the movie began and honestly I've had it!"

"Yeah!" One woman protests who was sitting next to him.

"So why don't you just pick up your two brain cells and get out before I show you what being a 'kaffer' means. It's not a threat, it's a motherfucking warning." I walk back to my seat and face forward. So as to what happened to the guy I don't know, but I ended up pretending to watch the movie instead of actually

paying attention to it. I was annoyed already and I realized that I swore too.

"That's my girl!" Troy whispered to me when I leaned on his shoulder and watched the movie.

The movie ends and we all make our way out of the theatre. Some people are still staring at me and I don't know whether it's because of the incident with the guy or they recognize me from the Scarlet magazine or both. Either way, I handled that situation the best I could so I didn't feel any shame nor embarrassment.

Troy and I get in the car and drive back home without saying a word to one another.

We get in the apartment and I rush for the bathroom. That raspberry drink filled up my bladder ten folds.

"Hey errr... babe?" Troy says from the kitchen.

I wanted to answer him but I quickly finish up, wash my hands and join him in the kitchen.

"Yeah?"

"You're okay?" He asks.

"Yeah, why?"

"You've been quiet."

"You've also been quiet." I say and take a seat on one of the bar stools.

"Yeah, but I was quiet because you were quiet."

"I can do this all day skippy."

He chuckles and then takes out some bread and sausages.

"I'm really proud of how you handled that situation though." He says.

"You are?"

"Yeah, you became a voice for the voiceless."

"Wow. I didn't think of it that way. I was too busy re-thinking on how I easily let that swear word slip from my lips."

He stops what he's doing and leans in so that he can kiss me.

"That's because those lips are mine." He slyly says.

"Sies!"

"Did... did you just wipe off my kiss?" He dramatically asks.

"Yeah I did. What are you going to do about it homie?"

He grabs my face and kisses me again, very deeply so.

I attempt to wipe the kiss before he warns me.

"You best not do that." He warns me again.

I quickly wipe it off and get up to start running.

"I done warned you!" He says and comes running after me into the bedroom. Of course, he caught up with me and started giving me baby kisses all over my face.

"Okay! Okay!" I surrender.

"When are you going to learn that you can never outrun me? Just like how you can never beat me in the kitchen." He says with his face very close to mine.

"That remains to be seen grandpa!" I retaliate.

"You know, it would be really embarrassing to lose in front of your friend. So just give up now and we'll settle this once and for all." He says.

"When I lose? Ha! Says the guy who added peanut butter in a kota."

"Yeah! And it was delicious!" He proudly says.

"Liar! You threw it away!"

"Yeah because I was full."

"Why didn't you save it for later then?" I ask.

"A sandwich of that magnitude cannot be 'saved for later' because it's best eaten at that moment."

"You're not going to admit are you?"

"Admit what? That I'm a great cook? Yeah I'll admit to that."

"Say what?" I ask while laughing.

Yeah, the debate lasted for over an hour until we both started yawning. We took a shower and ate what I cooked earlier, which was a simple pap and wors, before heading to bed. While I was slowly dozing off, I could hear him still mumbling about how great of a chef he is. The last thing I heard him say was, "I'm a great cook, you can... even ask Tory."

"Morning loser chef." He says as I walk into the kitchen with my suitcase and laptop bag.

"Says the guy that devoured my cooked food yesterday." I scoff at him.

"That's because I was hungry. Ever eaten something out of hunger and it tasted good? Yeah, that's what I was... yeah."

I look at him and chuckle at his inability to lie. I pour hot coffee and sip on it over an endless debate with him.

"I'm going to be late. See you later!" I exclaim to him as I grab my car keys and head to the door.

"I love you but I'm still a better cook!" He yells from the kitchen.

"I love you too loser chef!" I yell back and head to work.

Upon arriving, I greet Mr Bodyguard and like usual, he just nods and follows me inside. I have a sudden hate towards my job now and it's affecting my mood every time I come to work. Me giving up on Miss Kethe's case was both smart and heartbreaking, it made me even more irritated when I had to hand over my discovered information to the provocative Rea. Then Mr Cornish gave me some case about a drug lord that's being held accountable for selling his illegal merchandise to underaged teenagers.

It was interesting but it was too easy, I gathered up almost everything so now it's just all up to the Magistrate to decide on how his life will unfold.

"Morning Miss Mapulane. You have a visitor."

"Morning Rivonia. Who is it?"

"It's the new detective that was handed the Reverend's case."

"Oh. To take over from Detective Maphanga?"

"Yes. She's in the bathroom and she'll be out soon. I'll direct her to your office."

I'm taken aback by the 'she' word but leave the thought behind my head. I just nod and head to my office to settle in. I want to see who this new detective is before I direct her to Rea's office. They must've not gotten the brief yet that I'm no longer representing Miss Kethe.

"Hello?"

I turn around and ask her to come in. Well, she's definitely a dark beauty indeed. She also happens to be muscular but not too much and tall! She has a razor cut and a blue suit that makes her look even more badass. I'm a bit jealous.

"Please take a seat."

"Thank you." She says before pulling out a notepad and a pen from her blazer. She has a Nigerian accent.

"How can I help you?" I ask.

"I just need to ask you a few question. By the way, I'm Detective Mutsa. I've been handed over the Reverend's murder case."

"So I've been told. Why do you need my help? I'm not the representative for Miss Kethe anymore."

"Oh! I thought- my apologies. May you direct to the current attorney. I got a bit lost on my way here." She shyly says.

"It's okay. Her office is just down the hall to the right. You'll see her name engraved on the glass door. Advocate Goapele."

She stands up and fixes her blazer.

"Thank you Advocate Naledi. I'll ask for you if I need anything."

"Uhm... it's Advocate Mapulane around here."

She stops by the door and turns to face me.

"What did you say your surname was?"

"Uhm... Mapulane. Are you okay?" I asked because she looks like she's about to cry.

"W-what is your fathers name and surname and what does he do?" She terrifyingly asks. She's acting strange.

"Uhm... well he passed on but his name was George Mapulane and he was the Chief of Police."

"How did he die?"

A little insensitive but I tell her anyway.

"I can't believe it's you." She says with tears in her eyes.

"Whoa! What are you talking about?"

"The girl that your father died to save from a bullet from the mob? That girl is me. I'm that girl that was saved by your father that day."

"What?"

"Yes, it's me. I cannot believe I'm in the presence of the daughter of a mighty hero." She excitedly says.

My arms and legs may have been shaking but I grabbed the last energy in my entire being and slowly walked towards her, not shifting my gaze away from her, until I was a few inches away from her.

"You're the girl my father saved that day?" I ask with trembling voice.

"Yes! You know I never really had the chance to thank him for his sacrifice and bra-"

"You're the reason my father is 6 feet into the earth? The reason why my mother is a widow and my brother doesn't remember his father?"

"Abeg (I beg) don't take it like that now. I wasn't part of the mob or anything like that, I was just a lost 14 year old who was looking for her boyfriend and-"

"My father is gone because instead of looking for 'x' in your math book you were looking for dick?"

"Uhm... well uhm... I-"

"Detective Mutsa, I'm giving you 3 seconds to voetsek (leave) out of my sight before I say and/or do something the human race should never dare encounter."

"Naledi please don't be like that now..." She pleads with a few tears running down her cheeks.

"1..." I say as I close my eyes and listen to my heart beating at an alarming rate.

"Naledi please! My boyfriend was going to take me away from my barbaric father and-"

"2..."

"I'm sorry for your loss I didn't mean to-"

"3." I open my eyes and grab the nearest lamp so I can throw it to her. She closes the door before it can hit her and runs down the hallway.

I feel my soul leave my body as the bulb of the lamp flickers before dying out. Just like how the lamp was into pieces, so was my heart.

"It's her momma, it really is. I just saw the video taken that day and she hasn't changed a bit. Even her razor cut hairstyle is still there."

"Oh ngwanake (my child). Have you been crying?"

"No."

"Okay. If you say so. Ngwanake (my child), let go."

"What? What are you talking about momma? She's the reason we struggled all those years. The reason why Tshedi doesn't have a father!"

"Where is she now?"

"She probably went home."

"Yeah, she probably went home and is sipping Bean & Mugg cappuccino. Wena (you) you're there, torturing yourself with things out of your reach."

"Momma why are you talking like this? You became a widow! Remember that? Should I perhaps refresh your memory on how papa's family abandoned us? Should I do that?"

"Ka tlhaloganya o kwatile, mara o nne aware gore o bua le mang (I understand you're upset, but be aware of who you're talking to)."

"Sorry momma."

"This is partially my fault. I never checked in on you or checked how you dealt with his passing. You never truly grieved ngwanake (my child)."

"It's not your fault momma."

"It is. You're my child too. I was so focused on Tshedimogo and us surviving that I forgot gore (that) you needed healing too. You need to let go of this Naledi. I'm not saying forget your father, I'm saying forget how he passed on because it will bring hurt towards you. Your father is watching over us, why do you think a decade later we're still together as a family? Naledi please ngwanake (my child), go apologise to that girl."

"Eng (what)?!"

"Go apologise not for her but for you."

"Ma?"

"When you're hurting, and you shout and scream and act insane, the devil takes a camping chair to sit and watches you destroy your life. Why do you think it's so easy to blame and yell at someone than it is hard to forgive or apologise to them? When you do that, it shows you're the bigger person and that's makes the devil furious. He will try to throw memories, addiction, betrayal your way but if you stand firm against what you believe in, you've already won. You can blow all the wind

you want, but if a tree has strong roots it's not going anywhere. It will be bend, it will lose branches and gain even new ones but at the end of the day, it will remain where it stands. Go home, read that scripture I sent ko (at) WhatsApp and sleep with a light heart."

"Okay ma."

"Kea go rata, wa utlwa (I love you, you hear)?"

"I love you too momma."

"Bye bye Advocate."

"He he. Bye ma."

She hangs up the phone and I just stare at it for a while. I may be stubborn, but what momma said made a lot of sense. Still though, the hurt that's inside of me is still there that I can't even begin to imagine apologising to Detective Mutsa.

"Ma'am? It's almost closing time."

"I'll be out in a sec!" I exclaim to Mr Bodyguard outside my office. I quickly pull myself together and head outside my office for first time since this morning. After my outburst, I never left the office. Not even to eat or use the lavatory. I just stayed in and watched as the clock on the wall tick-tocks away with every second. If I wasn't busy with some papers, I would just put my

feet on the desk and think about my father. Oh papa waka (my dad)! Why did he have to be the one to end up 6 feet under?

I compose myself and grab my belongings to my car with Mr Bodyguard following behind me.

We get to the car and he inspects it before he gives me the go-ahead to drive.

"So you still don't want to tell me your name?" I ask.

"No. Have a great evening. See you tomorrow." He says before he stomps back to the building.

I've tried... I really did. He's just a really private person which gets a bit boring if I'm honest.

I get in the car and leave for home. This is going to be a long week.

A few days later

"Happy Anniversary!" Karabo says through the phone.

"Thank you Baby K. Atleast you remembered."

"Please don't tell me he forgot..."

"I don't know. I'm eating breakfast alone so..."

"You're eating breakfast alone? On a Saturday? On your anniversary?"

"Yeah."

"Say yes and I'll handle him so quick so fast."

"Why you always gotta involve violence?" I ask jokingly.

"Uhm... because you my ride or die." She dramatically says.

"It's okay friend, I've been a real disappointment this past week."

"What do you mean?"

"I met the girl my father saved the day he passed on."

"..."

"Yeah, that was me on Monday."

"Well, did you..."

"I nearly hit her with a lamp."

She laughs so hard though the phone, I had to distance it from my ear a bit.

"Why didn't you hit her vele?"

"She ducked. She's a detective anyway."

"Whoa! Well atleast she grew up to become something meaningful."

"Yeah, I kind of apologised for my behavior to her."

"You're a saint you know that? She would've known who I am by now."

"How are you a psychologist again?"

"Don't confuse my work with my personality. I may tell people to forgive then hold a grudge on someone the next day."

"Oh wait! He's here! His car just pulled over."

"Don't give him any Morning Glory!"

"Yoh! Bye bye Karabo!"

I hang up the phone and chuckle at her statement. Karabo is one heck of an enabler. You'll tell her 'let's go kill someone', and she'll ask when and where.

While I'm on that thought, my mind keeps pondering over Mutsa, I'm going to be real honest with you- I still have a tiny bit of blame that I've pinned on her. After the hectic week I've had and a few motivational talks from momma, I was able to throw away a piece of my pride and go apologize to her. Later on, she told me why she was there during the mob strike and all. She may have been looking for a boyfriend, but she was also running away from her father. She came and told me this on

Wednesday that her father was abusive and toxic that she was drowning with him. Her mother passed on so her father was her only source of survival, but when this boyfriend came along she saw another means of living. She became 'alive' and that day was the day they were going to escape and live on the lam but the strike around their area delayed everything. After the shooting of my father, of course the whole community fled to their homes to avoid jurisdiction and she ran away too.

However, she was caught and put in an orphanage when her father kept going in and out of jail. A decade later, she became a detective so that she never goes down the route her father went through. She chose the opposite life to her father's one and I tip my hat off to her for that. It took a lot of crying and hurtful trips down Memory Lane but I forgave her. She didn't actually need forgiving because she technically didn't do anything wrong, but it made sense to me to spiritually forgive her. I remember praying to papa that I wanted to meet the girl he saved and only a few weeks later, there she comes walking through my door. We're not friends but we're definitely not enemies either. I think it's best if her and I don't interact a lot, especially considering how pretentious I get when she's around because I always just want to cry. I don't cry in front of Troy though, the only side of me I showed him this week is my dull side. He asked me frequently what's wrong and I finally managed to tell him. He consoled me but this was a situation I

had to internally deal with. So I don't blame him for forgetting that today is the 25th of June, our 2nd anniversary of us being together.

"Hey!" He comes in with bags full of groceries.

"Hey. What's all this?"

"Food. For the contest."

"What contest?"

"The cook-off." He says with a 'duh' looking face.

"You were serious?"

"Fuck yeah, I was. I don't just speak 100 and act 0. I'd rather speak 0 and go to action 100."

I roll my eyes and watch him as he excitedly puts the groceries in the fridge and cupboards. He's so adorably excited about all this. Wish he would be this excited about me. I wanted to tell him or maybe give him a hint that today is a special day but I want to see how long it'll take for him to realize.

"Okay. Go take a shower." He says.

Do I smell bad? I start sniffing my armpits to detect any foul scent but nothing.

"No, not because of that. Because we's going somewhere."

"Where are we going?"

"Will you just hurry?"

I quickly finish my cereal and run towards the shower. Maybe he's planning something huge for me. I don't know. Whatever it is

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I know that he's been planning it for a while. Maybe he's taking me to the hillside place or maybe the aquarium or maybe a fancy dinner date.

Everything goes smoothly as I take the shower and comb my hair and even apply a bit of makeup, but then I get stuck at the closet. Oh Lord, what am I going to wear?

I need to know where we're going so that I can appropriately dress for it. I decide on my white crop top with a high waist black jean and of course, my leather jacket. I really need to go shopping, people might start thinking I'm a goth or something. I pick up my phone to see my reflection as I apply gloss to my lips. A notification pops up that says that Karabo has added to her Facebook story. I swear if she posted about me and the anniversary, I'm gonna kill her.

I click on the story and see that she took a snap of the outfit that she's possibly going to wear with a bottle of champagne on the bed next to the outfit. There's no caption but I can tell that today is going to be busy for her.

"Uhm... babe?!" Troy exclaims from the kitchen.

"Yeah yeah! I'll be out in a minute. I settle on black kicks and my cross necklace as an accessory. I look good, even my crown has grown a bit despite my lack of care towards it. I put on more gloss and put it in my black and golden handbag. Remember, you can never have too much gloss on!

I walk out and just the reaction I was expecting, Troy stops chewing and stares at me. Both his mouth and eyes are open wide like I'm some kind of goddess.

"T? T? T!"

He snaps out of it then swallows whatever that was left on his plate.

"Baby! You look... amazing. So beautiful." He walks towards me which makes me blush a little.

"Thank you!"

"I'm serious, I always tell you that you look beautiful but this is on another level, maybe I'm falling for you even harder." He says with his deep voice whispering in my ear. He knows that I love it when he does that, makes my knees weak just listening to him talk like that.

"Thank you. You don't look so bad yourself." I say and clear my throat.

"I may have showered but I know that I look terrible. Give me a minute." He kisses my forehead and jogs to the bedroom.

I keep having butterflies in my stomach about today, I don't know why but I'm just falling for him even more. Weird right? Weird.

"Okay okay, are we going to that Dog Pet Shop?"

"Nope. Wait why would we go there? You love animals now?"
He chuckles and reveals his dimple on his left cheek.

"Not all of them. I do dangerously love dogs though."

"Yeah that one I know off but not the rest of them."

"Ha! I may not favour them but I still hate animal abuse."

"Yeah, it's sad how people treat animals just because they're animals."

"Yeah. Okay so are we... going to that fancy restaurant near the suburbs?"

"Nope. I thought you didn't like fancy food."

"I don't. I just thought it would be a food idea to guess it too."

"Will you relax please? I got you. Just sit back and enjoy the surprise."

"I don't like surprises."

"But you're going to love this one."

He looks at me then turns his gaze to the road. I hold his other hand while he uses his right hand to drive. I can't stand the suspense, all this secrecy is killing me. That's the reason why I always get to the truth when it comes to my work, because I hate secrecy! I turn on the radio and they tell us that it's a Luther Vandross Saturday so they'll be playing back to back songs of his. I turn it up as one of my favourite songs play.

"One look in your eyes and there I see

Just what you mean to me

Here in my heart I believe

Your love is all I'll ever need

Holdin' you close through the night

I need you, yeah

I look in your eyes and there I see

What happiness really means

The love that we share makes life so sweet

Together we'll always be

This pledge of love feels so right

And, ooh, I need you

Here and now

I promise to love faithfully (Faithfully)

You're all I need

Here's and now

I vow to be one with thee (You and me), hey

Your love is all (I need) I need

Say, yeah, yeah..."

"You know all the lyrics?"

"It's Luther Vandross. Of course I know all the lyrics."

.

We spend the next few hours just listening to the songs and talking about more nonsense than ever.

"T, can we please have honest hour?"

"Oh no you don't! You want me to tell you where we're going?"

"No. I just want to tell you how sorry I am. I've been a real boob to deal with and I'm sorry. I saw the girl my father saved, like I told you, and I just wanted to deal with this alone."

"You're not alone. I'm here. There will be things that will be harder to deal with, but I'll be there. I have to be there. Please."

I nod and we continue talking about other stuff.

He pulls up at a Café and tells me to stay while he heads inside. So because I trust him, I stay as I try to guess what he's playing at. We're in Johannesburg, by the way. Why? I don't know.

"Okay. Let's go."

He gets in and throws a brown paper bag at the back seat.

I just keep quiet as he drives on while talking non-stop. He's acting weird again.

Okay.

He drives up near a park and I already know where we are.

"Happy Anniversary." He says with a smile.

"I... I thought you fo-"

"Forgot? What do you take me for woman?" He dramatic asks.

"I just thought-"

"Well, you thought wrong. I've taken you almost every other place but this one still takes the cup. This is the park we where at 2 years ago when you agreed to be mine."

He gets out and opens the door for me. I hold onto his hand and get out to breathe in the familiar winter breeze. He grabs the paper bag and we walk around the park just reminiscing our memories. He gives me an ice-cream sandwich out of the paper bag and although it's a bit chilly, I still take it and thank him for it.

"We were eating this too, remember?"

"Yeah I remember. You gave some little girl yours for your devilish ways."

"You have to admit though, it was kind of romantic."

I just smile at him and thank the Lord in my heart for such a thoughtful man. This is better than anything I've ever imagined. It's even more beautiful because they added a lake near the tall trees over there.

I leave him behind as I start walking to it and just stand there to watch the sun set beautifully with the lake.

Yeah we took more than half a day on the road singing, talking and eating. I'm sure it's 17H00 by now.

When I don't feel him coming towards me I call out his name still not taking my eyes off the sunset.

"T!"

"Turn around."

I turn around and find him on... one knee? Is he tying his laces. He's acting weird again.

He takes out a velvet box and holds it with both hands as he looks up to me.

"Nay. I'm not good with words, that's for sure but with you... I'll try. Baby you inspire me. In many ways than you can ever imagine. You inspire me with my work, my mother, my lifestyle, my food, even my underwear. You're so beautiful, sweet, intelligent, extraordinary and everything in between. I've never... ever loved anyone the way that I love you. I want to wake up everyday next to you, I want to have children with you, grow with you and grow old with you. You're the only woman who's ever made sense of me. So, even though I really love your Mapulane surname I was hoping you could take my surname and make it ours. Naledi Mapulane, will you do me the lawful honour of marrying me?"

I look at him and just stand there in silence. I've never been speechless before but I think this situation is appropriate for being speechless. I tear up and watch him waiting for me to say something. A few people are watching us and it makes it even more... unnatural.

He gets a bit worried at my silence that I grab my last breath and tell him.

"Yes."

He looks up to me with confusion.

"Yes, I'll marry you." I reassure him.

He widely smiles and opens the box to reveal this beautiful ring with a huge ass diamond on it. Sorry for my vulgar word.

He kisses my hand before slipping it on and giving me a big hug.

"Thank you so much. I love you! So much Mrs Lane."

"I love you too Mr Lane." I say in between chuckles with tears in my eyes.

He kisses me before whistling. Huh? Why is he whistling?

Out of the blue, almost everyone we know appear out of cars and bushes and all. He made my friends hide in bushes. I see Karabo wearing the same outfit she posted on her Facebook story. She pops the bottle of champagne and takes a big swig of it.

"My best friend is engaged y'all!" She excitedly exclaims.

This was all set up! They keep clapping hands and taking us pictures and videos. This is the happiest day of my life and even though I don't like surprises, Troy was right- I loved this one.

"Congratulations once again my friend-ooo!"

"Karabo, you're drunk already. Stop with the-"

"Nywe nywe nywe! Yoh! You sound like a wife already. Troy sonny boy! Take good care of my best friend. Otherwise! It's me and you in a Mayweather boxing ring. Wang kutlwa (do you hear me)?!" Karabo bellows.

"K-baby please don't tell me you're driving." I interject.

"Anybody here wanna take me home? Anyone? Thabang! Take me home baby boy." She drowsily exclaims.

I drag Troy to the kitchen so I can talk to him in private.

"T, can I please take her home?" I plead with him.

"Yeah sure. Just hurry back okay, I don't wanna miss you too much Mrs Lane." He says before unexpectedly pecks my lips.

"I'll be back before you can say 'I have a sexy wife' out of your lips." I sassily say back.

"Careful, you might just not make it out this kitchen." He says as he gets closer and stares through my eyes that I feel his gaze at the back of my head. Okay! Time to get the heck out of here.

"Okay Karabo let's go. Karabo? Karabo! Where the heck is she?" I ask Thabang who's sipping on some Whiskey at our lounge.

"Ah! Boss lady I respect you too much wabo (you see). If I knew where she was then obvious it would mean gore (that) I've been kukuring (slang word meaning 'having sexual intercourse') her you see and-"

"Naledi. Yeah she my best friend! She got her own money! Uh-oh I think her booty growing!"

"Argh! Come on Karabo! Let's go!" I reprimand her and put her arm over my shoulder so that she can walk in coordination to the car.

I swear this girl is going to get me into trouble. I'm the one that is engaged yet she's the drunk girl being driven home.

I start giggling to myself as I'm driving her home in my car. What?! I'm engaged! Ha! To think that I was telling myself that Troy and I were okay just the way we were, nothing could've prepared me for this. It just felt right at that moment.

After the engagement, Troy took all 6 of us to some family restaurant where we all dined and had a great time taking videos and pictures and sharing travel stories too. We eventually drove back to North West and had a mini party at our place with only the 5 of us.

It wasn't a big thing but Karabo kept drinking like a fish. Now she's uncomfortably asleep at the back seat. I don't blame her though, it's only a few minutes to midnight anyway. We had so

much fun and adrenaline that we completely forgot to keep track of time.

I stop by a house and step out the car. This is Karabo's condo which she shares with her cousin. I've come here 4 to 5 times in the last 2 years but the scenery never gets old. It looks so homey and comfortable, the kind of space an author would enjoy for the peace and silence.

"Alright K-baby. Up you go!" I try to wake her up and get her out of the car.

"You know Naledi, I really am proud of you. O Naledi ya mannete (you're a real star)." She says in between hiccups.

"Thank you friend. Now let's get you inside." I say and lock the car before I help her walk to the front door.

"Okay. Where's your keys?" I ask.

"At your apartment!" She says and laughs so loud, the neighbours' dogs start barking and howling.

"What?! And you're only telling me now?" I hiss at her.

"I thought we were going to a club."

Argh! It's a long shot but I knock on the door, hoping that her cousin is around. It's a Saturday (well technically it's a Sunday) so I'm expecting her to not be home, but because I serve a living God I hear someone yelling that they will be right there.

I look at Karabo and find her trying to doze off.

"Karabo! Karabo!" I try to wake her up so she doesn't drool on my shoulder.

The cousin opens the door and doesn't even ask any questions. She just helps me get her inside and runs to the bedroom to find a blanket for Karabo. We tried to carry her to her bedroom but the struggle is real. She's heavy and we're tired.

I look at her silently snoring on the couch and I find it hilarious that I'm again some drunk person's rescuer. First it was Bandile and now her.

"Here you go." She gives me some black blanket for Karabo. I nod and lay the blanket on her before walking towards the door.

"Thank you for bringing her home." The cousin whispers.

"No problem. Goodnight." I whisper back and leave for my car.

Upon getting in, my phone rings and I see that it's Troy calling me.

"Hey. I just dropped her off, I'm driving back." I state before he can say anything.

"How do you know I was calling you for that? What if I was calling because I needed legal advice." He chuckles through the phone.

"Do you need legal advice?"

"Yes and no." He nervously says.

"Wow. Only a few hours of being engaged to you and the lies pile up. I want a divorce."

"We're not even legally married."

"I know! I was trying to be- never mind. Anyway I'm coming over. Where's Thabang and Oscar?" I ask.

"Passed out on the couch."

"Ah!"

"Yep. I'm not spending the first night with you as Mrs Lane with drunk guys around."

"What should we do? I'm pretty tired right now."

"Let's go to that 4-star hotel 12 minutes away. I would have said let's go to that other 5-star one but it's about half an hour away and I don't want you driving tired for that long." He says.

"Awww! That's so sweet. What do we do with your friends though?"

"Argh. I'll leave them here. I know what is in here so they won't dare steal or anything."

"Okay see you there."

"See you there. I love you and drive safe."

"I love you too."

"Morning sunshine."

I open my eyes and find Troy half naked sitting on the edge of my bed with a tray in his hands.

I sit up and rub my eyes as I vividly remember that we're at a hotel. That would explain the white sheets and the unfamiliar scent.

"What's all this?" I ask.

"This... is breakfast for you."

"For me? What's the occasion?"

"I always make breakfast for you when I can."

"Yeah but not in bed."

"Now that you agreed to be mine, this is the reward."

"Well thank you Mr Lane, this looks delicious. Compliments to the chef." I say as I take a bite of the grilled sausage.

"Yes, the chef. Which is me." He proudly states.

"Don't even think about it son." I say and we both laugh at our silliness.

"Did you check up on Thabang and Oscar?"

"Yeah. They said they just drank coffee and locked up to go home. So if we want the keys we should go to Oscar, he has them."

"Oh okay. Yesterday was crazy."

"You mean last night?" He smirks at me.

"The whole of yesterday was crazy so calm down tiger."

"Yeah I know. Did you hear how excited Mrs. Mapulane was?"
He asks.

"Yeah momma was more happy than I was when I told her over the phone. I really wanted to see her but that's okay. As long as she knows. Did you tell Sheryl?"

"Hmm."

"T? Did you tell Sheryl? Your mother? The woman that gave birth to you and therefore should hear the news straight from you?" I emphasize.

"I'll tell her tomorrow."

"No! You'll tell her right now!"

"Why does she need to know again? It's me that asked you to marry me. Why should she be noted?"

"Troy Sebastian Lane!"

"Okay okay! I'll tell her."

"When?" I ask.

"Right after I make love to you in the shower and we go get a massage."

"We're gonna get massages?" I excitedly ask.

"I might just cancel if you take this long to finish your breakfast."

I immediately begin eating and drinking the coffee. He starts laughing at me when I start getting out of breath from gorging the food down my throat.

"I'll go get the shower ready." He stands up and heads to the bathroom.

While drinking the coffee, my left hand just keeps disturbing me. Oh right, it's the ring. It's so beautiful, I never really got to be mesmerized by it because of yesterday. It shines so brightly with the morning light that's illuminating through the balcony of the bedroom.

Something else is on my mind though. Today is also the day I got the news that Tshego had disappeared and that Erica is in a rehabilitation center. It might've been years ago but I still miss them. Everyday. It's okay though, I just hope they're okay wherever they are.

"Penny for your thoughts?"

I snap out of it and watch him strut to me.

"Oh it's nothing. I'm just really happy you know. I can't believe you love me this much."

"You still don't get it do you?"

"Please don't sing." I say.

"What? But I have an incredible voice."

"You're a lot of things babe, but not a singer I can reassure you."

"I'm hurt!" He dramatically exclaims.

I laugh at him and just run my fingers through his curled hair.

"T?"

"N?"

"N? Since when do you call me N?"

"Since now."

"Please don't call me that. That's my thing. Anyway I just wanted to ask something."

"What's that?" He asks and sits on the carpet in between my legs as I'm sitting on the edge of the bed.

"Please tell me about Tory."

He goes silent before exhaling a really deep breath.

"Why do you keep asking me this?" He flatly asks.

"Do you blame me? Every time I ask you brush me off. I really need you to trust me. You know all about me but I don't know all about you. Please?" I plead.

"Promise you won't judge or anything?" He looks up to me.

"I promise." I reassure him. He keeps playing with my toes as I'm playing with his hair before he starts talking.

"Tory. My younger brother. I'm 25 but he's 23, wherever he is. We were inseparable when we were young. We would do everything together, he was into toy guns and I was into knives. Sounds dangerous but we didn't care

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mom and dad didn't seem to mind either. When he was bullied, I would be there. If it was me, he would be there. People always thought that we weren't brothers because of how I was light yet he was dark in complexion. It got even worse when we were teenagers. Old man kicked the bucket when I was in 10th grade and Tory was in 8th. Mom started favouring me more than him. If I got an academic award, we would go out for pizza to celebrate. When Tory got a sports award, mom would tell

him to focus on school than on sport. I applauded him though, but it wasn't enough. It went on and mom's criticism towards Tory didn't stop. One day, Tory got in trouble for something I did and mom beat the hell out of him. I tried to talk to mom but she thought I was just shielding him. She went on to say that she wishes she never got pregnant for Tory, that the only reason he's alive is because the condom broke. I guess that day, his spirit broke too. He started staying away from home and not talking to me and all. Mom didn't care. It got worse after he passed 12th grade and was offered a position in the marines. He didn't even say goodbye or anything, he just told mom and left. It was... (sigh) it was heartbreaking. When dad passed on, it left mom so bitter that I started hating her too. I also blamed her for the ruined relationship between Tory and I. He left and I never heard from him ever again."

I start massaging his shoulders when he wipes something off his face. Is he... crying? Gosh, now I feel guilty for making him talk. Sheryl singlehandedly ruined a bond between two brothers.

"Hey. Thank you for telling me."

"Do you think it's... it's my fault?" He asks.

"What? No! You tried all you could but the damage had already been done. Do you wish to maybe... meet him again?"

"I don't know. I don't know whether I would give him a punch in the face or a hug. Anyway, let's uhm... let's go take a shower. I don't want to be arrested for not paying the water bill here." He jokingly says.

"Heh. I'll be right there." I chuckle back.

He gets up and goes back to the bathroom. I cannot believe Sheryl would say such things to Tory. They are both her children but he favoured Troy over Tory. Why? I don't know.

~Sheryl~

"If you don't get my order right next time, I'm suing your restaurant! I'll be the first one. You don't want none of this honey! You better ask somebody!" I hang up the phone call and sigh in frustration.

They keep getting my order wrong, and it's too early in the morning to be dealing with their lazy, incompetent asses.

I look up on my laptop and see that we've got a few special orders and a lot of the ordinary dresses. Thank you sugar for adding some bank into my pocket. Oh don't worry, she got a big lump sum too. I'm a kind soul like that.

Just as I'm about to take a shower, I get a phone call. Argh! It's him again.

"Yes?"

"Did you hear?" He asks.

"Tory. My life is very busy, you need to be specific when asking such questions." I annoyingly say back to him.

"Troy and Naledi are engaged. He popped the question yesterday in RSA time zone."

"What?! I mean uhm...thank you for telling me. Naledi still doesn't know that you're Troy's brother right?"

"No. She keeps asking what my name is but I always brush her off. She calls me Mr Bodyguard now." He chuckles.

"Stop telling me useless info. You only tell me things about your brother."

"He ain't my brother!"

"Watch your tone boy. You still owe me till the job is done."

"Why exactly am I surveiling Troy?"

"Just do your job. Is there anything else?"

"Besides his friends celebrating his engagement last night and them spending a night at a hotel. Nothing."

"Alright. Keep me updated. Watch your six."

"Alright. Bye mo-"

I hang up the call before he can say the full word. Imagine a whole man calling me 'mom' while I'm still a fresh bad bitch. So my man finally proposed to sugar huh? This was definitely not the plan. I'm going to have to go back to the drawing board. Sooner or later Troy is going to find out that sugar's bodyguard is Tory. Tory may be an ex-military son, but he's still incompetent. Then when I used to tell him that, he'd get angry. Angry at me for telling the truth? Anyway, this doesn't change anything. I'm still on this mission to make Troy mine. I did not kill their father, my husband, for nothing. I killed him knowing that the space is going to be filled by Troy.

Anyway I thought sugar didn't want to get married right away, why the sudden change of mind? It's fine, Troy is as good as mine anyway- the father of my unborn kids and the husband my dead husband couldn't own up to.

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~Naledi~

"Yeah mom, we're engaged. Yeah I'll tell her. Yeah yeah. Look mom I gotta go. Okay bye." He hangs up and looks at me with a 'are you happy' face.

"Don't look at me like that. It was the right thing to do." I rebuttal.

"She wants to know when is the wedding." He says.

"Oh. Uhm... that's too early to discuss yet." I huff.

"Wait, you don't want a wedding?" He sadly asks.

"No, no. Not like that. I'm saying an exact date is impossible to pinpoint because planning one takes a lot of work."

"Oh. You nearly gave me a heart attack."

"You still don't get it do you?" I ask.

"Hey! That's my thing. Make up your own." He exclaims.

"Whatever. I gotta get going though. So should we discuss wedding things after work?"

"Okay. Let me shower and get to the reserve."

"How's Miracle by the way? Is she still mad at you?"

"Nah. She's mostly mad at you." He jokes.

"Mxm! It wasn't my fault though."

"So about the wedding?"

"I don't know, should we perhaps get a wedding planner? This needs thorough thinking."

"Speaking of which. What do you say we don't invite Sheryl?"

I give him a death stare and he raises his hands in surrender. That thought he must just forget it. Sheryl has her flaws but she apologised for it, who are we to judge her further?

"I gotta go. If it's not Mr Cornish that's going to be pissed, then it's Mr.Bodyguard." I say as I look at the time on my watch.

"You know I really want to meet this Mr Bodyguard of yours. Who does he think he is guarding my wife's body?"

"Oh of course, because the last time you met Mr Cornish you nearly got kicked out of the building." I exclaim from the bedroom.

"I didn't like where his eyes were travelling to." He says flatly from the bathroom.

I chuckle but deep down I get what he's saying, he's a real piece of work! My boss that is.

"You'll meet him some other time. Bye for now, today we get to know my client's fate."

"Wait! What about my kiss?" He exclaims.

I smile to myself and get in the bathroom, I open the shower drapes and kiss him before closing it again.

"I love you!"

"I love you too!" He says and continues showering.

"Mr.Bodyguard! Good morning." I politely say.

"Hmm. Why are you late if I may ask?"

"Uhm... well-"

"It doesn't matter. You need to go to Rivonia, she said she needs to talk."

"To me?"

"Affirmative." He says.

While we're walking into the building, I try to make small talk with him.

"So Mr.Bodyguard, where are you from?"

"The cafeteria, I had to have breakfast when you took time." He flatly says behind me.

"No not like that, I mean where's your home town?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Just making small talk." I embarrassly say.

"Tell me why you want to know. What do you know?" He gets in front of me.

"Like I said, I was just making small talk. Calm down." I reassure him. He's scaring me at this point.

He calms down and leaves me when I get to the reception.

"Whoa! What's up with him?" Rivonia asks.

"I'd be lying if I told you." I say.

"You're late." She says.

"Sorry." I apologise.

"On a Monday!"

"Eish! Please don't rub it in, I already got a lecture from him." I massage my temple.

Rivonia starts squealing out of the blue, that it startled both me and everyone else at the reception.

"I'm sorry. I just didn't think it was real. I thought it was fake news." She whispers to me.

"What are you talking about?"

"You're engaged! A video of Troy proposing went viral. Listen to the caption; 'Lane Model and attorney, Naledi Mapulane, is officially off the market. Troy Lane popped the question at a lake nearby UJ this Saturday and Naledi didn't hesitate to say yes! We congratulate the lovely couple.'" That's one of the posts from Facebook only. Not mentioning other social media platforms." She excitedly says.

I didn't even know I was trending. I'm not that active on social media so of course, I missed that.

"Well, thank you Rivonia. Look, I need to go to court. I gotta hurry." I say.

"Of course. Your case. Good luck." She says before giving me a thumbs up.

I chuckle and look for Mr Bodyguard who is nowhere to be seen. I spot him at our cafeteria alone and on a phone call.

I wanted to disturb him but I let him finish talking and although he's a bit far, I managed to hear my name out his mouth before he ended the call. What the?

Anyway I compose myself and pretend like I just got there.

"Hey. Can we go now?" I say with a smile.

"Wha- how long have you been standing there?" He asks.

"I just got here. Are you okay?"

"Yeah. Where are we going?"

"The court."

"Okay, let's go."

I start walking with him behind me and although I can't see him, I can feel his eyes staring at me with a threat.

We get to the court and yes, it's packed. This may have been a straight forward case for me but it was definitely a high profiled one. It wasn't easy though, the state kept giving me knockouts and sleepless nights from their witnesses. I step out of my car and all of a sudden I'm tackled by journalists and other media personnel trying to get a statement from me. Mr Bodyguard guides me with his huge stature inside the courtroom where it's even busier than outside. I walk to where the defense bunk is and look to my right where the state is seated. I was going against Miss Menacherry. An Indian attorney that is ruthless beyond belief. That's why it's been a stressful couple of weeks. She wants to see my client behind bars so bad, I'd be surprised if she didn't have a personal hatred towards him. I couldn't dress in my red suit because well... a black suit is the way to go. She's wearing a black blazer and a black skirt that's showing some skin rather. We don't need to wear our gown this time because we're just here for the verdict.

"All rise!"

We all rise from our seats as Magistrate Diale enters the courtroom. I'm telling you everytime he walks in, the Earth can feel it. He has something about him that screams 'fear me' without even trying. That's why Nancy doesn't like talking about him. If you think my client or Miss Menacherry is ruthless then you haven't seen anything. He walks in with his black gown and takes a seat with a threatening look from behind his glasses. Everyone takes a seat and the court goes silent. As soon as my client appears to the stand, all we hear is a bunch of murmuring from the people that are here to witness and the sound of camera's clicking away. This is going to make headlines I'm telling you.

The state says their last word and all about how Mr Mutaweshu is guilty beyond measure for selling illegal substances to minors. I just watch her as she keeps emphasising the 'guilty' word and all I can do is chuckle a bit. Not Mr Mutaweshu though, he keeps looking at me in a worried manner and I always nod to reassure him that I got this.

Yeah, even drug lords become scared once in a while.

He may be feared by almost everyone but he came at my mercy when I started talking in a courtroom. Sure at first he seemed to not trust I could handle his case because I don't have much experience but he changed his mind as the case went along.

"I thank you your worship." She bows and gives me a conniving look before taking her seat. We're all here to work so I don't know why she has so much hatred towards everything. Maybe it's because her very own son, takes illegal substances. Yeah, I knew that before we even got to this point.

I rise up and start speaking English even Shakespeare would applaude me for.

"Your honour, Miss Menacherry knows that I speak honesty. She's quite adamant on making it seem that my client is guilty due to her own experience of substance abuse by a loved one. They presented no form of evidence other than assumptions and gut feelings from the community. Their angle of projectory in this case is emphasising on the finger prints that were allegedly found on the drug that killed the minor. However, finger prints don't mean anything if you have no intention of doing anything illegal. If I held a fake R100 note that I got as change from a mall centre and paid my helper with it. Then the helper takes it home and buys bread for her kids, then the R100 note further goes to the shop owner paying a company for merchandise and the R100 note lands on some woman who works at that company, does that mean that the woman is guilty of making counterfeit money? No. There were finger prints of Mr Mutaweshu there on the drug packet, but so were 67 other finger prints. We have told the court that Mr

Mutaweshu owns a business of producing hardware products. Furthermore-"

Yeah you get the idea. Anyway I sit down after a few more minutes of speaking before calmly sitting down and returning the conniving back to the state. Magistrate Diale smiles a bit after Menacherry and I dangerously look at each other before speaking.

"Right. Well, after hearing the evidence, statements and weeks of rebuttaling in this court from the state and the defense, I have come up with my own conclusion. Mr Mutaweshu, the state was able to prove that you have been in contact with illegal substances before."

What? What's going on? What is he saying? Am I going to lose this case? This doesn't make any sense.

"However, the defence was also able to pinpoint the magnitude of the finger prints provided by a lab that has a history of making mistakes. The defence also proved that Mr Mutaweshu's fingerprints were there because of his business that supplies plastic, metal and wooden furniture to the community and even other states at large. The minor that overdosed on the illegal substances had nothing to do with Mr Mutaweshu nor his business for that matter. So, when it's all said and done I hearby find Mr Mutaweshu not guilty of being

in possession of illegal substances and not guilty of the 3rd degree murder of the minor. Case closed!"

You know when you're in a situation when you wish that you had a camera to capture something? Yeah, I wish I had a camera to take a snap of Menacherry's face when Magistrate Diale said his word. She looked... horrified.

"Order in the court!" Magistrate Diale exclaims when the people keeping saying that my client is guilty and all.

I couldn't agree more with them though, see being an advocate is not a walk in the park. I was given this case and I already knew that Mr Mutaweshu was dealing with drugs, mainly 'Crystal Meth', and selling it to minors. Most of the time he used teenagers to push his merchandise out in the street. Unfortunately, it had to be my job to defend him and I guess I won at that.

Social media is in a frenzy

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especially after Magistrate Diale left the courtroom. Mr Mutaweshu whispers something to the security guard and then he nods before they disappear out of the courtroom too. I pack my belongings and as I'm about to walk out, she stands in front of me.

"Advocate Mapulane." She says while folding her arms.

"Advocate Menacherry." I say back.

"You know that this is the first time I lose a case?"

I had no idea. I thought she lost several over the years.

"Yes, I do." I lie to her.

"Great job back there but don't think that I'm going to go easy on you next time. It's a marathon not a race, right?" She smiles and starts walking out the courtroom.

I just stand there like an idiot, jeez that was intense! She was right though, it's a freaking marathon out here.

"Naledi?"

I turn around and find... Detective Mutsa?

"Hey, what are you doing here?" I ask.

She's not even dressed in her work uniform, just a jean, shirt and a sweater.

"Great job. Congratulations." She disappointedly says.

"Thank you."

"Thank you too, for making my father free."

"Sure no pro- wait a minute. Mr Mutaweshu is your father?"

"Yeah."

"Oh my, well uhm..."

"Oh no don't worry. He doesn't even own my life anymore. I'm okay. I just thought that he'd have some accountability this time. He's always been in and out of jail, this time I thought that he would be locked away. I've got to admit Naledi, when I heard that you were working against Menacherry, I just thought that you were going to lose this one. I thought he was going to pay for once in his life but... but I guess that's not how it works."

"Mutsa, I was just doing my job. I didn't even know he was your father, why don't y'all have the same surname or something?"

"I got married to the boyfriend I was looking for remember? His surname is Mutsa. Close call."

"Hey, karma knows everyone's address. I didn't want to admit it at first but in my line of work, it's not even about the truth it's about what you can prove in court."

"Yeah. I know, same goes for my work line. Anyway I'll see you around." She says before going out the courtroom.

I'm not even going to describe how I'm feeling right now, a part of me is guilty and another part of me is victorious.

Anyway, I too head out and I'm met by a hurricane of journalists pointing at me with microphones and all of them talking at once.

"One question please." I say.

"How do you feel about the case that just unfolded?" I managed to hear one journalist ask.

"I feel... I feel neutral. I'm happy that I emerged victorious but my heart aches for the minor that passed on. My client may have been found not guilty but drug persuasion still peaks out from our communities. We need to make sure that our youth are aware of the dangers of substance abuse. I will personally make sure of that." I say before Mr Bodyguard escorts me out to the car when they started talking all at once again.

I climb in and he drives to a nearby library before stopping the car.

"Uhm..."

"A security guard came to me, said that Mr Mutaweshu wishes to speak to you concerning the case. He says it's urgent. Should we go?"

"Uhm... yeah. Let's go. I need to speak to him too."

He nods and makes a U-turn to the prison that I've been going to these past weeks.

He parks the car and gets inside with me.

I get my visitation pass and wait for him to come out and 'talk to me.'

A prison warder opens the cell gates and out he comes, dressed in a blue suit to kill ,yet he's still handcuffed.

He sits down and starts talking.

"Naledi, I cannot thank you enough. I'm finally a free man. This case has been dragging for far enough. Finally, some justice. You truly are meant for this." He sincerely says. He too has a Nigerian accent.

"Mr Mutaweshu first of all congratulations on your freedom, you will be released tomorrow, 12h00 sharp."

"Wow thank you so-"

"I'm not done talking. Now both you and I know that you have dirty businesses hanging in the air. That's why the state was very close to winning this case. You need to stop all this drug business."

"But-"

"No buts Mr Mutaweshu. A life was lost and it's all because of your nasty substances around the community. Please. You won't get this chance again."

"I'll have you won't I?"

"If you're ever in this situation again, I will not be representing you."

"But it's my right to-"

"Yeah I know. I'd rather quit than to defend you ever again when it comes to the youth. This is your chance to turn over a new leaf, expand your business, create other businesses here in SA and Lagos. Please."

"It's my life this one."

"Then live your life Mr Mutaweshu, just as long as I'm not a part of it."

I stand up and take a few steps before turning around to face him again.

"By the way, if you go back to your ways and you're caught again. I won't be the one defending you, I'll be the one dragging your ass to jail."

I indicate to Mr Bodyguard that it's time to go and he walks out with me.

We get in the car and I tell him to drive back to the office.

"Uhm... congratulations." He says.

"What? Really? Wow, thank you." I excitedly say.

"You've been getting 'congratulations' all day."

"Yeah, but not from my arrogant bodyguard." I say and walk out of the car.

"You think I'm arrogant?" He asks behind me.

"Yes. Sweet too, a bit arrogant but sweet." I turn around to look at him and find him smiling.

"Whoa! Is that a smile?"

"No." He frowns.

Well, that was a first. At least I made him smile, even if it was for millisecond.

We get in and I find all my colleagues at the reception.

"Congratulations!" They all shout when I enter. Even Mr Cornish is here.

Rivonia comes to hug me and they all just give me a handshake or a hug. I didn't know I was appreciated like this.

Mr Cornish gives a toast with a glass filled with Champagne to me. They all raise their glasses and soon one by one they get back to work. The reason why it's such a big deal here is because Mr Mutaweshu pays a lot of money to this firm. So me winning a case for him means more money.

"Thank you." I say to the last person to congratulate me before I get back in my office for peace of mind. I suddenly chuckle

when I realize that everyone was there except for Rea. Jealousy will be the end of humanity.

Momma calls me and I smile before answering it.

"Ngwanake (my child)"

"Mamaka (my mother)"

"O sharpo (are you okay)?"

"Eya (yes). Is everything okay ma?"

"Eya Ngwanake (yes my child). I was just checking on you. You're still going to church akere?"

"Uhm well uhm..."

"Naledi, you need to pray. If you're not going to church then atleast pray ngwanake (my child)."

"I do pray ma."

"These cases you deal with, this marriage you're about to encounter, all these important things in your life need a prayerful woman otherwise the devil-"

"Ma, don't worry. I'm fine. It's all good."

"Okay ngwanake (my child)."

"I'll call you later neh momma?"

"Okay ngwanake (my child). Modimo a go sireletse (may God protect you)."

"Amen mamma. Bye bye ma."

"Bye bye."

I hang up and just get even more confused by all this. That was odd. The devil?

Anyway, I should be relaxing now but something else is bothering me. I decided to ask Rivonia to do me a solid and give me all background information about Mr.Bodyguard. I want to know how he got this job? Why he won't tell me his name nor where he comes from? What was that call about earlier that made him say my name.

~Blandina~

South Africa is the best honestly! I'm having the time of my life here, better than I had back in L.A. I got a modelling job after Sheryl abandoned me and took Naledi as her new model. It hurt a bit but I took the opportunity to maybe expand my name without the help of her anyway. Something else is bothering me though, a video of Troy proposing to Naledi has gone viral. If I'm being honest, I never really stopped loving Troy. I may have hurt him in the past but I've always loved him. I don't love him for money now, I love him because... well, because I love

him. It's okay though, I've been laying low and out of their lives but now it's time for my comeback. I want my Troy back.

~Bandile~

"Yes I'll marry you."

"Yes I'll marry you."

"Yes I'll marry you."

I've been rewinding the video of mlungu (white person) proposing to Naledi. The part where Naledi agrees is the part that hurts me the most.

So Naledi is getting married huh? Then she failed to inform me? After she also failed to inform me that she's leaving that day and left me to handle the police alone. Mxm. Telling me ukuthi (that) our friendship is over. No ways. I didn't invest in this friendship all these years just for her to cut me off with a situation I had no control of. This Troy mfana (boy) thinks he can come from the states to take our women, he thinks he can just make money out of our people and furthermore take our women? Next thing he's going to be taking our children too. Yeses! Just the thought of him and Naledi having a child sickens me! Someone of Naledi's level deserves a proud Zulu man, not some light boy who thinks his alien eyes can make women lose their minds. Let me take my taxi, it's time I paid Naledi a visit.

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"Tell me Naledi, why are you so invested in knowing who Trevor is?"

"Do you really believe that his name is Trevor? And if so, then what's his surname?" I ask.

"Well, does it matter? He's a delight to look at and he's doing his job to the letter so... give me a reason why I'm hacking into our company's data log."

I try to think of something to tell her that wouldn't come off as suspicious. Rivonia is a nice girl and all but I don't just easily trust anyone. I rub my eyes and continue talking through the phone.

"I just really need to know man. I'm an advocate for a reason. Besides, if he has nothing to hide then why would it be a problem? Unless you're the one hiding something from me?"

"What? No! Uhm... lemme search real quick then I'll call you back."

"Alright. Thanks for doing this again." I sincerely thank her.

"Yeah well I don't want to end up on your suspect list." She jokingly says.

I chuckle and finally hang up after being on the phone for at least half an hour. I look at my phone and its 19H32. Troy is going to kill me.

I get up from the bed and head to the lounge where I find him watching TV and clicking away on his laptop.

"Hey." I attempt to talk to him.

"Hi. Your food is in the microwave."

"Baby I'm sorry we had to cancel the cook-off. I-"

"Nah don't worry about it. It's all good."

"So... what you up to?"

"I'm working too so if you don't mind..."

"T, I really am sorry about missing dinner. I was just so amped up on this case and-"

"Your case was concluded today. It was on TV."

"Okay if I'm being honest, I'm digging up something on someone."

He sighs and closes his laptop in annoyance. He then grabs it and stands up to go work somewhere I guess.

"T please. Hear me out." I stand in front of him with pleading eyes. I don't like to show my vulnerability but with him its justified.

He sits down and looks at me as he waits for me to say something.

"I'm doing a background search on Mr.Bodyguard." I say.

"You're doing what? Why?" He asks with a dangerous tone.

"Because... because I heard him-"

My phone rings yet again and I look at him scoff before leaving the lounge. Has my work really taken over all other priorities?

"Rivonia please tell me you got something." I ask.

"Yeah. Your bodyguard's name is Trevor Brown and he was born in Mexico. He moved to downtown USA when he was 18 and pursued his career in IT."

"What? Well does he have any relatives like someone to contact in case of an emergency?"

"Yeah. His mother. Her name is Lucy Brown."

"Can you get her number for me please?"

"Eish... that'll take a while. I gotta do some more digging."

"I got a day off tomorrow so take your time."

"Lucky you!" She whines.

"Well, when Mr Cornish saw me working today he gave the day off. I think he's still feeling guilty for taking me off the Reverend's case."

"Yeah you see. Every setback is a setup for a comeback. Still practicing quotes by the way." She says over the phone.

"He! Okay well get back to me ASAP. As soon as you have it Rivonia." I remind her.

"Yoh alright. Now I gotta go, my sugar boo boo is here."

"Let me not keep you. Bye."

"Bye." She says and hangs up.

"Hey uhm... can you get your work stuff off the bed?!" Troy exclaims from the bedroom.

I pull myself off the couch and find him putting his laptop in his bag without a shirt on. He's quite hot as he's doing this with anger and all.

"T."

"Naledi."

"Are you serious right now dude? You're angry because I cancelled the cook-off?" I ask.

He sighs and breathes in and out before turning to me and walking very slowly towards me.

"Nay, it's not just about the cook-off. I respect you and your work, you know this. However, there's a time and place for everything. You've placed your work before me in so many aspects that you lie unnecessarily. I know your case was concluded today and that you won it. Part of the reason why I done cooked for you and even got you that good coffee. You just barged in here didn't even greet me, you just went to the bedroom and went to work again. How do you think that makes me feel huh? I tried to talk to you about it and what did you do? You bit my head off. Telling me that crime never sleeps and all that bullshit. We've been engaged for about 48 hours and I'm already being at the bottom of your priorities' list. I put you above everything but you don't do the same. You know what... I don't want to talk anymore. I got a busy day tomorrow. Remove your crap." He turns his back on me and continues fumbling with his laptop bag.

Have I really been that bad? I can't believe this. It completely slipped my mind that I've been hurting him like this. I know I work a lot but not to the extend of shoving my other half out of the way.

I remove my 'crap' and he just pulls that duvet cover over and slips into it. He goes to my side of the bed and turns his back on me.

"Please switch off the light." He says.

I switch it off and go out to lock the doors and close the windows. There were no windows open anyway since it's still winter. I don't even wanna see what he cooked, it's probably delicious but I just lost my appetite. I take a shower in the guest bathroom and dress into my warm PJ's and slip into the covers too. I can hear him breathing but I know he's pretending to sleep because when he's asleep he mildly snores and it's still early.

"T." I innocently say.

"Nay I'm trying to sleep." He annoyingly says.

Atleast he's still calling me 'Nay'.

"T, I'm sorry."

"Okay."

"What?"

"I forgive you."

"You do?" I ask.

"Yeah, I've made mistakes in the past and you'd forgive me without a doubt. You've never really made a huge mistake so..."

"But T, I don't want you to forgive me because I've forgiven you before. I want you to forgive me because I'm sincerely asking for your forgiveness. I haven't been fair to you and it's on me.

All me. I'm sorry. I'm really so sorry. I'll never do it again, you're my everything T and without you-" My voice breaks up and I find myself on the verge of tears. Even my sinuses act up that I sit up and turn on the side lamp. I pull out some tissue to blow my nose and he just gets off and goes out the bedroom.

Well, I really messed up. He's now getting sick of me and everything in between.

"Here."

I look up and he's holding a glass of water towards me.

I take it and just gulp the water in one go.

"Thank you." I say as I hand him the glass back.

He goes back to the kitchen and switches off the light before coming back in the bedroom. He switches on the bedroom light and comes to sit next me.

"Only an idiot would forgive you." He says.

I shift my gaze to the lamp in shame. He turns my face to me using my chin and continues talking.

"... and I'm that idiot." He says with a smile.

"Not to ruin the moment but that's really cheesy." I say with a few chuckles and sniffing.

"But it's appropriate for this moment, don't you think?" He asks.

"Yeah. I'm really sorry T. I didn't intentionally mean to hurt you or push you on the sidelines. It's really-"

He kisses me passionately and looks at me again.

"Wow. Where did that-"

He kisses me again but this time he doesn't pull out. He just deepens it and because I'm into it I reciprocate the same energy he's giving to me.

"T-"

"Stop talking." He says.

We just reached half way to Heaven that night.

'I look in your eyes and there I see!'

I open one eye of mine and find that we switched positions on the bed.

"T, what was that?" I lazily ask.

"The alarm." He says and slips his arm out from under my head to switch it off.

"Did you just hit the snooze button?" I ask.

"You're really warm." He says and closes his eyes.

"T!"

"Nay!"

"Get up."

"Make me."

"I'm gonna fart." I say.

"I've been in the same room with you while you in the toilet or going through your lady period. Don't patronize me." He slyly says.

"Okay. Let me just grab your balls and try to rip them out."

He jumped out of the bed so fast the speed of light would be put to shame. I just laugh at his silliness and wake up too. Even though I'm not going to work, I figured let me just make him breakfast and pack a lunch for him. It's my turn to improvise.

He takes about 45 minutes to prepare and finally walks out the bedroom.

He's dressed in all black. Black long pants, a black hemp and a black jacket he's holding with his index finger over his shoulder. Even his watch is black.

"Whoa! Is this how you dress like everyday?" I ask very much mesmerized.

"Not really. I just wanted to dress like this today." He says and looks at me before taking a seat on a bar stool.

"You look nice."

"I know. You chose well." He proudly says.

I know he dressed like this on purpose. He knows I love the colour he's over dressed in.

I clear my throat and hand him a plate filled with toasted waffles, raspberries and honey on top.

I also hand him my world famous coffee and a lunch box.

"What's this?"

"Breakfast."

"No like what's in the Tupperware?" He asks.

"Your lunch."

"Okay who are you and where did you take my Nay to?" He dramatically asks.

I just laugh at him and pack his work stuff. He eats up and thanks me for the breakfast before leaving for work.

"Bye honey, I love you!" He says.

"I love you too sweetheart. Stay safe and come back to me!" I dramatically exclaim too.

He closes the door and I can hear him chuckle a bit.

"Dead end!" I yell to myself in agony.

I've been at this for 2 hours now and I keep ending at a dead end. I'm still searching about Mr.Bodyguard's background. Okay maybe I'm being silly about this whole thing. I should just stop at the fact that his name is Trevor and he's an ordinary bodyguard with no agenda whatsoever. Argh!

My phone rings just as I'm about to switch off my laptop. Unknown number? I answer it anyway.

"Hello, Advocate Mapulane here."

"Hello, Mr.Bandile here."

"Bandile?"

"So you even deleted my numbers? Tjo." I can hear taxis driving and honking in the background.

"What do you want Bandile?" I ask.

"A word. That's all."

"No thank you. We already talked about whatever we had to talk about."

"No. You talked about whatever you had to lay off your chest. I still need to say my bit."

"Bandile!"

"Please. For old times sake." He pleads.

"Fine. When and where?"

"Ocean basket. 15H00."

"Fine. Wait you're in North West?"

"Yes."

"I'm not even going to ask. See you there."

"Okay bye ba-"

I hang up and continue with something else. Even though my gut is telling me that there's more to Mr.Bodyguard

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a dead end destroyed my Faith.

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"Bandile." I say and take a seat opposite him.

"Naledi. Beautiful as always." He says and places his iPhone and wallet with his Quantum taxi keys on the table.

"Hello. Welcome to Ocean Basket, my name is Kgomotso what can I get you?"

"Hi, Kgomotso. Uhm... I'll just have a glass of lemon water." I say.

She confusedly looks at me before writing down on her notepad. She then turns to Bandile.

"Eish... yaz I'm feeling fancily rich today. Can I have this order, large fish and chips with calamari." He says to her.

"Alright sir. Anything to drink?"

"I'll have what the missus is having. Actually no, give me a cold one- Heineken."

"Alright. Your order will be right out!" She says and skips to the kitchen side. I don't know if it's me, but I think Bandile was even staring at her behind for a while. The girl must be 20 or something. Bandile is 27 by the way.

"Bandile. This isn't a social meet up. Can we just get down to business?"

"Do you have somewhere to be?" He asks.

"Yes. I'm meeting up with Troy a little bit soon after our meeting here. That's why I ordered water."

"Mxm. So mlungu (white guy) is more important than I am?"

"First of all, he's African American. Not white. Secondly, yes he's more important than you. Thirdly, speak or I leave."

"Naledi what happened to us?" He asks.

"You happened."

"Naledi, I actually cared about you."

"I did too. Till I saw that I'm basically at risk with you in my life. I didn't distance myself because I wanted to, I did because I had to. Some friendships aren't meant to last a lifetime, some come with great life lessons and knowledge about yourself. That time happened and now it's over."

"Marry me."

"Say what?" I ask, horrified.

"If we're done as friends. Let's start as lovers."

"Over my dead body son!" A voice behind me exclaims.

I, Bandile and the rest of restaurant all turn to... Troy!

He walks to our table and kisses my forehead before whispering that we had to go.

"Okay. Bandile, it was nice to see you but our business is done. Move on, make new friends and family. Let me be just a memory in your life." I say and stand up.

"Alright. Here's your drinks." Kgomotso the waitress comes with a tray.

Troy takes out a R100 note and puts it ontop of the tray before grabbing by the waist to leave.

"Take your filthy money wena (you)!" Bandile exclaims.

Troy stops in his tracks and turns slowly to Bandile's direction.

"What did you say son?" T asks.

"You're deaf now? Why don't you just go back to the states and leave our women?" Bandile asks and stands up.

Troy's breathing increases and even the waitress is scared on what's about to happen. I'm just standing between these two men with no way or solution to ease the tension.

"What? Huh? Do something! Likkle bitch!" Bandile says.

Before I can even blink, Troy's fist is already on Bandile's cheek. Bandile takes the blow and attempts to punch him back but misses. T then punches him in the stomach area which makes Bandile hurl a bit. I manage to get in between them again and look at Troy.

"T. T. T. Look at me, don't. Hey hey hey! He's not worth it. Let's go." I say and slowly pull his arm towards the exit. He reluctantly follows still keeping his gaze on Bandile who's on the floor trying to catch his breath. The mall security looks at Troy and back at Bandile. After seeing how angry T looked, he just turned around and went to the bathroom. Eh! This

situation just went from 0 to 100 real fast, real quick. What was Bandile thinking? I can't even beat Troy at a simple race, how the heck was Bandile going to fight him with his arm this big? Now we caused ourselves a few eyes. Guess I'm going to be trending again, this time for the wrong reasons.

"Let me take a look." I say.

"Nag it's cool. Just a scratch." He says with a flinch.

I take his hand anyway and see that he bruised his knuckles, probably when beating the life out of Bandile.

I dab a sanitizer on a cotton bud and clean his wound. Although he's trying to act strong, I know that it probably stings.

I then wrap a bandage around his hand and kiss it before packing the First Aid Kit.

"Thank you." He says as he tries to move his fingers.

"You're an idiot you know that. You're really sweet but idiotic too." I say.

He just smiles and I get up to put the First Aid back at the kitchen.

"Can this idiot get a slice of that forbidden pizza?" He exclaims from the bedroom.

I just chuckle and heat up the entire box we ordered when we got here. While it's heating up my phone rings and it's Rivonia. Oh right, she still had to get back to me.

"Rivonia Hi."

"Hey Naledi. So it took a lot out of me that you owe me a mega breakfast date."

"No problem. Tomorrow if you want."

"Whoo yes please! I can smell the fat breakfast already." She says while smacking her lips together.

"Rivonia!"

"Okay okay. Yoh! Alright so I managed to get the number of his mother. It doesn't look a South African number though."

"It's okay. Just give it to me."

She says the number and I write it down on the receipt for the pizza we bought.

"Okay thanks Rivonia and please... not a word of this to anyone. Just in case I'm wrong."

"You are wrong but don't worry my lips are sealed."

We bid each other goodbye and I don't even waste time, I dial the number on our land-line house phone and keep tapping my foot in anticipation. The line finally gets picked up and I'm horrified by what I hear.

"Hello, Sheryl Lane speaking."

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"Hello? Hello. Hello?!"

I hang up quickly without uttering a word. What in the world is going on? Mr.Bodyguard's mother is Sheryl? It's either Sheryl has another son or... or Mr Bodyguard is Tory. Oh my word! Eh. Eh. Eh.

"Babe! I've been calling you. Are you okay?" Troy asks.

I look at him in the eyes with tears and I can't even speak.

"Babe. Babe? What's wrong? Talk to me."

I open my mouth but nothing is coming out. So much is going through my mind.

He sits me down on the couch and I just sit there trying to comprehend what I just encountered.

"Babe. What is going on?"

"Did... did your mother have another son?" I ask with my voice breaking up.

"No. Wait why?"

"I think you should meet Mr Bodyguard tomorrow."

"Why? Is he treating you badly? I'm gonna fu-"

"No! I just really want you to meet him. That's the only thing I can tell you right now."

"Will you just tell me now? Who were you on the phone with?"

"I... can we just wait till tomorrow? I can't even-"

"Okay, okay. I'll wait."

"Thank you."

"Babe? Have you seen my watch?" Troy asks.

"Uhm... check on the counter. I mean on the little table by the bed!" I exclaim.

"Thanks!"

I continue pouring water in the water bottle. This is going to be mind blowing. I don't know what I'm going to do honestly. I don't even know why this is affecting me so. Mr Bodyguard is Tory? Sheryl has another son? Mr Bodyguard is... working for-

"Babe! Your bottle is full."

I snap out of it and see that indeed my bottle is overflowing now. I turn off the water and close the bottle.

"Ready to go?" He asks.

"Yeah. Uhm... can you drive? I'm not in my right state of mind."

"I was already going to drive. Come on."

I grab my laptop bag and handbag to the car before getting in the passenger's seat. Troy puts in his laptop bag too and starts the car before heading to the office.

On the way, my heart is just pounding vigorously. I don't know how this so going to play out and I've been avoiding speaking as much as possible since last night. I know that if I start talking, I'm not going to make sense.

I'm a bit late but at this point I don't care.

"Naledi. What is going on? Please talk to me." He asks.

He's been asking that ever since and I'm sick of not responding. I can't even respond because I'm still confused.

"Park right over there." I say.

He parks the car and I tell him to stay inside the car while I go outside. I know that Mr Bodyguard won't come out if he sees him or he might charge at him.

I step outside and wait for him to come get me as he always does. As I suspected, he steps out the building and comes to me. He looks even scarier than before which makes the situation more heart stopping.

"M-morning Mr.Bodyguard."

"Morning ma'am. You're late again." He says.

"Yeah uhm... I have something bothering me. It's in my car."

He immediately takes out his gun.

"Are you threatened?" He asks.

Bad move. I know that Troy couldn't see his face while he was in the car, but he was able to see his lower body... including the gun.

Before I can say anything Troy steps out the car and Mr Bodyguard points the gun at him.

"Naledi! What is going-" Troy stops speaking when he's face to face with Mr.Bodyguard.

"Babe this is my bodyguard. Mr.Bodyguard, this is my husband T-"

"Troy." Mr Bodyguard finishes my sentence.

They both look at each other in astonishment and I'm just there looking at them both, waiting for one of them to talk.

"Tory?" Troy asks.

Mr Bodyguard (Tory) says nothing. He's still pointing the gun at Troy.

"Tory? What? How? When? Most of all, why?" Troy is speaking in tongues now.

"Ma'am. Let's get you inside. You have a new case to deal with." Tory says without a bother. He puts his gun down and holds me on my back so that I can start walking.

"Tory?" Troy asks.

Tory just keeps making me walk towards the building. This is weird, Troy would never allow anyone to touch me. Even if it's my hair or a nail. Now he's just behind us standing like an idiot. I look back and I see him getting inside my car and driving off.

"Well, glad you're back gladiator. Mr Cornish has another one for you. Plus, Detective Mutsa made an appointment with you at 12H00."

"Uhm... okay. I'll be in my office."

Mr Bodyguard is still standing behind me and I already know I'm going to have it.

I can see Rivonia is picking up a vibe between us but she too says nothing.

I take a sticky note from Rivonia and head towards my office. I get inside and just as I'm about to close the door behind me, Mr Bodyguard stops it with his giant boot.

He opens the door wide and closes it behind him.

I carefully go back to my desk and begin unpacking my stuff. Laptop, book, writing utensils and my phone. I lay them all on

my desk and sit on the chair. I'm trying so hard to not acknowledge the elephant in the room, but it's hard. Since we already have computers at work, I log in and check all my emails. Guess they were right, I do have a new case.

"How did you know?" He asks.

I stare at him without uttering a word or even attempting to do so.

"How did you know that it's me?"

"Why did you get this job?"

"I asked you first."

"I asked you second and 2 is more than 1."

"I did it because... I wanted to find a way to reconnect with my brother."

"Really?" I asked, shocked.

"Yeah. Now your turn. How did you know?"

"I walked in on you when you were busy on your phone and I heard you say my name. It was a bit suspicious so I did a little digging. Fake identity? Really?"

"I had to lay low till I figured out how I was going to talk to Troy after not seeing him for four to five years."

"Still. Faking your identity was unnecessary. Fraud even. I could just drag you to court you know?"

"I know you won't." He proudly says.

"Don't tempt me. You're Troy's brother, not mine. If I drag you to court I got nothing to lose."

"I see why he chose you." He says with a smile.

"Oh yeah? Why's that?"

"You match up to him. All them thots done came and went because they couldn't stand up to him. They didn't have a backbone."

"Gee, thanks."

"Nah don't worry, take it as a compliment."

"I wonder why he acted that way."

"Too much has happened. I'm sure by now you're well aware of our fucked up family."

"Don't say it like that. Your mother is dearly paying for her mistakes."

He mumbles something under his breath that I couldn't comprehend. He tells me it's nothing but I know that whatever it is, it was about Sheryl.

He excuses himself and I take the opportunity to call Troy and ask him if he's okay. The way he left earlier was a bit unorthodox for him.

Straight to voice mail.

I try again and it takes me straight to voice mail. Maybe he's busy, he did say that he prefers no electronics when he's with the animals.

Although it's hard, I try to push and get as much work done as possible.

This isn't my battle, it's theirs.

"Hi Rivonia."

"Hey. Detective Mutsa is here to see you."

"Send her through."

"Okay."

I hang up and wear my blazer as it was starting to get chilly even though it's 12H00.

After a few minutes, Mutsa knocks and I let her in.

"Have a seat." I say.

She sits down and fiddles with her hands and the rubber band around her wrist.

"What can I do for you detective?" I ask with a straight face. By the way, I'm taking it one step at a time. I'm still a bit startled that she's the one papa saved that day. Yes, I'm still blaming her a bit but just a tiny bit. Like a dot on a white page kind of tiny.

"I need to speak to you about the Reverend's case. Seeing that you were once out and about it, I need to clarify something with you." I just can't get over her Nigerian accent. Every time she speaks, I just think of momma and how much her and I enjoy watching Nigerian movies.

"Okay. Spill the beans."

"Alright. First things first, the Reverend's wife was out of town the time you were investigating yes?"

"Yes."

"Okay. I just needed to make sure. She's quite a character that one. Two

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what exactly did the Reverend's brother tell you? I tried to talk to him but he kept speaking in a language I didn't understand. However, I could tell that he was insulting me."

"Not much. I wrote it in my notes that Rea has that he used to have a thing for the suspect, Emmarentia Kethe."

"Yes! That's another thing, she has been asking for you every single time I pay her a visit. She says that Rea is not someone she fully trusts."

"She doesn't trust Rea because I trusted her."

"Huh?"

I get comfortable on my office chair before continuing.

"Her daughter was my friend so she knew that I would try with all my might to get her out of there."

"I thought you were close. Why are you speaking like you don't care?"

"She's not... she wasn't completely honest with me. I kept finding things out along the way. The only way I even found out about them is when I would ask her about it. To this day I still think she's hiding something. She's not guilty, according to me, but she's not entirely honest with everyone."

"She told me that she fears for her life."

"As she should. However these people are not God. They don't see all and know all. I can think of many times when they messed up when they were gallivanting about."

"Them? I thought it was one person."

"Really detective? One person would be able to pull all this off?"

"I've seen it all Advocate. Some people are real masterminds. Search 'solo murderers' and you'll believe me."

"Well, the killer isn't working alone. I wrote about it that she said she heard two people in the room."

"She said she heard one person. Argh! This woman is making me look a he-goat."

"Is that all detective?" I ask.

"Yes. That's all. Please contact me if you remember anything or stumble upon new info." She hands me her business card.

"I will do so detective." I bow my head.

"Before I forget, Naledi I'm sorry if I offended you back at court or anything. I was a bit unprofessional."

"It's okay. Being brilliant comes with its disadvantages."

"Heh. Indeed you're brilliant. Some of the words you spoke are still ringing around my head. It's like a whole new world of-"

"Sorry to sound rude detective but it's lunch time and I'd like to fuel my engine before work." I interrupt her.

"Of course. Farewell."

She leaves when she doesn't get a response and shuts the door. I didn't think that needed a reply or something.

Eh.

Just as I'm about to go to the cafeteria, I receive a call from my personal phone and it's... an unknown number. You know I'm getting real tired of all these anonymous phone callers. I answer it anyway.

"Hello."

"Hello. Boss lady?"

"Thabang?"

"Yeah yeah. It's me boss lady." He sounds like he's in trouble.

"What's up? Is Troy okay?"

"Iyoh please don't ask about boss man tuu. He just fired me."

"Heh? Wareng wena (what did you just say)?"

"Iyoh. Gadaffi o kwatile blind (he's really angry)! He fired me because I was asking why is he angry. Hape he nearly saw bra God when he got in a cage without protection."

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know. After he fired me, he told security to escort me out. Boss lady I've been working for boss man ever since he got that reserve up and running and now I'm on the side of the

road. Calling you from a phone booth. Tjo. Satane o throw'ile party ya jara ko di hell'eng (Satan is throwing the party of the year in hell)!"

"I'll try to talk to him. Just go home and try to fix your CV."

"Ah! Boss lady!"

"I'm joking marn, he'll be alright. He's just dealing with something right now."

"Okay boss lady. Let me leave now, hape di prostitute tsa mo strateng se okare di tlong strangle'a ka g-string (these prostitutes on this street look like they're about to strangle me with a g-string)."

"Uhm... okay. By the way how did you get my phone numbers?"

"Karabo gave them to me."

"Uhm... okay. Sharpo."

"Sure sure boss lady."

Troy has done it now! Firing Thabang! That's not even constitutional. Thabang can go to any worker's union and they'll easily vouch for him.

I try to call him by his personal and office number but they all lead straight to voice mail. Eish.

Let me drive there. I'm hungry so I'll eat on the way, my baby needs me. I tell Rivonia that I'm heading out and she tells me that Troy sent someone to drive my car back here since he sped off with it this morning. She hands me the keys and I give them to Mr.Bodyguard. Time to go.

"Ma'am are you sure you want me there?"

"No I don't. I can't go anywhere without you can't I?" I state the obvious.

"Oh yeah. Still, I'm going to have to stand beside you there. He's my brother or not, my job is to protect you. If he tries anything I will not hesitate to-"

"He's not going to do anything. You'll see."

He looks at me on the rear view mirror while raising his eyebrow.

I know Troy and I know that he would never willingly hurt me. Not that one. He'd rather swallow glass.

Anyway while we're driving there, Karabo calls me.

"Hey friend-ooo!" She excitedly squeals.

"Well, you seem energised after being in a hangover for three days."

"I wasn't... no. It's just that I've been really busy. Did Thabang call you?"

"Yeah he did. I'm on my way, I'm going to talk to T."

"Yoh please do. I can't have a man who's not working."

"Eh eh eh! Kante la jola (y'all are dating)? When were you going to tell me."

"Errr... today." She innocently says.

"I can't believe you! You're only telling me about your love life today." I say.

"Sorry. We only started dating yesterday."

"You started dating yesterday?!"

"Errr... gotta go. I'm driving through a tunnel." She says and quickly hangs up.

Well, Karabo and Thabang dating? Yeah, this is going to be an interesting relationship.

I get to the game reserve and find Thabang still on the side of the road.

"Thabang? I thought you went home."

"Eish boss lady. The Uber is taking its time. I can't even drive myself home because my car is still inside."

Just as I'm about to respond, the gate opens and they throw Oscar outside.

"Hey! You can't do this marn! Mr Lane sir. I'm sorry marn!"

"Oscar?" I ask.

"Yoh thank goodness you're here. Mr Lane just fired me. Yoh ma weh! How am I going to pay rent and support my family?"

Oscar retaliates

Thabang is just laughing at Oscar so hard, even tears are flowing down his face.

"I'll fix this guys. Wait here." I say as I walk towards the gate.

They let me in and I drive on a long gravel road while Tory is in the passenger seat. It looks so wild here. Tall, dry grass on either side of the road, thorn trees and birds flying in the horizon.

I get to the main entrance and I park my car before walking towards Troy's office. I don't even need confirmation, the guards just let me in. I walk for a while on the stone filled ground with bushes and flower trees on either side till I reach it and knock before opening the door. Bare in mind, Tory is outside.

I find him face down on his desk, the view of the waterfall on his big window is still dreamy.

I close the door and sit down next to him.

"Nay? What are you doing here?" He asks. I thought he'd be crying but he just looks dangerously mad.

"I'm here to comfort you."

"I don't need your comfort. Just go back to-"

"Yey! Don't you dare! You better realize who you're speaking to. I'm not Thabang and Oscar nna (me)."

He looks at me and soon apologises for being insensitive.

Just as I'm about to kiss him, Tory knocks on the door. When I'm in a room, he knocks every 5 minutes just to confirm that I'm still safe and sane.

"I'm okay... dude!" I exclaim.

"Is that him?" He asks.

"Yeah."

"Call him in."

"T?"

"Call him in." He says.

I reluctantly call for him to come inside and he waits no second. Soon as he's inside, he stares at Troy then back at me.

"Are you okay ma'am?" He asks.

"Nay please leave us." Troy says and stands up to hold the door for me.

"T?"

"Now babe. Right now." He says while clenching his teeth.

I get up and walk out the office and look at him close the door with him and Tory inside.

"T, what are you going to do?" I manage to ask him before he closes the door.

"Talk. We're just going to talk." He says and closes the door, leaving me outside with uncertainty.

I've been waiting outside for a good 8 minutes but it feels like 8 hours. What the heck are they doing in there? There's something about the way Troy said 'We're just gonna talk' that didn't sit well with me. I haven't heard any grunts or slaps and punches flying so I'm still positive that they're just talking. It will be really good for them to just talk. I'm not saying reconcile on the spot, because that will take a while, but they must at least reach common ground that they are not each other's enemies. I know right now that Troy has a lot of questions and has already asked Tory half of them. All I hope is that Tory answers the question truthfully.

I finally stand up from sitting on the bench near the rose garden when Troy opens the door.

I run up to the door and they both come out laughing at something.

"Oh yeah that one I'll never forget. Uncle Murray nearly choked the hell out of you. What was you doing in his room anyway?" Troy asks.

"Stealing his weed." Tory says as he continues laughing. This is the first time I see him laughing, it's kind of disturbing.

"Oh hi ma'am. Ready to go?" Tory asks me when they finally recognize my presence.

"Yeah. I need to get back to work. Can I just speak with T for a minute?"

"T?" Tory asks.

"That's what she calls me." Troy says.

"That is both adorable and odd. I'll wait for you in the car ma'am. See ya' later T!" Tory exclaims as he heads for the car.

I look at Troy who's still grinning ear to ear and looking at Tory still.

"T? T!"

"Huh? What's up?"

I look at him and fold my arms.

"Look I know you have a lot of questions and I'll answer all of them tonight at home."

"I know you will! What I want to know is why did you fire Thabang and Oscar?" I ask.

"Oi véy! I really did, didn't I?" He says with his hand covering his face.

"Yes!"

"Okay I'll rehire them. How about that?"

"...and you'll give them a day off today for shouting at them and embarrassing them in front of the public."

"Say what?!"

I look at him again and this time I pout and raise my eyebrow.

"Alright alright. Whatever you say. Thanks for coming to check on me by the way." He says and holds my waist so I can move closer to him.

"You are the luckiest man to ever set foot on this earth you know that?" I ask.

"Why do you say that?"

"Cause you got the luckiest girl by your side." I wink at him and kiss him before leaving too.

As I'm walking towards the car I look back and find him smiling at me, he waves and I wave back before climbing in.

Tory revives the engine before heading out and driving on the gravel road out of the reserve.

He keeps looking at me on the rear view mirror and seeing that I'm at the back seat he can't really hide his expression from me.

"Ma'am please don't ask what Troy and I were talking about."
He finally speaks.

"No. What I was going to say was: 1- take me to the cafe near work before we head back and 2- stop calling him Troy by T. Only I get to call him that." I say and look outside.

"Yes ma'am."

"Hey Rivonia." I greet her as I enter the reception.

"Well that was a long break for you." She says.

"I'm not even late." I state.

"Yes but you took time."

"Sorry mom! Anyway here you go." I give her a brown paper bag.

She stops typing on the computer and stands up to see what's inside. As soon as she opens it she smiles widely at me and thanks me.

"Well I had to keep my end of the deal." I say to her.

"We agreed on a greasy food sub. What's with the muffins and raspberry soda? Not that I'm complaining or anything." She says.

"It's interest."

"Well, it was definitely a pleasure working with you. Do call me if you need any hacking done again."

The old white lady that was about to exit the building, stops opening the glass doors and stares at us in horror.

"Uhm... I mean in like good hacking. Had we not hacked the system that poor girl would've been a goner. Thank you officer." She says out loud for the lady to hear. The old lady just continues walking out and I laugh at how Rivonia is looking all worried like. She'll learn to keep her mouth shut next time.

"Ah! That lady isn't going to use our legal advice anymore." She says as she takes a bite of the blueberry muffin.

"Yep. Anyway let me get back to work. Later."

She waves at me and I wave back before dismissing Mr Bodyguard too. I don't know, it seems weird to call him Tory. I'll stick with Mr Bodyguard for now.

I get inside the office and just drink the coffee I bought for myself. I mentioned that we went to our annual physical on the 1st of June. We both get a check up on that day every year and although the doctor gave us a clean bill of health, he did mention that I should cut down on caffeine. I have too much of it in my system but not so that my entire being is at risk. He just said that one cup a day is enough. He said that I should drink it with milk just to dilute the caffeine.

I'm not one to follow orders because ke ngwana wa papa (I am dad's child) but I did however, follow this one.

My phone rings as I'm reminiscing about how Troy nearly told that doctor where to get off. You know now that I think about it, Troy is a bullfighter when it comes to me. I don't know why he just acts so crazy sometimes but... it happens. I don't know, atleast I'm able to control him and his bullying tendencies though.

"Hello."

"Hello ngwanake (my child)."

"Oh hello momma. I'm sorry I thought it was a client."

"Gosiame ngwanake (it's okay my child). O siame (are you alright)?"

"Eya mme. Lena ka mo gae(yes mom. How about you at home)?"

"Re siame ngwanake (we're alright my child)."

"Alright momma. By the way, where is Tshedimogo? I tried to text him on Whatsapp but he's offline."

"He's at it again."

"Eng (what)?"

"Stealing. I'm not too sure mara (but) he's coming home late now and he barely speaks to me. The other day, that old man who fixes stoves and irons nearly beat him up."

"Why?!"

"He says that Tshedi stole his tools but Tshedimogo said that he didn't. He said that they were old and rusty anyway."

"Do you think he did it?"

"How else did he pay for his new shoes?"

"Ah! Momma I thought he learned weitsi (you know). I thought he finally turned over a new leaf and-"

"The community held a meeting at the hall and we discussed all things concerning our area. The water, electricity, people who passed on and... theft. Naledi, I've never been so embarrassed when Tshedimogo's name kept being thrown around when it came to that topic."

"What did they say?"

"They said that they're tired of all the 'thieves' in the neighbourhood and will not call the police when they catch a perpetrator."

"What will they do?" I horrifyingly ask.

"Whatever they please."

"Yoh! What are we going to do momma?"

"We talked to him. We prayed for him. We defended him. If he is caught, I will just sit back and watch them."

"Bathong (exclaim) momma!"

"What else are we supposed to do?"

I keep quiet when my mind goes blank of solutions.

"Exactly. I'm tired of talking Naledi. Your brother can only be fixed by one thing. Prison. You showing him from the outside was not enough. He needs to be inside to fully learn."

"I can't believe you're saying this momma."

"We'll see. Anyway did you hear the sad news?"

"Who passed on?" I jokingly ask. I don't even know why I 'jokingly' asked such an insensitive question but... yeah.

"Koko Deborah has passed on. Stroke."

"He e momma!"

"Yoh. Pelo yaka e boima (my heart is heavy). She was the only one that had my side when it came to the people of this neighborhood. She was my best friend. She filled that 'big sister' space that had been left empty after your aunt abandoned us. Now she's gone."

I knew from the moment she spoke on the phone that she was not okay. I thought it was because of Tshedimogo but little did I know.

"Aow momma. Askies (sorry). Yoh this is sad indeed! How is Bandile dealing with it?"

"I don't know. She passed on this morning so I haven't seen him yet. Yoh he's not going to like this at all."

"I know. Losing a parent is never easy, no matter how old you are. Yoh momma this is sad!"

"Ka nnete ngwanake (true my child). She will be buried this Sunday."

"Ah! It's only Wednesday today."

"Her sister says that she never really wanted big things. So a small funeral seemed appropriate. That's impossible though, this woman was an ANC member. The least possible number of people coming is 500."

"Hey! She always made sure that everyone around her knew that she's a proud member of that political party."

"Yeah."

"Momma it will be okay. Troy and I will be there on Sunday. We'll be there to support okay?"

"Kea leboga ngwanake (thank you my child). Plus I need to speak with Troy-boy. Alone."

"Ha! Why?"

"He e (no) Naledi. Eo ke taba yaka le Troy-boy (that's an issue between Troy-boy and I)." She has always called him that.

"Tjo. Okay. Stay strong momma. I love you."

"Lenna kea go rata ngwanake (I love you too my child)."

I hang up and deep down I know that she's probably annoyed by me. She likes to be the one to hang up, especially if she's the one that called. Onto pressing matters though, Tshedi and Koko Deborah. I'll solve both issues when I get to Kagiso on Sunday. I cannot believe Koko Deborah is gone though. She was the grandma I never had and had always wanted. She supported momma and I when we were at our lowest and now she's gone. Even though I'm not fancying Bandile right now, I do know that he'll be shattered when he hears the news if he hasn't already heard them. Losing a parent isn't easy. It's as close as having physical

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mental and emotional abuse. I just hope he gets through it.

"Honey, I'm home!" I exclaim as I enter the apartment.

Seeing that I received no sarcastic response, I conclude that I'm alone and T hasn't come home yet. That's okay. This will give

me a chance to cook something and have a moment before he arrives.

I quickly change into back leggings, and a grey oversized shirt. I put on my brown Winter boots and get to work.

I grill the chicken and make macaroni, mashed potatoes and a thick gravy.

It all looks heavenly but it's too simple. I put all the macaroni in a big bowl and make momma's recipe. I add like 3 chopped vienna's in there and add parsley, robot peppers, tuna, aromat and mayonnaise! I take a BIG spoon to taste and Oh. My. Word. This is delicious! Not like momma's one but definitely 2nd best. I don't know what's the deal with how the meals mom's prepared are better than the meals we prepare. Same recipe, technique and even time of day but totally different results.

As I'm cleaning up, I hear keys ruffling and a distinct 'Eh!' when they realize that the door is already unlocked.

He gets in and immediately starts sniffing the aroma around.

He gets in the kitchen and smiles when he finds me waiting for him.

"Well, this is a heavenly sight." He says.

I come over and give him a huge kiss then take his jacket and suitcase to the bedroom. I tell him to sit down and he does so as I keep dishing up for him.

I tell him about my day and how momma informed me about the sad news. He kisses my hand when I start to break in between as I talk about Koko Deborah's passing. He agreed to go with me to the funeral and you should have seen his face when I told him that momma wants to talk to him. Priceless.

I give him his food and watch him make weird looks to it when he sees the macaroni. I tell him to take a bite and he does so. After that, he just kept filling his mouth hole with food that I doubt he was still breathing.

"Seriously. What did you cook woman?" He asks with a mouthful of the macaroni mix.

"Dinner. I cooked dinner." I proudly say.

I look at him as he devours his food.

"Don't look at me like that." He says.

"I can't help it."

He smirks and continues eating away.

I don't know if I'm the only one but, I don't get hungry for the food I prepare. I earlier concluded that maybe it's the smell that makes me seem full or something.

"Aren't you going to eat?" He asks.

"Maybe later. Right now though you got some explaining to do."

He chuckles and takes a sip of the juice I poured for him.

"I know you've been dying to know ever since you left. Well, we talked."

"About what?"

"Our brother relationship and Sheryl."

"Come on! You're going to have to give me more than that dude."

"I asked him where has he been and he said that he's been around the neighborhood. He got out of the marines after 4 years and layed low for a while. He found out that I lived here in SA and decided to pay me a visit."

"That says something, right?" I hopefully ask.

"Yeah well, we didn't get to talk about emotional stuff. After I told him about us and how Sheryl paid me a visit, we took a trip down memory lane. Mainly because it's always been my dream to be around animals and we happened to be in our very own game reserve."

"Our?"

"Yes. You and I."

"But-"

"Please don't start. It's ours and that's that."

"I didn't know I had shares."

"Well you do, 50% of it."

"You got 50 too?" I ask.

"Nah, I got 39. Sheryl invested so she has 10."

"Oh. Why don't we just switch?"

"No thank you." He jokingly says.

I chuckle too and begin cleaning up the counter and stuff.

"Word of caution though- don't trust him." He finally says after laughing.

"Why?"

"I don't know but he's hiding something."

"Do you think he has an agenda?"

"Yeah. Definitely. Why else did he receive a call from Sheryl while we were talking?"

~Sheryl~

Let's all give Tory Lane a round of applause for being a complete imbecile and dunderhead. Whoo! Yeah! You take after your father my boy! I don't know what is so difficult to just surveille someone. All you have to do is literally watch them but my poor boy couldn't do that. Now I find out that sugar found out that he's Tory and that Troy has already seen him.

When it rains, it pours.

I knew this would happen, I just didn't think it would be this soon.

You know what? Let me lay low. Everytime I bring the thunder, the lightening strikes me and not sugar. I'll let them talk and bond and all. My business with Tory is done anyway. I think he's paid me a bunch, especially after that saga with the South African reverend. I'll strike when least expected.

In due time though, in due time.

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"Come on babe. We're gonna be late!"

"In a minute!"

"You've been saying that for the last 30 minutes. I don't want to arrive there late at night."

"T, just give me a minute! Where's my phone?!"

"Your phone, handbag and travel bag are with me. Now please get out of there!"

I scoff and finally settled on a bootleg black jean, long sleeve rose gold top and one of T's sweaters. I put on my black ankle boots and leave my afro as it is. Maybe I should braid it because it's becoming a real nightmare to-

"Nay!" TV exclaims from the kitchen.

Sheesh okay! It's Saturday anyway and the funeral is tomorrow so I don't know what the sudden rush is for. Makeup? Neh. I'm fine. I'll put it on tomorrow.

"How do I look?" I step out the bedroom and turn around for him.

"Is that my hoodie?"

"Well if you didn't rush me maybe I would've found one of my sweaters. Yours was an arm reach away from me. Plus the dark colour goes with my-"

"Yeah okay. You look fine. Now let's go." He says and grabs my hand out the apartment. After locking up, he starts brisk walking downstairs to the car. Why is he rushing? I gaze on my watch and it's only... 14H47. Okay we may be a little bit late but we're still going to get there. I know he doesn't like driving at night but we'll arrive there around 17H00. I don't know why he's rushing so much.

He loads up my handbag and travel bag in the back seat. Yeah, he was holding my handbag!

He unlocks the door and although he's acting like a headless chicken, he hasn't forgotten about chivalry- he comes around and opens the door for me then closes it. We're going to be driving with his car, a black jeep. This is a beautiful car but not something I could go to work with. No, this one you go out with it or travel long distances. It seems a bit big but that's because my Mercedes- Benz isn't this high.

He gets in and starts the ignition before hitting the road.

"Hey so uhm... I was thinking of- why are you mad?" He asks.

We've been on the road for half an hour and now he notices.

"Nay?"

I sigh and continue looking out the window.

"You said I look fine." I finally speak.

"Uhm... so?"

"I said you looked handsome but you said I looked fine. This car ,however, you said it looked breathtaking." I say in a low tone.

He takes my hand from my folded-arms position and kisses it while he's driving with his other hand.

"I'm sorry okay. I'm sorry. It was just chaos back there and I was afraid we were going to leave late. I don't want to be driving around these streets at night with my lady."

I smile a bit but I'm still looking outside.

"Naledi look at me, look at me."

I turn my gaze to him and find him already looking at my direction.

"You look beautiful. You look badass and finally, you look breathtaking." He says and looks at me before looking at the road and back at me.

"Thank you." I say and although I wanted to keep a straight face, I end up blushing.

"But you're a real nightmare to deal with when going out to somewhere."

"T, I was on the cover of a magazine. I think when I'm out in public I should dress to kill every time. Otherwise, I'll be lowering Sheryl's clothing line standards."

"Nah, you used to take time even before the magazine roll out. You was on standard level but now you's on boss level. My God."

I chuckle at him and continue looking outside.

"How are you doing though?"

"Huh?"

"Well I know that she was almost like a grandma of some sort to you. So how have you been dealing with it?" He asks.

"I've been okay. It's sad, like heartbreaking and all but I'm mostly worried for momma. She was the one that was close to Koko Deborah."

"Damn! By the way, did you tell her that we'll be staying at a hotel?"

"Uhm..."

"Nay!"

"Is it really important to tell her that? I mean all she knows is that we'll be at the funeral tomorrow. Why tell her that?"

"If she finds out in an awkward way she'll think that I kept you away or something. We're staying at a hotel because of the space at your home and because it would be disrespectful for me to be sleeping there if we aren't fully married."

I look at him in awe and disbelief. How did he know all this? Or is it practiced everywhere?

"I've been living with you for 2 years and living here in SA for about 6 years. I know a thing or two about culture. What I also know is that we need to discuss lo-"

My phone rings and I grab my handbag from the backseat.

"Sorry. Could be important." I say as I'm ruffling in my bag for the ever-so ringing phone.

I see that it's Karabo calling and I pick it up immediately.

"Hey K-baby!"

"Naledi? Ha! I did it again!"

"You did what?"

"I took a guy for granted!"

Troy can hear a bit of our conversation because of the way she's yelling and how worried my face looks. I wanted to put it

on loudspeaker but that would be a bad-friend move. Especially considering how she is dating Troy's friend.

"Okay Karabo okay. Calm down. Tell me what happened."

"Okay so, today is Saturday right? Okay on Thursday, I was busy talking to Thabang. We were at his apartment and we were talking about how he nearly lost his job and how our week has been going. All that."

"Okay." I say for her to continue.

"Okay so, it came down to me cooking for him because he said he was starving after we went to the bedroom and had a steamy-"

"Halalalala! I don't need to hear that part." I chuckle.

"Hehe okay. So I get up and I even dress in his shirt and go make him some desert since I was his dinner."

"Karabo!"

"I'm getting there. So it's about 9 pm but I don't mind so I just grab some eggs and make him an egg sandwich. I added some mashed potatoes that I made the night before and poured coffee for him. It was a bit chilly for a cold drink. Anyway he takes a bite and spits it out. Tells me that the eggs taste horrible but I only bought them yesterday."

"Hehehe!"

"Naledi this is serious. After that, he's busy telling me that all his ex's could cook so what is wrong with me? Me? So now that I can't cook, I'm not a woman enough for him? Cooking doesn't define a woman! I have a successful career and a great personality so how dare he! He told me that it's no big deal but our fight eventually got heated and we said some... things to one another. I left, even though it was in the middle of the night, and went home to blow off some steam."

"Yoh. This was all on Thursday?"

"Yep! Yesterday I thought he was going to call to apologise or something but nothing. Today I gave him some time but he hasn't called nor texted still. Some girl named N Diale, tagged her on Facebook and said that this used to be the 'old him'. I didn't even see the meme. I'm so pissed right now because he's already moving on and nna (I) I'm here stressing myself."

"What is the name of the girl?"

"I don't know the name of the girl. All I know is that she called herself 'N Diale'."

We continue talking until I gave her tips on how to relax and that it's her decision whether she wants to take the first step or not. You can't exactly force advice down someone's throat. If they decide not to take it, it's not anyone's fault.

She tells me that she apologises for not being able to come to the funeral and I tell her that it's okay, she needs time to think.

"Okay bye K-baby."

"Bye tjomie (friend). Love you."

She hangs up and I look at Troy who's already looking at me.

"What's going on?" He asks.

"Thabang and Karabo. They're going through it."

"They've only been dating for a few days and already- Thabang you've done it now!"

We both laugh but I'm forcing my laughter. N Diale? Nancy.
Nancy Diale.

I leave the thought behind when the thought of Nancy being caught in another dilemma hits me. She's now too smart to be doing that again. Thabang and Karabo are just too proud to admit that they're wrong. They just need time. We arrive at the hotel and T grabs both of our travel bags inside.

He wanted the superior suite but I told him that's too costly for just one night.

We got a standard room with one bed and a lovely view.
Gauteng isn't so bad after all.

We make ourselves comfortable so while he was showering, I was just sitting on the master bed watching a movie. We got our room service and ate so now it's just relaxation time.

I pick up my phone and tell momma what T said I should tell her and see that her 'last seen' on WhatsApp was an hour ago. Momma sleeps early and wakes up early. I'm guessing she'll see the message in the morning or at 00H00 when she does her midnight prayer. Tomorrow is definitely not going to be a smooth day. I just cannot wait to get it over and done with.

"Ngwanake (my child)!"

"Momma!" I exclaim and go over to hug her. She looks quite lonely with her black skirt and top. She even has her black big hat and block heels on.

Since T and I were late this morning, we didn't go to momma's house, we just went straight to Koko Deborah's house and found her there.

Well it wasn't easy to find her, I had to greet and ask around for her because of how crowded and packed it was. Momma was right though, Koko was known by many which is why it's so packed around her yard and even inside the house.

"I thought you were going to be late for the funeral." She says while we were sitting down and eating scones.

"I wouldn't miss it for the world mamma." I say.

"Hm. O kae Troy-boy (where's Troy-boy)?"

I chuckle at the manner in which she says it and tell her that he's outside talking to some guys.

"Okay. I'll talk to him after the funeral."

"Momma please tell me what you're going to say to him." I plead.

"No." She flatly says and sips on her tea.

Thud isn't fair you know. This isn't fair at all. While we talk about other things, a bunch of women and men start humming a tune while walking towards the gate. I should tell you that Koko Deborah's house is totally amazing. Her hard work and determination made her build this house all by herself.

"It's time." I say to mamma.

She looks at me and stands up to leave. She fixes her skirt and grabs her handbag before walking out. I follow her and tell Tshedi to make sure she's okay. Yeah I still need to talk to him. Right now though I'm looking for Troy who's nowhere to be seen.

I can't exactly be calling out for him when people are humming and crying like this.

I go next door and get inside, maybe he's in here. Two yards had to be used because of the large number of people that came by. More people means more food.

I greet everyone inside and go to the kitchen, before I go inside though I hear a bit of Troy's name being murmured.

"Yoh! America? Naledi o mo kreile kae (where did Naledi get him)?" One of the adult ladies cooking says.

"University of course." The other woman replies while peeling some carrots.

"Oh! Yoh haowa (no) mma wena! Naledi ke wa Bandile, Troy o tla ba wa rona (Naledi is for Bandile, Troy will be for us)."

"Moshimane o (this boy) is probably in his 20s. You're 35 this year!"

"YOLO (abbreviation for 'you only live once') mma wena!" She excitedly says.

I manage to peek in the kitchen and find that there's only the two of them. They're busy peeling some vegetables near a window, they keep looking through the window and I'm guessing that Troy is back there.

"Besides

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he looks 30 nyana (a little)."

I sigh and get in the kitchen so that they notice me.

"Actually he's 26 this year." I correct her with a smile. I take a peeled carrot and tell them that it's delicious.

I then step out to the back yard, leaving them trembling and embarrassed inside.

I find T and other guys talking over a fire.

I can never get enough of him in a black suit, he looks good! He told me I look good too but not compared to him. I'm just wearing a slightly tight short black dress with heels and a tied up bun of an afro.

I greet them and ask to speak to Troy. They all look married but they kept looking at me like I'm water in the desert.

"T! Momma went to the cemetery so we should probably go too."

"Should I get the car?"

"Yes please."

"Okay, thank you for saving me. I don't really like people."

"Neither do I."

Momma has been talking to Troy for a while and it's really heart pounding that they're still talking. I hate secrets, that's why I hate surprises.

I've been on the phone in the jeep just waiting for them to finish whatever they're talking about. After we went to cemetery earlier, we didn't even stick around and eat or do 'after tears' party. We just drove momma and Tshedi home and momma asked for privacy with Troy.

I'm in the car with Tshedi who's become very quiet.

"Sister I didn't do anything."

He finally says from the back seat.

"Okay." I flatly reply back.

"I'm serious. On my on. I didn't steal anything, that life is behind me now. I even go to church."

I burst out in laughter because of his last statement. I remember momma telling me one Sunday that she forced Tshedi to go with her to church. If he didn't go, she wasn't going to buy him anything on his birthday.

"It's your life Tshedi, it's your life." I say while chuckling, not keeping my gaze off the front door.

The door finally opens and Troy gets out, he gets in the car and says that momma wishes to speak to me. Seeing how serious

he looked, I didn't waste any time. I just step out and head towards the house, I get in and find momma on the couch. She pats a space next to her and I willingly sit next to her.

"Ngwanake (my child)."

"Ma?"

"Can I see the ring?" She excitedly asks.

I remember that she hadn't really seen it so I give her my left hand and she gasps in shock.

"Beautiful ngwanake (my child). Congratulations once again. He's right for you, I just spoke to him. He acts all tough when he's with you mara (but) he was busy vibrating in fear here."

I laugh at the thought of him trembling in fear. T? Fear? Never.

"Onto important matters Naledi, lobola. When should I expect his uncles?"

"I don't want lobola."

"What did you just say?!" She shockingly asks.

"I once told you that I didn't want lobola remember? In high school? Well, my belief still remains. Momma lobola feels like I'm being sold. I don't believe in it."

"Naledi, I'm going to forget that you said that."

"Don't forget it momma. I really don't want a price tag and uncles discussing how much I'm worth. It just doesn't make sense."

"Troy-boy told me you might say this. Naledi ngwanake (my child), when you do this kind of thing, you're letting a man disrespect you. Troy-boy doesn't believe in lobola because you don't believe in it. You're letting his culture dictate yours and that's not the way. Lobola doesn't mean you're being sold, it means that the groom is thanking me, your mother, for raising you and grooming you into the woman of his dreams. I'm not even going to chow that lobola, there's blankets that need to be bought and certain things a wedding needs. Some of that money, I'll save for Tshedimogo and you too. Do you see that I'll be left with nothing?"

"But momma-"

"Naledi if that man in that car doesn't pay lobola, then you don't have my blessings."

"Momma! You're choosing money over me?"

"I'm not choosing money over you. I'm making you realize the error of your ways. I already let you live with him all these years because of your friend's disappearance. Settling like that was already disrespectful, but this... this I will not stand for. Go with

what you believe, just make sure your heart doesn't break when you don't see me at your wedding."

"I can't believe you momma."

"Believe it. You've been in many debating competitions but this match you won't win. If I let you do this then I'm misleading you and if I'm misleading you then that means I don't love you. I love you very much more than I love myself. However, if you do wrong, I will not hesitate to correct you. Bring Troy back in here let me pray for you before you leave. I know both of you have work tomorrow."

I keep looking at her like she's some sort of alien. How can momma say this to me? My belief, my point of view matters too. I don't believe in lobola and that should matter too.

I go out and indicate for Troy to get back in.

He gets in and stands next to me, he doesn't look so tall like he always looks.

Tshedi gets inside the house too but he goes straight to the lounge to watch TV.

Momma stands in front of us and holds both our hands before praying. She prays for a good 7 minutes before saying Amen. I didn't even hear her prayer, I just kept looking at her with disbelief. She really doesn't want to give me her blessings until she receives money? Money?! Yoh I'm shocked. Maybe the

death of Koko Deborah has changed her. Speaking of which, I didn't see Bandile at the house nor at the cemetery. He probably doesn't want to be around everyone, that's how I felt too.

Anyway, momma concludes the prayer and we all chat and eat her Sunday-kos (food) before heading to the car. It's already 16H45 so we better get going.

We say goodbye to Tshedi and head outside with momma following behind.

She taps T on the shoulder and tells him to keep well.

He tried to give her money but she declined and said that she's okay. She then comes to me and hugs me even though I didn't want to. She kisses my cheek and holds my hand while praying. Again.

I let her finish and finally say goodbye before going inside the jeep. Troy reverses the car and beeps before heading out.

"Are you okay?" He asks.

"Yeah. Just deep in thought. Are you going to tell me what momma said?"

"I'm under oath so... no. Sorry." He chuckles and continues driving.

I just look out the window and gaze upon the setting sun that's lighting up the sky. Heavy in thought.

Troy parks the car and goes out back to get the travel bags.

We took a few stops on the way and took pictures just as a memoir. So right now it's a few minutes past 8 and since it's still winter, it looks pitch black. I tell him that he'll catch up with me since he was taking time with... everything.

I take in the familiar scenery lights and scent before heading upstairs.

I got my phone but no apartment keys.

Dang it!

There's no way I'm going downstairs to Troy just for keys so I wait for him to come. I hear a thud next door and even though it seems wrong, I knock on her door. Nancy has been distant lately and it's starting to get me worried that she may be falling into depression or something. Two birds with one stone, maybe she could also explain how her and Thabang are suddenly friends and tagging each other on Facebook. Last time I checked, their mutual history experience left them both traumatized.

I knock again when there's no answer and after a minute or so, the door unlocks. It's not Nancy that opens the door though, it's a half naked Thabang with a glass of whiskey in his hand.

"Thabang?!"

"Boss lady?"

"Babe, what's up? You just ditch me downstairs with the-" Troy stops speaking when he sees me staring at the half naked Thabang who's looking widely embarrassed.

"Thabang? What are you doing here?" He asks.

Thabang doesn't answer nor move, he just slightly shifts his body and keeps looking at Troy then back at me.

"Should I perhaps ask in your home language? Wetsang fana Thabang (what are you doing here Thabang)?" T asks again. He walks over to stand next to me and is instantly horrified to see him only in his underwear.

If that wasn't worse, Nancy comes frolicking to the front door in a red thong that highlights her... well, everything. She hugs Thabang from the back and asks who's at the door. As soon as she goes on her tiptoes to see above Thabang's shoulder, she starts covering herself with her hands. As if we haven't seen her already. I just clear my throat and reach into Troy's pocket to get the apartment's keys. Soon as it's unlocked, I grab Troy's hand and we get in. Before I could close our door, Thabang stops it with his bare foot.

"What the?" I ask myself.

"Sister boss, eish. Kopa ho bua le wena mei suster (may I please speak with you my sister)?" He pleads with his arms around his

torso. It's a bit chilly so I understand why he's acting like this. The cold weather must be getting to his head.

"No." I say.

I attempt to close the door again but he blocks it with his foot yet again before painfully retracting it. I must've really swung the door.

"Boss lady please! Okay okay, what I'm asking from you is simple- please don't tell Karabo about this."

"Simple? Simple?! What you're asking right now is far from simplicity. How am I going to look my friend in the face knowing fully well that her boyfriend is doing hanky panky with my neighbor. She already doesn't like the girl due to... personal reasons, how could you do this dude?"

"Eish, it's also due to personal reasons. Boss lady kyk (look), you don't have to lie to her. I'm just going to brainstorm on how I'm going to explain this to her."

"You're gonna tell her?" I astoundingly ask.

"Yes boss lady. I may be single and a bit sore from the slap I'll receive from her mara (but) atleast the truth will be revealed wabo (you see)?"

"You're a real disappointment, you know that?"

"Eish, I know. I take after my father. Boss lady please promise me-"

"No Thabang. I'm not promising anything. I know that if she saw T with some woman she wouldn't hesitate to tell me so I won't too."

"Wena (you) you're understandable boss lady. Karabo is a special case. She'll tear Nancy apart until go nkgga di phinya (until it smells like farts)."

I think about how crazy Karabo can get and how withdrawn Nancy is. If Karabo does anything to Nancy, she's going to jail. Nancy is a Diale, her father is a judge so of course the Court will take her side over Karabo's. Even if her father wasn't a judge, Karabo could still be held accountable for violence.

"Thabang go right now and tell her. Right now."

"Ah! Boss lady. I just unloaded the tank, I need sleep to think about what I'm going to say to her."

"Thabang, I need my wife back please." Troy says behind me. He then shuts the door in Thabang's face and goes back to the kitchen.

I follow him there and just take a seat on one of the stools.

"How's your friend going to take it?" He asks while heating up the takeaways we bought on the way.

"Not good. This relationship may have just been for a few days but she already told me that she's in love. Love! She's a savage goat that one so when she mentioned the 'L word', it became serious."

"What did the idiot say?"

"He says that he wants to go sleep it off so he can think of what to say to her. I think he might do it tomorrow or something."

"Oi véy! Get ready for WWE smackdown. My money's on your friend." He says and chuckles to himself.

"T this isn't funny weitsi (you know). I don't know how she's going to take this."

"So you're not going to-"

My phone ringing interrupts him from speaking. I pull it out of my jacket and instantly get sweaty palms. It's Karabo. I reluctantly answer it.

"Hey." I say in a low voice.

"Hey. Did I wake you?"

"What? No. We just got back. What's up?"

"You'll never believe what just happened."

Thabang you motherfather!

"He' just texted me on WhatsApp right now. He says he misses me and we should go out for lunch tomorrow."

"Really? Why?"

"Because he misses me. Is this the best time to talk to you or..."

"You know I'm just so tired and all. We were actually just about to hit the hay."

"Oh right, you guys travelled. Before I hang up, how's your mom holding up?"

"She's doing okay. One step at a time you know?"

"Yeah. That good. Okay I'll see you tomorrow neh?"

"You'll see me?"

"Of course, after lunch with Thabang I'm coming straight to your office. For gossip."

"Oh yeah. Eish but you'll probably not find me there. I got a new case and it's making me go up and down you know?"

"I'm sure you can spare 5 minutes just for me." She dramatically states.

"Okay, 5 minutes."

"Great. You're the best. Seriously, I'm so lucky to have you in my life. You're not a friend to me anymore, you're my sister. I love you neh?"

"Uhm... I love you too." I say as I swallow the lump in my throat.

"Sharp!"

She hangs up the phone and I stare at the already-puzzled Troy who's mouth is full of French fries.

"What now?" I ask.

"Ask God."

"Seriously T?"

"I'm serious. You're always basking in His glory and bragging about he knows all. Now is the perfect time to ask him. Give him a little test."

"Give God a test?"

"Yeah... and no cheating! He must accept his 0 if that's what he'll get."

"You're tired, go shower then sleep."

"Only if you'll join me." He slyly says.

"I'll be there in a minute." I chuckle.

He leaves his half eaten cheese burger and goes to the bathroom to heat up the shower. Should I tell her? Maybe T is right. Praying might just help me in this one, asking God for a

direction into the right path. If I don't get an answer, I may just lose another friend.

"Hey. What's up?"

"I couldn't sleep."

"You couldn't- it's 2 am. What are you working on?"

"Just checking my e-mails and agenda for today." I say.

"It's too bright."

"Huh?"

"The monitor brightness, it's too much."

I go to 'Settings' and adjust the brightness so that it accommodates both of us.

He then sits up right and starts rubbing his eyes.

"Where are you going?" I ask.

"Nowhere. I'm just sitting up so that we can talk." He lazily says.

"Talk about what?"

"About why you're checking your e-mails at 2 in the morning."

Troy is a real sweetheart you know, I'm probably nothing without him. I can't even begin to imagine my life without him.

I place the laptop on the side table next to the dimly lit side lamp and just hug him.

"Whoa whoa! What's wrong babe? Are you okay?" He asks totally shook from my gesture.

I pull back and look at him and even though there's not much light in the room, I can still see his twinkling hazel eyes.

"Yeah I'm okay. I just really love love love love you!" I say in excitement.

He's obviously taken aback by my behavior so he holds my arms and asks what's wrong.

"I'm worried T."

"About what?"

"Karabo. She's going to be having lunch with Thabang and obviously he's going to break it down to her that he's been... busy. What will hurt her the most is that I knew all along yet I chose to be quiet. She's been a great friend and when it's my turn to be good friend, I roll over like a worthless rock. You know how crazy she got when I told her about the Nancy saga with you? She nearly made me turn my car around so we could go give her a beating. She's the one who calls me every time or

the one who organizes dinner dates and all. She travels high and low just to be with me when I get engaged and when I go through life. I can't even-"

"Hey hey. Come here." He says and lays my head on his chest. He keeps swaying back and forth like I'm a baby but I find it oddly soothing.

"Shhh! Don't cry okay?"

"I'm not crying, I'm just really sad."

"Uhm... okay. At a time like this you still have time for jokes huh?" He chuckles.

"Trevor Noah is from my birth country. I was bound to be funny at some point."

"Hehe okay. Look, baby you and 'Karabu' are friends right?"

I giggle a bit at how he pronounces her name.

"What?" He asks.

"Nothing. Continue." I reply and become serious again.

"Okay. Y'all are friends and friends don't count favours. Just as long as you got each other's backs then you Gucci."

"But-"

"Let me finish. This isn't supposed to be involving you babe. You ain't even supposed to worry about what's going to happen to

them and all. Thabang is the one that flopped and you're the one that's up early in the morning stressing yourself. He gets to fuck and my lady has insomnia? Nah that's not on."

"T, language."

"Sorry. My point is, it's not your place to tell her. Yes you knew but at least you didn't tell her because you know that Thabang is already going to tell her. It would be understandable if you kept quiet and Thabang showed no sign of coming clean, then it would be a problem. So this one ain't your battle babe

it's theirs. All you can do afterwards is just be there for your friend."

"I just really hate secrets."

"How many times you watched that movie about couples going to a retreat in the mountains? That movie by Tyler Perry?"

"Why did I get married?"

"Yeah! That one. One of them guys there was cheating on that thick girl and all them friends knew yet they didn't tell her. Why?"

"I don't know, they said that because she's been through so much so what they could do is just make sure that they're there for her. That some people don't like it when you tell them nasty things about their partners."

"Exactly. Imagine you tell 'Karabu' about her cheating boyfriend and she blames you for being jealous or something along those lines. You're gonna feel bad. Thabang is the one that messed up so he has to face the music alone. Okay? Please don't stress about this. See I ain't even stressed because I know that this is his life. If your friend decides to kill him or make him paralysed then I'm still going to sleep with a clear conscious."

"Easy for you to say. Your friend is the one in the wrong."

"Yeah. He's a real idiot."

"That's what I said!"

"Alright. So he's an idiot and we will not stress about this ever again. Right?"

"Y-yeah."

"And if she asks did you know along you're going to be honest and tell her that it was not your place. Right?"

"Yeah."

"A'right. Give me some love."

I hug him for a while and although it seemed impossible, I fell asleep. His words still lingering around my head.

It's 5 am so I get up and take a shower. That 3-hour nap was exactly what I needed. I feel the warm water splashing my back and heating up my cold fingers and toes. I just keep feeling every single drop heating up my back as I think about everything. My mom, Tshedimogo, Sheryl, Karabo, Marriage, my work, my social life. Just everything.

I don't know about others but the shower is the best thinking place you can ever find. You just start thinking about your life and your regrets as well as your blessings.

I take a good long one hour shower before stepping out. My finger tips were getting wrinkly so I think that was a sign that I've been in there long enough.

I dress up in my usual black suit and neat tied up bun. Usually when I'm about to leave, is the time that Troy gets up and gets ready for work. So I make him a quick breakfast special and leave it in the microwave. He'll get it when he wakes up. Yeah, he's still sleeping and I don't want to wake him because I'm the cause of him oversleeping. Before I leave however, I kiss him on the forehead and set his alarm 15 minutes from now. So that he wakes up and gets to work on time. He looks so cute when he's asleep, and even though he says that he doesn't snore- he does. It's not a loud type of snore but one of those really quiet snores that happen when you're really tired. I kiss him again and grab my car keys.

I step out the apartment and inhale the morning air around, Monday has never been this peaceful.

I park my car at the usual spot and wait for Mr Bodyguard to come out. When 4 minutes pass I decided to head inside anyway, maybe he's the one that's late this time.

I get in and greet people that I come across until I reach the reception where I find Rivonia answering calls and writing down something while she's scrolling down her computer looking for something. Busy Monday.

I just wave at her and after she greeted me with a smile I head to my office. Odd how Mr.Bodyguare is nowhere to be seen. Maybe he's really really late, I'd like to believe that he's actually late and didn't land into any trouble whatsoever.

After I settle in, Mr Cornish's PA comes in and stands by the door.

"I'm sure you're wondering where your bodyguard is. Well, since you're not working on the dangerous case Mr Cornish felt that it'd be appropriate if your bodyguard was handed over to Miss Goapele. You'll have no bodyguard as your life and well-being isn't threatened anymore. Understood?"

"You came all the way here and said all those words just to tell me that I don't have a bodyguard anymore? Wow, you really have time." I scoff.

"It was Mr Cornish's instruction for me to personally tell you about the matter." She nods and struts to the elevator with a pen in her hand. She's a white, 28 year old woman who isn't at all very friendly. She goes by the book with everything and everyone. Guess that's why she got the job. Wait a minute, I won't have Mr Bodyguard anymore? My heart is a little sore from realizing that, I was starting to really take a liking at him. Of course, Rea gets to have him. It's fine really, part of the reason why I don't even argue with her is because she's my fellow black sister. Yeah we're the only 2 black attorneys at this firm, others are either Indian and most of them are white. I'm not complaining, but hey- that's just the way it is.

Anyway with a heavy heart, I do a few arm stretches and get back to work.

"Naledi, someone named Karabo is here to see you." Rivonia says through the telephone.

"Uhm... what time is it?"

"13H00 ma'am."

"It's okay, let her in."

I hang up and put on my blazer. When the clock struck 12H00 and there was no sign of her, I thought that she called a rain check so we'd have to meet up some other time. Oh God, please don't let her be extremely mad or feel betrayed by me. I beg you!

She knocks on the glass door and I indicate for her to get in, this is the first time she comes to my work so it's a bit foreign for her. By the look on the her face.

"Hi." I say first while swaying on my office chair.

"Tjomie (friend) am I bad person?" She asks while still standing up and holding her handbag with her two hands. I remember Miss Kethe asking me the very same question after she tried to kill herself. You must be very careful when answering such a question- 80% of the time you'll get it wrong.

"No. Why do you ask?" I ask.

"May I sit?" She asks.

"Of course."

"Thanks. Anyway I... I met up with him today and- and he told me something."

"What was that?"

"That he cheated on me. Last night."

"Oh my God."

"... with your neighbour. Nancy Diale."

I cover my mouth with my hand in shock. I'm not overselling it am I?

"Did you know?" She asks.

I remember the talk with Troy yesterday and how none of this should be making me feel bad.

"Yes. I knew. However, it wasn't my place to tell you. I also knew that he was going to be telling you today which is why I didn't bother sharing the news."

"Yeah. It's okay."

"Really? You aren't mad at me?" I shockingly ask.

"No. I think I took out all my frustrations out on him today."

"What did you do?" I ask.

"Humiliated him in public."

I ask no further when she starts tearing up yet she's still smiling. The face she's making is a psychotic one.

"I'm so sorry friend. I really am. I know you loved him so for him to do this to you is unethical. Childish even."

"It's okay friend. I should've come here earlier but I was over at Nancy's house."

"What?! What did you do? What were you doing there?"

"Why do you care? That bitch took us both for granted with our men."

"Karabo. What were you doing there?"

"I taught her a lesson."

"What kind of lesson?"

"The lesson she'll never forget. She'll think twice before going after my man again."

"Again? You're still going ahead and dating Thabang?"

"I'm not letting some bum-ass bitch take my man. No sir."

"Wait a minute, what did you do to Nancy?"

"..."

"Karabo!"

"Okay okay. I sort of beat up her a little then poured all her furniture with acid."

"You did what?!"

"That's nothing. In fact she should thank me for not paralysing her or throwing her out the balcony."

"Where is she?"

Some security guy took her to the hospital and wanted to detain me but I sneaked away.

I lean back and massage my temple in distress. I knew this was going to happen but for her to beat Nancy until she needs professional medical care? Not likely.

"You know you're going to jail right?" I calmly ask.

"Who? Me? Never. She'd have to be a real dumb slut to lay charges on me. If she does that I'mma come back for her. I told her this before knocking out her two front teeth." She says.

I look at her hand and see bruises all over. She even has a cut in her finger.

"Please don't say anything lawful or something. I really don't need the lecture right now."

"No. Nothing. Thank you for telling me this. I'm not even going to go into detail or try to do anything. Like T said, this isn't my battle so I won't pick up a weapon."

"Your T is a smart man. Keep him close so that snakes like Nancy think twice before messing with you."

"Karabo you didn't know did you?"

"Know what?"

"Nancy is Magistrate Diale's daughter. If he finds out about this, charges or no charges you're going to pay one way or another."

"They can come for me with everything they've got. I'm waiting."

I look at her and just shake my head in disappointment. Amidst that disappointment is sadness too. I don't know why she didn't humiliate Nancy and then put Thabang in the hospital. I'm not condoning her behavior but I'm giving it a lighter weight. This thing of going after the side chicks instead of the boyfriend is really concerning. Why do we do this to ourselves. Your partner is the one in the relationship yet you leave him and go straight for the side chick. Why? Honestly!

We're startled with a knock on the door.

"Come in!" I exclaim.

Suddenly a half dozen policemen come in with rage written all over the faces. I stand up from my seat and ask them what is going on. They ignore me and go straight to handcuff Karabo who is swearing with each passing second.

"Whoa whoa whoa! What's going on?" I ask.

"Miss Karabo? You're under arrest for the assault of Nancy Diale. You have the right to remain silent, anything you say will be used against in the court of law. You have the right to an

attorney and if you cannot afford, the court will provide you with one."

They take her away and of course, the entire office building has stopped doing the work to come and enjoy the show. I don't know why crazy follows me all the time.

Karabo has a permanent criminal record now. All because of a man?

I'd rather swallow glass.

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ONE YEAR LATER

"Pepper! Pepper! Salt & Pepper!!!"

"Huh? Sorry what were you saying?"

"The flowers? You were talking about the flowers?"

"Yeah I think our options are roses or lilies and- yoh darling who is that?"

I look behind me and see a group of men eating a big steak around a table.

"Uhm... those are men Pepper. Now please focus."

"Darling we're going to have to go somewhere else. I can't focus with all these tantalizing 'esperado' men. Yoh! Lord have Mercy!"

I look at Karabo who's also staring at me in confusion.

"Okay let's go somewhere else then." Karabo says and stands up.

"Where do you think you're going? Leaving? When there's men there feeding our eyeballs with their hotness? You must be high on soap!"

Yeah, Pepper is my wedding planner. I saw him on this other website and it turns out he planned the wedding of this other

celebrity and it was so beautiful and EXPENSIVE that people basically fight for him. Not everyone wants him though, because he's gay. Our country still stigmatizes people that are different. It's sad really.

Anyway, I gave his company a call and said that I'd like a wedding planner. I'm thinking that since his employers are in the midst of his artistic genius, I'd get a 2nd best wedding planner. Imagine my amazement when he was the one knocking on my door one afternoon. I nearly screamed! I don't think of him as a celebrity but he's definitely a genius. He knows art inside out.

I later learned that when I gave his company my name and surname, they immediately ran it through the system and saw that I was once on the cover of Scarlet Magazine. With that being said, planning my wedding would give his name a boost but at this point it's his name that's going to boost mine. I may have been on the cover of a magazine but the fame doesn't last forever. Especially after Sheryl made another famous dress and used some African American super model to advertise it.

It's alright though. I had my fair share and honestly, it was starting to get a bit overwhelming. Troy and I couldn't go anywhere without our faces popping up on trending scoops. It got a bit too much. We felt like our privacy was violated, mostly because we were on the tabloids for the wrong or odd reasons.

By the way, I'm getting married on November 6th. Today is October 31st, Sunday. It's been a year and a few months to be exact. Anyway, I thought about momma's demand for lobola and I love her so much, I couldn't stay mad at her for long. So a week after Koko Deborah's passing, I told her that Troy and I have been talking and he's willing to pay my bride price- we both want to do it. You should've heard how loud she was screaming. She was mostly ululating the entire phone call. To be honest, I love her but I was still sticking to my guns. Troy was the one that 'talked me out of it' and told me that he doesn't want to be in momma's bad books. Since it's tradition and momma is still a traditional woman, we did it for her. I can't say it was a sentimental moment for me, in fact I wanted it to be over and done with. So momma gave him a date and we started preparing. Since I don't have much family as well as Troy, it was only momma, Troy's uncle Murray, Tory and my aunt.

Sheryl couldn't make it because she said that she was in Europe at the time and got confused with the date. She did however, say that her presence would be useless anyway and she already blesses Troy and I. It was a bit unorthodox for momma to understand but she let it slide. After the lobola negotiations, we held a mini party and then we all went our separate ways. I didn't even want my aunt there but mom invited her anyway. She's one of the people that abandoned us and blamed us for

papa's death but my mom, being the soft serve that she is, forgave her when she came back apologising after my graduation. Her presence brought back painful memories, part of the reason why I wanted the agenda of the day to be done with. After the negotiations, momma finally gave us her blessings and that was the most precious thing I'd ever had to experience. That was the first time I smiled the entire day.

So since the lobola negotiations were private, our wedding is definitely public. Pepper warned us about how people just crash into well-known weddings so he suggested that we use invitation cards as a way to minimize collateral confusion.

There is so much that happened in the last year that summarizing it would take a couple of days. I just really want to get this meeting over and done with but the meeting coordinator seems distracted by something (men).

"Pepper. I'm really late so I think we should reschedule or maybe you should just e-mail your flowery thoughts to me. Okay?" I say as I stand up and pick up my pink handbag. The reason why I pointed out the colour of the bag is because change was one of the things that happened over the last year. I may have gone a tiny bit deep into black clothing so as a New Years Resolution, I promised myself that I'd buy less black and more colourful. It was difficult at first seeing that black clothes and accessories are so mesmerizing, but I was able to control

myself and bought this cream white tight over-the-knee skirt, a rose gold top and a cream white blazer. This outfit was picked out by Karabo because she once saw Kim Kardashian wearing it. Since I'm a tall lady, I'm not really into heels but this outfit did require elevation so I chose to put on wedges. They're pretty cute and match my pink coated toe nails. I decided to braid my hair too, my current braided hairstyle is a 'long twist' combo. Like they're really long, so much that the first few nights of having them on I felt like Rapunzel. I really did. After watching some YouTube videos and learning different styles you can create with them by just tying them or braiding them, I was able to form 10 new different looks. Troy loved my transformation and asked me to promise that I'll forever keep this hairstyle. I said no, for obvious reasons but I knew what he wanted to say.

"Actually Naledi, we need to talk to you about something." Karabo says while looking at Pepper and back at me.

I reluctantly put my handbag down and take a seat to hear what they have to say.

"Uhm... it's just that you're getting married darling." Pepper says.

"And?" I ask. Hoping to solve this riddle.

"And you turned 26 not so long ago." Karabo nervously says.

I just lean back and fold my arms. I will keep quiet until they just blab out whatever they want to say. I already deal with real life puzzles as an attorney so this right here, is not entertaining.

"We want to do a bachelorette party for you!" Karabo finally speaks up.

I think about it and I realize that a bachelorette party wouldn't be so bad. We'd probably just hang out and ride the top down before the wedding.

"Oh. Yeah that's not so bad."

"In Kenya." Pepper enthusiastically says.

"Say what?!"

"Well I know a guy there and he said that he'll be able to save a hot seat for us at this other major club. Since you're getting married on Saturday, we can go on Wednesday and be back by Thursday. Then Friday you'll have it all to yourself. What do you say?" Karabo asks.

"I say hell to the no! Kenya? Club? Thursday? That all seems to extreme. Can't we just have the party right here." I say.

"Aaaaaaaaargh! I knew she'd say this." Pepper says and scratches his hair.

"Naledi please. Ever since you were... born. You've never loosened up a little bit. You've always been focused and

determined and that paid off because you're now an attorney, have your own money and a loving husband-to-be. You need to be a little wild so that you don't lose your mind when you're fully married. Taste some alcohol, dance all night to club music. Travel without a destination. Something!"

"Karabo, I don't need all that. I know that I've never really been a fun 20 year old to hang out with but that's just me. It's my personality. I'd rather-"

"I know what you'd rather do. We've been best friends for a while now. All I'm saying is that if you don't taste the grass on the other side before you get married, you'll crave for it while you're married. I don't think you'd want to experience the 2nd option."

I think for a bit but my mind keeps telling me that this is a crazy idea. Kenya? Come to think of it, of all the places Troy and I have travelled to we've never really went to Kenya. It's a shame because we've went places as far as Madagascar and France yet not Kenya.

"I don't know Karabo, it just seems-"

"Look, we won't force you to consume alcohol and no boy toys are on the agenda." She says. Pepper looks at her in shock and she just smiles.

"Uhm... can I at least think about it?"

"Sure. Yeah. Take all the time you need." She says.

"Just make sure you decide before Wednesday okay darling?"
Pepper says.

"Yeah. I'll do just that. Look Pepper

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the white roses are fine. Go with the white roses." I say. He writes something down and I finally get a chance to leave. Before exiting the restaurant I hear Pepper saying that 'the black guy is his and Karabo can take the white one.' Ever since I introduced these two, they've been hitting it off like Spongebob and Patrick. They're both wild and they're both party goers, so when they discovered that they have similar interests they've been inseparable. I'm glad Karabo has bounced back though, after her saga with Nancy she was completely withdrawn and heart broken. She lost her licence and her practice so she's been doing YouTube videos full time. You can say that she's also a business woman because she's about to release her own branded bubbly. I'm proud of her, really I am. I thought I'd lost a friend when they came to arrest her but Nancy was able to convince her father that she was the one in the wrong so Karabo should be set free. It took a lot out of me to even think about what they were all going through but with a little bit of manipulative talking, Karabo was let out but the assault record will always be there. That was a huge turnover for her. Along

the way, she dumped Thabang and decided to never date again. Thabang was a real flip flopper after the breakup but he too bounced back and apologized for the Willy Nilly. He's still friends with Troy but I can see that T doesn't trust him the same.

I wouldn't too.

The only reason why he's still friends with Thabang is because he's a good father. He might've been a bad boyfriend to Karabo but he's a good father. Yes, Karabo got pregnant for Thabang and after their breakup they decided to be civilised and co-parent. She gave birth to a baby boy in April, so baby Obitshepo is about 7 months old now.

Anyhow, I get inside my car and drive out the parking lot mall. I look at the time and realize that I'm going to be late. I cannot miss this again, if I do I'll never hear the end of it. T once got really mad when I missed the deadline but that was mostly because I was obsessed with work and all. Yes, I've calmed down a bit with the workload. Being a workaholic wasn't doing me any good, especially when it came to my relationship and social life. I toned down the obsession with my cases but it really wasn't that difficult, seeing that most of the cases I've gotten were easy and took less time. I once asked Mr Cornish to give me a real challenge and he said he would do so. He didn't. The case was about some guy who nearly murdered his friend

because the friend was messing with his girl. I was to defend the boyfriend. Turns out the girl was the one who organized the shooting because of her lies that the boyfriend was beating her up. She did it for the insurance money. That's the only mild case I've gotten so far, other than that, they've all been straightforward and to the point. I'm still enjoying law, oh God yes I am but it just makes you drag your feet when you don't have anything that pumps your blood faster. I look at the time and it's a few minutes to 17H00. The 'thing' is supposed to be on course exactly at 17H00. I drive to the flat's parking lot and hurry upstairs to the apartment. Before I open the door, I check the time and it's exactly 17H01. Well atleast I made it.

I get inside and go straight to the kitchen where I find Thabang holding baby Obitshepo, Tory and Mutsa drinking and talking about something.

"Hey guys. I made it!" I say with heavy panting.

"Babe! You okay?" T asks.

"Yeah I'm fine. I was just with Pepper a while ago but I'm here now."

"You're just in time then. Lady and gentlemen, let's get ready for the 'Nay & T Cook-Off!'" T exclaims. He can be so extra sometimes.

"Okay let me go change first." I say.

"Babe but you look fine. Beautiful even."

"Exactly. I'm not handling oil and tomatoes with my white outfit. No sir!" I exclaim and head to the bedroom for a quick change.

Yes, Mutsa and I have been... talking. More like just talking about our lives and relationships and since we're both into law, we hit it off. I don't blame her for papa's death as I did before because it was just hurting me more. I was at the receiving end. So I prayed about it and asked momma to pray for me so that I let go of the past and I guess it worked. The memory will always be there, I've just found a better way of looking at it. Anyway, today's is the Cook-Off where we discover who is a greater cook between Troy and I. The first initial thought was invite Karabo but that would've been awkward with Thabang here so I invited Mutsa instead. Three judges is all we need.

It's been a while but I dress in my black tracksuit bottoms with a crop top jacket? I don't know what it's called but you get the idea. It's hot now so I don't need a million blankets around my torso every time.

I leave my bun up as it is and step out to the kitchen.

The 3 judges sit by the bar stools and I stand next to Troy to wait for what they have for us. We told them that they should

surprise us with a challenge. Thabang stands up, obviously, and clears his throat before speaking.

"We, the judges, have decided that your cooking skills shall be tested by swapped cuisines."

"Huh?" Troy and I both ask.

"Boss lady will be preparing an American dish and boss man will be preparing an African dish. South African to be exact." He says while holding a glass of champagne on his one hand and baby Obi on the other.

Troy and I look at each other and back to them.

"This will be the only way we test your skills, by making you cook something you cannot even spell. So Troy, your dish is right here on this paper. That's the recipe but we left out one ingredient so that you can guess what it is. Naledi, take this paper because that's your recipe. We left out an ingredient on your recipe too so that you can guess what it is. If you guess an ingredient wrong but your dish is delicious then you're already a winner. So this can go both ways. We give you each one hour. Start cooking! Boys, let's go watch a movie at the lounge."

Mutsa says before leaving for the lounge with the boys.

Troy and I keep laughing at how silly this all is, not until Tory yells from the lounge that they're timing is and we have 57 minutes left.

We get cooking and begin gathering up the ingredients. We went shopping for groceries so that we don't have any problems. I don't even know what the heck I'm cooking but all I know is that it contains a lot of shrimp and barbeque. Troy is supposed to make, I think, sour pap (ting) and chicken feet with chakalaka. It's weird but that's what he's supposed to cook.

I fry the shrimp but the ingredients are just too confusing, maybe I should just add Six Gun to everything. With the barbeque, I add the barbeque sauce (duhhh) and garlic! It's not in the ingredients so I add it anyway. Maybe it's the missing one.

An hour later, Troy adds brown onion to his chicken feet before serving. I already served mine 5 minutes ago.

"Are we done?" Mutsa asks as she and the boys strut in the kitchen.

"Yeah. We're done." I say with pride. I have confidence in my dish, even though I just made this other thing I've never seen in my life!

We put our dishes on three plates for them and give them so that they can taste and 'judge'.

Thabang is so dramatic, he's busy eating the sour porridge with a fork and knife.

Anyway they eat and Troy and I sip on a cold drink after slaving over a stove for an hour.

"Well, that was... okay." Tory finally speaks.

"Indeed. We need to go to the lounge to discuss the results." Mutsa says.

"Yeah. Aii mara (but) boss lady seems to be killing it. Start praying boss man." Thabang says.

They go to the lounge and I start washing dishes while T cleans up.

"What did I just cook?" T asks.

I chuckle and shrug my shoulders. It was a real mess in this kitchen.

They come back from the lounge and sit on the bar stools yet again.

"We talked it over and... this was some difficult judging I've ever done in my 1 year career in judging. We have decided that the winner is... neither of you." Mutsa says.

"Say what?!" Troy and I both exclaim.

"It's just that they were both good." Tory says.

"And none of you got the hidden ingredient correct. So for us to decide, we're going to have to have a 2nd cook-off contest. This

time, you and boss man are going to have to prepare deserts. Isn't that right boy boy?" Thabang asks Obi. The baby just cooes and grabs him by the chin.

"Y'all are high neh?" Troy asks.

"Yes, we're high on soap." Thabang dramatically imitates Pepper.

"Why does she say that anyway?" Mutsa asks.

"She?!" Tory asks in confusion.

I just chuckle and finish washing the dishes. Since it was a bit late (19H37), everyone went home and no winner was announced.

"You were so beautifully sexy in that outfit earlier." Troy slyly says.

"I was?" I blush.

"Yeah. Let me show you how much I appreciate you." He says and kisses my neck.

"Don't even think about it tiger. We're not going to have any intimacy until there's a ring on this finger. Well, until there's a 2nd ring on this finger."

"I gotta wait till Saturday?!"

"Actually till Sunday."

"But baby-"

"You can make it. I just want our wedding night to be special. Please do this... for me." I pout.

He sighs very deeply before nodding and going into the bathroom. I feel bad but I know that it will be special on our wedding night.

"Hey T! I was with Pepper and Karabo today!"

"Yeah?"

"They want to me to go to Kenya!"

"You're kidding right." He says as he enters the bedroom.

"Nope. I told them I'd think about it but the chances are 1%."

"That's exactly what Thabang and Tory said." Troy says.

"What? So they planned this? Bachelor party in Kenya?" I ask.

"I don't know. I didn't answer them too. So what do you think?"

"If we're together then I don't really mind."

"So we're going to Kenya?" Troy asks.

"We're going to Kenya."

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~Naledi~

'Knock Knock Knock'

"Go away!" Troy scolds from the lounge.

"T!"

"What? We always have people around us, they just need to chill for a minute."

I scoff and sit up from laying on the couch next to him. If he keeps this up, we'll end up with no friends at all.

I open the door and find Pepper busy on his phone.

"Oh Pepper. Hi! What's up?"

"What's up? What's up?! I'll tell you what's up, that baker that's about to have a piece of my mind! I mean I tell him, no sparkles on the bottom tier but guess what he does! Guess what he does!!!"

At this point I'm afraid to even answer his rhetorical question. I've never seen him this upset before, and I know he's just being dramatically upset but it's still frightening. Troy must've heard the commotion because he's now behind me watching Pepper go at it.

"Guess what he does! Take a wild guess!!" Pepper exclaims.

"Oh I know, he put the sprinkles on the bottom." Troy says.

"Bingo! We got a winner! Argh anyway, I need to talk to the both of you. I'm glad I actually caught you at home. Y'all are always busy. Darling, would you be a darling and get me a glass of grape juice please." He says as he invites himself in carrying his purple handbag to the lounge. Troy always seems uncomfortable near him and for all good reasons, Pepper once saw Troy half naked and he could not stop talking. I was there too but he just kept exaggerating at how 'yummy' he looks. Eh, you should have seen the shock on Troy's face that day, he immediately went to go put a shirt on. Reason why he took it off is because it's so hot now that having clothing on feels suffocating.

I go to the kitchen and pour 'his majesty' the grape juice he asked for.

"So, what do you need to talk to me about?" I ask as I give him his grape juice.

"Oh no darling, I need to talk to you and Troy. Where is he anyway, I was just talking to him a while ago." He says and takes a big swig of the juice.

"Whoo! Darling, this... is amazing." He says and smacks his lips together.

"Uhm... okay. Let me go get him."

it brisk walk to the bedroom where I find him busy on his phone.

"T, we're going to need you out there. Please, let's just hear what he has to say. He's our wedding planner!"

"Okay okay. Jeez! I was just-"

"Doesn't matter, let's go."

"Wait wait..."

"What? Wait for what?"

"I need to tell you something." He seriously says.

"Tell me what?"

"I... argh it doesn't matter anyway."

"No it matters."

"How do you know if it matters or not if you don't even know what it is?" He asks with a chuckle.

"Just tell me." I plead.

"Okay. It's something you probably know but it's better if I knew that you knew. Nay, I'm not wearing a tie to the wedding."

I smack his arm in annoyance and he laughs when I hurt myself instead of him.

"Why would you go all serious-like just to tell me you're not going to be wearing a tie? Here I am thinking you're going to be saying something important. Ai!"

"Hehe relax okay, relax. I was just teasing."

I grab his hand and head to the lounge where we find Pepper organising some graphics on the glass table.

"What's all this?" I ask.

"These are merriments and activities one can do in Kenya!" He dramatically says.

"Pepper you came all this way just to tell us about Kenya?"

"Yes. By the way, have you decided? It's Monday and Wednesday is the day we're supposed to leave."

I look up at Troy and he just smiles and finally speaks.

"We've decided that it... wouldn't hurt to just go check it out." T says.

"So does that mean..."

"Yes Pepper, we're on board." I say with a chuckle.

He stands up and hugs the both of us quite tightly.

"I love you guys. OMG, I love you guys so much! Y'all are gonna be make me cry! Oh my word, there's bookings and travelling and-"

"Pepper! Calm down. We already have tickets. T bought them today actually."

"Really? Oh my word, you darlings are going to have a blast! But darling you shouldn't have bought all 8 tickets. They were willing to contribute you know?"

"Wait, you're not coming?" T asks.

"Darling I'm flattered but someone has to stay behind and take care of things. You're forgetting that the day y'all return is one day before the wedding. Your decor needs more than 24 hours to set up darling."

"But... but this was your idea."

"Oh no, this was Karabo's idea. I just went with it because the men in Kenya are literally to die for. I'd be high on soap just for one to call me 'Baby Doll', oh!"

"Oh come on Pepper! You have so many second in commands. Can't they do the work while you're away and then when we arrive you add the finishing touches?" I ask.

"Uhm... well that could work but darling-"

"So it's settled. You're coming too. Better organize your travel bag." I say.

"Darling, I'm going to need a travel suit case I tell you that! Let me go inform the gang. Actually let me text them."

"You're going to text all 6?"

"We created a Whatsapp group."

"When?"

"Weeks ago. That's how we were able to practice our presentation to y'all. So it's me, you guys, Thabang, Oscar, your cousin, Tory, Karabo and Mutsa. Right? You got all 9 tickets darling?" He asks Troy.

"Yeah. All 9."

"Great! Give me theirs so that they have them. If they get lost, it'll be their whoopsie and not yours."

"Let me go get them." He says and jogs to the bedroom.

"Pepper, what exactly are we going to do there?" I ask.

"That's for us to worry about and for you to find out. Don't worry darling, we have an itinerary packed."

"You have an itinerary?" I ask.

"Darling maybe you should relax a bit. I got you. You don't want to turn into bridezilla. Okay?"

"Okay. Is Karabo comfortable with Thabang coming along? Who's going to stay with the baby?"

"Troy please come take your wife. She's tense!" He exclaims and pats his blonde-dyed hair cut.

Troy comes walking in with the tickets and hands them to Pepper.

"What's up? What did I miss?" He asks.

"I was just leaving. Anyway, we have the flowers and we're going to set them up the night before the wedding. The bakery said that they're almost done with your cake even though we didn't want the sprinkles! The decor lady has a whole team ready. Your dress is already done and I will pick it up on Friday. Troy's suit and his groomsmen's suits are ready too. Invitations are all sent out. Months ago actually but remember we had a few that didn't receive one. Alcohol and food will be picked by y'all on Friday. I think that's all. The photographer that Troy's mom sent will be boarding a plane and land on Thursday. The owner of the venue we booked, said that we need to arrive on time because they're also fully booked. Don't worry, I gave her a piece of my mind. The Dj is giving me trouble but I'll handle her. Naledi darling, your momma wants to talk to you before y'all have a meeting with the pastor on Friday. The boat is set and the doves are ready. And-"

"Whoa whoa! Are you sure we need all that?" T asks.

"T please, we know what we're doing. Pepper momma wants to talk to me? Why didn't she just call me?"

"I don't know darling. You've been so busy. We all have. Anyway, the hotel we booked for make up and dressing up is on board too. I think that's everything. All that's left is the step."

"Step?" Troy asks.

"Yes. A dance the couple and their bridal party will be entering the venue with."

"Uhm..."

"We'll practice on the way. Chao darlings! I need to go make sure that that Dj knows who I am." He says before leaving.

Troy looks at me and then laughs. He laughs so hard that tears fall out.

"What are you laughing at?" I ask.

"That's how I'm going to laugh if those boys think that I'm going to be acting single in Kenya. Strippers babe?"

"Strippers?" I shockingly ask.

"That's what they said. As soon as some stinky ass- I mean stinky butt ladies start coming out I'm going to church. Seriously!"

"Church?" I ask.

"Yep. I ain't going to finna do all that. I just want to hang with my boys that's all."

"Yeah. How's it going with Tory?"

He sighs before rubbing his neck.

"It's moving along. Not at the pace I want to but it's coming along. I don't know but we still don't trust each other and all. I had to hear second hand that he was dating. When I asked him, he said that the girl has been his ex for a while. They aren't dating anymore."

"It's okay T. Just take it one step at a time okay?"

"I'm trying babe. I really am."

"I know you are. So soon enough, he will too. Let me call momma okay? Today is movie night so pick out something for us."

"Bear movie!"

"T please don't select-"

My phone rings before I can finish talking. It's momma! What perfect timing.

"Momma."

"Oh ngwanake, go tsamaya yang ka lenyalo (Oh my child, how's it going with the wedding)?"

"Good momma. Perfect actually. Pepper really knows his stuff."

"Oh. Ngwanake (my child) I wanted to talk to you about finding. I wanted to wait till I'm with you but that will be on your wedding day."

"Sure momma. What's going on?"

"Ware 'sure' ko nna (are you saying 'sure' to me)?"

"Sorry momma." I chuckle.

"Anyway, I want you to know something first. Your father is was and always will be in my heart. To this day he's still my first love."

"Momma are you going to say some powerful quote about marriage that will carry Troy and I through our storms?"

"Errr... aowa ngwanake (no my child). I wanted to tell you that I'm lonely."

"Uhm..."

"And so is Ntate Joe."

I keep quiet because she's basically talking gibberish right now.

"So nna le Ntate Joe ntse re bua ka tse kgolo and ke nagana gore o tlo krey a step father se se good (Ntate Joe and I have

been talking about important things and I think he could make a good step father)."

"Step father? Momma wareng nare (what are you saying)?!"

"Hao tlhaloganye ngwanake (you don't understand my child)."

"I understand quite clearly. Momma how dare you replace papa with Ntate Joe o rekisang di koloi (who sells cars)!"

"Naledi watch your tone! Okare wa ntebala (it seems like you're forgetting who I am)."

"Sorry momma." I say with a hiccup.

"Enwa metsi (drink water)."

"Ke sharpo (I'm fine)."

"Now."

I sigh and pour a glass of water while the phone is still on my ear. Troy comes in the kitchen too and just stares at me. He then grabs a cold one before going back to the lounge.

"I drank." I say.

"O calm nou (are you calm now)?"

"Yes."

"Weitsi ke go rata yang mara ngwanake (do you know how much I love you my child)?"

"You love me like how God loves everyone."

"Exactly. Nothing and no one will ever replace your dad. Or you and Tshedimogo. No one. Your father knew he was dying on his last days and one day he asked if I would ever remarry if he ever passed on. Of course I said I would never but you know what he said?"

"What did he say?"

"He said that if God ever remembers him, and it all seems lost. I should look for him. I met Ntate Joe a few months ago when I was looking for my Bible after church. I was part of the feeding scheme that day so I had misplaced my Bible. I was looking for His word but I found Ntate Joe instead."

"Did you ever find your Bible?" I ask and sit down on one of the stools.

"I never found the Bible." She says with a chuckle.

"Are you and Ntate Joe going to have kids of your own?"

"Naledi." She warns.

"Sorry."

"But if you must know, we're not planning on having any kids because we both have children. He has 3 grown boys."

"Oh so y'all are just dating. I know but I just want to get everything clear."

"Yes, we're keeping each other company. Naledi, I love you and your brother so much. But I'm doing this for me, just for me. Tshedimogo is 16 this year. When he goes to university, who will I be left with? Koko Deborah is gone."

"You'll have me momma!"

"Baby girl you're starting a family of your own. You will go and create memories with Troy-boy. Please understand ngwanake (my child). I haven't even told Tshedimogo yet but he has his suspicions. If I don't confide in you, then who should I confide in Naledi?"

I sigh and try to hold back the tears.

"I'm happy for you momma."

"I'm happy for you too ngwana wa momma (momma's child). I'll talk to you soon okay? I hear you're going to Kenya."

"What? Who told you?"

"Salt & Pepper. A few minutes ago."

"Oh."

"I'm glad you're going. I want you to live my baby. Take risks, have fun, enjoy life, laugh, cry, see people, experience new

things, love and forgive. All that. Just know that at the end of the day, momma will always be here for you. Always."

"Okay momma."

"Are you crying?"

"No!"

"He he he. You and always acting tough. Your father was right."

"About what?"

"You are a living star in human form. Call me when you're free and don't forget to pray okay?"

"Okay momma. I love you!"

"I love you too ngwanake (my child). More than you can imagine. We didn't name you Naledi for nothing, now go make the world see that."

She hangs up and I just slouch forward on the kitchen counter. Deep in thought. If I'm being honest, a part of me always knew that this day was coming. Momma is a beautiful woman, she doesn't look 50. On top of that, she's a kind and forgiving woman that always puts others before her. That's why papa would always tell me how people think that she's lucky to be with him, yet it's the other way around. Well, I have to just put my big girl pants on and accept this Ntate Joe she talks about. I hope he's worth it, and only I will determine that.

~Blandina~

You didn't forget about me, did you? Thee most beautiful woman this Earth has ever been blessed with? Of course you remember me. Anyway, it's been a while. Honestly after my outbreak and crying everyday about Troy's engagement- I just picked myself up and went on with my life. Which was the most difficult thing I've ever fucking done in my entire motherfucking life! All these South African men are useless! It's either they're after your body or they're after your money. How you're going to be broke as a man? Useless! Which is why when a video of Troy fighting with Bandile, I knew I had to seize the moment. Yes, I know Bandile. The video may not have gone viral but because I'm stalking all their social media accounts, I saw it on Facebook. Most if the people were just laughing so I asked around and apparently, Bandile is Naledi's old friend who grew fond of her when they announced their engagement. He wants Naledi and I want Troy. We have one common goal so he was definitely on board when I contacted him and presented my idea.

Right now we're just doing final preparations for the trip to Kenya. Yes, we organized it. The guy that Karabo invited to his club is one of Bandile's friends. We are about to head there anyway. As soon as Karabo informed the friend, the friend

informed us that they're coming. We thought it wouldn't work but it did! The plan is for us to attack their common thing. If it's not love, hope it's... trust. The plan is for me to seduce and sleep with Troy and put it out there. Bandile says that he just wants to make Naledi drunk enough so that she gets horny. So that when she does, he will be there to satisfy her. We're now at my apartment just going through 'Project Divide and Conquer'. Once they both realize what they've done, there will be nothing left to fight for. I know it's going to be effective because Troy hates betrayal, very! They break up, we become their shoulders to cry on and boom- I get my man back.

"What the fuck are you packing?" I ask him when he packs some tablets in his bag.

"I said no drugs dude!" I yell.

"Yoh, relax ntombi (girl). It's Viagra."

"What are you going to do with Viagra?"

"Drink it of course. I'm planning on making her moan my name all night."

"That's so gross and pathetic. You have to intake pills to get a hard on?"

"It's not that marn! It's just that my girlfriends have been making me work all night. It's exhausting."

"You sure you don't got no STD's bro?" I ask.

"Voetsek Blandina!"

I roll my eyes and pack my suitcase too. Everything is here: lingerie, weed (to make me loosen up), charger and killer outfits.

This is going to work. Right? Yeah, it's going to work. It has to work.

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"I'm going to be honest with you, I really thought we were going to drive there." Kganya says.

"Drive to Nairobi? That's like a 62 hour drive!" I exclaim.

"Really? It's not an hour drive with an Uber?" She asks.

"You're insane." I chuckle.

"So how long will the flight be? Half of 62 hours?"

"No, the flight is 4 hours long."

"Oh. Whooo, who is that guy sitting at the back? I'm going to enjoy this ride." She snarks.

"I think I'm going to like you!" Pepper exclaims to Kganya.

"Hold on, which one is my seat?" Karabo asks.

"K-baby you're next to me."

"If I sit next to you then where's Troy going to sit?" She asks.

"My seat is in front of y'all? Oh hell no! Karabo would you mind exchanging with me?" T asks.

"Sure. I was about to say the same thing." She gladly says and swaps with Troy. She sits in front and just relaxes while we do the same thing. We're boarding the plane now and it's honestly so exciting. Kenya! Never really dreamed or craved to go there

but now that I'm on my way, it's impossible to imagine that I've never really thought about it.

"Ready?" T asks and holds out his hand.

"Oh no I'm okay." I swallow.

"You always want me to hold your hand when we take off, what's wrong now?" He chuckles.

"Errr..."

"Dumelang di nyonyane tsa Pitori (hello birds of Pretoria)! Let's fly!" Thabang gets in with his suitcase. Everyone shifts their gaze at him, even the flight attendant is baffled.

"Thabang." T says and he instantly whispers 'sorry' to everyone before speaking with the flight attendant.

"Sorry my sister but where's my seat? Ke lost (I'm lost)."

The flight attendant looks at his ticket and points to the empty seat next to Karabo.

"Oi véy." T says in shock.

"Errr.... my sister. Is there no way that I can sit next to the pilot?" Thabang asks.

Almost half of the plane chuckles at his silliness and I just slightly slap my forehead in anguish. First, he was late and now he's causing a scene in front of all these people.

The flight attendant instructs him to take a seat as we were about to take off. He reluctantly sits next to the very annoyed Karabo and buckles his seat belt.

"This won't be a disaster. Right?" T asks with a grin."

"Let's hope so."

By the way, Kganya is a cousin from my mom's side of the family. She's my aunt's daughter and even though I distaste the aunt, I do have a bond with Kganya. When people asked who my cousin's were, I just said 'Kganya' because she was the only one that truly fulfilled that space. We used to do sleepovers and hang out at the mall but we did all that before my dad passed on. After that, I kind of pushed her and everyone away. However, she never gave up on me and continued being the 'sister from another mother' that she's always been. You'd be surprised to know that she's actually a year younger than me yet she's so matured. Well, sometimes.

"Uhm... T?"

He looks at me and chuckles at my tense state. He holds out his hand and I instantly grab it with all my being as the pilot speaks that we're about to fly. I'm afraid of heights, but I still choose to sit next to the window.

"You okay?" T asks.

"Never been better." I say though my gritted teeth.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. We are about a few minutes away from our destination. On your left you'll see the airport that we're about to land in. It has been an honour flying with you and I hope you'll enjoy your stay here in Nairobi. We hope to see you again soon."

I let out a sigh and relief and nudge Troy to take off his headphones.

"What's wrong? You didn't like the movie?" He asks.

"No not that. We're about to land."

He looks around and then indicates for Tory, Oscar, Mutsa, Kganya and Pepper to get ready. The plane ruffles up a bit and Thabang freaked out immediately.

"Ah ah ah! What's going on? Engine? Wings? Are we dying?"

The flight attendant tells him to calm down and further explains that it was just a bump.

"Bump? A bump? In the air? A bump in the nothing? O kreile kae certificate sa hao sa both flight attended wena (where did you get your flight attended certificate)?"

"Thabang, calm down man. It was just a little bump." Troy reassures him.

"Boss man, you're telling me that there are bumps in the air? Next thing you're going to tell me gore (that) there are potholes! Yoh I'm getting hot. I'm sweating, kopa o bule le fenstere (please open the window)." He says as he fans himself.

The passengers laugh at his silliness yet again and I can't help but laugh too. Thabang has become a funny pain in the butt throughout this flight.

Anyway, we land and I grab my travel bag and go into the airport with Troy and the gang following.

Karabo gallops next to me and starts giggling.

"What did you do now?" I ask.

"I just got his numbers. You know the guy that was sitting at the back next to us?" She says and points at a dark and really tall man who's dragging his wheeled suitcase behind the gang.

"Uhm... how old is he?" I nervously ask.

"20."

"20?!"

"Yeah, he's into body building and stuff. Anyway, he gave me his numbers instead of Pepper." She proudly says.

"The only reason why you got him is because you got to him first darling. Had I made the first move, he wouldn't be walking straight right now." Pepper says next to me.

"Why can't you just accept defeat?" She asks.

"We've been here 2 seconds and y'all are already fighting?" I ask with a chuckle.

"We're not fighting darling, don't worry. Besides, there are plenty of men here in Kenya. You can keep Mister tall, dark and ugly back there. He looks like he's high on soap anyway, the sunlight green soap to be exact."

I laugh so hard that my laughter echoes throughout the airport but because of the commotion, nobody really heard me.

"Whatever!" Kganya scoffs.

"Somebody please tell me that I'm not going to share a room with him too." Karabo dramatically says next to Pepper.

"I don't think I like that idea." Mutsa says.

"No darlings, don't worry. We booked for standard doubles remember? You'll see how I handled the bookings when we get there." He says and pats the back of his hair. It's no longer blonde, thank goodness, because he dyed it back to black yesterday.

We keep walking with the boys following and laughing at something.

When we get to the entrance Pepper starts clicking on his phone and in a few, a black 6 seater cab halts in front of us.

"Ladies, your chariot awaits." He says and puts his luggage in the boot.

"Wait, how are the boys going to get to the hotel?" I ask due to the minimal space.

"They'll find their way, they're grown ups. Do I have to do everything for them? In you go!" He slightly pushes me inside.

The driver steps on it and I look back to see the boys just blankly staring at our moving cab.

I immediately text Troy.

"Hey. How are you guys going to get there?" I ask.

"Don't worry, Tory is on it. Why'd y'all just speed off like that?"

"Pepper."

"Anyway, I'll meet you there okay?"

"Okay. Love you."

"I love you too."

I smile at his last text before Pepper taps me on my shoulder.

"Darling, you're busy being all lovey dovey and letting this beautiful scenery pass you by."

I look up from my phone and roll down the window to look outside. The warm spring breeze tussles my hair and gently brushes up my face. The foreign air and unfamiliar buildings makes me excited even more for what awaits us here. This is going to be an unforgettable experience.

After about 30 minutes, we reach the Grand Hotel and all its splendour.

"It's so beautiful here." Mutsa says as she looks around.

"Indeed. It really is... grand." I agree.

"Yeah, it's okay. It's not a 5-star hotel but it'll do for now." Pepper says and brisk walks to the reception with his luggage.

"Hi. My name is Pepper Lunganye and I booked a couple of rooms on Monday evening."

The receptionist looks at her computer and they continue talking.

"Hey, are you okay?" I ask Karabo.

"Yeah yeah. Ecstatic. The plane situation just made me a little uncomfortable, that's all." She says.

"It's going to be okay though. You'll be spending time with us the entire time anyway." Mutsa says and pats her on the back.

"What exactly are we doing here? Are we going to a museum or watching a movie or-"

"Museum? Movie? In Kenya?! Are you retarded? No girl, just make sure you look like a million bucks tonight because in a few hours we're riding the top down!" Kganya excitedly says.

I look at her and back at them for answers. They better not be planning what I think they're planning.

I look behind me and see that the boys have arrived.

"T!" I drop my travel bag and go hug him.

I don't know why, but I missed him so much. It's crazy really. The boys go stand next to the girls and that gives me time to speak to him.

"So-" We both say and laugh at our unison.

"You go first." He says.

"How do you like Kenya so far?" I ask while brushing the hair on his chin.

"Good. It's definitely nothing like back home but that's a good thing. What about you?"

"Splendid. This hotel for instance, Pepper really knows style."

He looks around and smiles revealing that dimple again.

"What?" I ask.

"Of all the beautiful things here, my eyes are still set on you."

"T." I gasp.

I lean in to kiss him and he obviously responds back. He drops his bag and hugs me tighter and just when I'm halfway to Heaven, Pepper clears his throat behind me.

"Shall we?"

"Oh, yeah. Sure." I shyly say and go get my bag with Troy still with me.

We all get in the elevator and the girls can't help but take selfies on the mirror inside the elevator.

"Why are we always in the air? We're always going up man! Are we descendants from the bird people?" Thabang annoyingly asks.

"It's okay dude. Maybe you should head back home then." T says.

"On second thought boss man, I'm enjoying myself. Don't stress neh?"

Mutsa chuckles at how Thabang looked nervous for a minute.

T smiles at me and continues looking at the elevator buttons.

"Can we just get out of here? Some of us are claustrophobic!" Kganya exclaims in a panic.

I leave Troy's embrace and go over to Karabo. How high is this hotel anyway?

"Breathe cuz, breathe." I slowly say to her.

She follows what I do and slowly inhales and exhale.

"There we go! See, we're here now." I say.

"Next time, I'm using the stairs."

Kganya is the athlete type so those stairs aren't really a struggle as she's very tall and slim. Taller than me but the same height as Troy. Tory is the tallest one here anyway.

We all head out and Pepper indicates who's room belongs to who.

"Okay, our lovely couple will take the master room at the end of hall. Thabang and Oscar will take that room, Karabo and Mutsa will take that other room, Kganya will be with me and Tory will have the singular room."

"Tory has his own room?" I ask.

"It was supposed to be mine because I'm the master of ceremony but it would be a bit uncomfortable for your cousin to be with him. Are you okay with that Tory darling?"

"Thrilled actually." He responds.

"Okay! Anyway, we're just going to freshen up and eat but not too much, and then the party will officially start at 17H00. That's gives y'all 2 hours. After that, boys will see the girls tomorrow and the girls will see the boys tomorrow."

"Wait what? We're wondering around Kenya until midnight?!" I ask.

"Until the early morning darling. So if you know you can't pull all nighters then sleep for these 2 hours. See y'all." He says and goes in but goes out again.

"Before I forget, theme is black with some glitter okay? Pepper with some glitter!"

I look at Troy who just shakes his head and opens the door.

"Ladies first." He says.

"Y'all just say that so that you can get a good look at the butt."

"True that!"

I nudge his arm and look around the room. This seems too extreme.

"T, why didn't we get a regular room?"

"We're not regular, are we?" He whispers in my ear.

"Patience is a virtue. Patience."

"Okay okay. I just need a cold shower then I'll be fine."

"Wait, what are we going to do for 2 hours? That's so little. Maybe I should check my e-mails real quick."

I go to my bag and ruffle through it.

"T, have you seen my tablet?" I ask.

"Yeah, it's on the bed back at the apartment!" He exclaims from the bathroom.

"What?! But I put it in here, didn't I?"

"Yeah, then I took out."

"You did what?!"

He comes in the bedroom while drying his hands.

"I knew you might want to get work done so I left it. We're on a mini vacation babe. No work, remember?"

"But-"

"But nothing. Nay we went through this."

"Okay okay. Yeah, you're right. I'll take the bathtub and you'll take the shower."

"Why can't we just shower together? Save water?" He slyly asks.

"Would you handle it?" I ask and switch on the television. Wow, I've never really seen any of these shows or channels.

"Whatever." He says before going back into the bathroom.

I switch off the TV and open the balcony slide door, I step out and I'm met by a glorious view. So many mountains yet we're far from nature areas. Did I ever say that the water here is also different? It's actually really good, sweet even.

Anyway, I go back inside and order room service. While that's being done, I lay out a mat and start with my yoga. I do it when I'm stressed or when I'm anxious, now I'm just doing it for relaxation.

The food comes in but I set it down and continue with my yoga. The splashing water from the bathroom is the perfect calming remedy for this. I stretch out and bend till there's no space between my thighs and my chest.

"Well, this is definitely a nice view."

I split my legs and look behind me, T is just there staring at me with a towel on.

"Pervert!" I say before sitting down on the mat and crossing my legs.

"No, I meant the view from the balcony. It's a nice view of the entire town don't you think?" He smirks.

"You little liar you! We both know what you were talking about. You done?"

"Yeah. The shower is amazing, great water pressure."

"Alright let me finish then I'll shower too."

"What's this?" He asks looking at the food.

"Food."

"How'd you know I was hungry?"

I exhale and stand up to go to the bathroom.

"Because your lips are dry." I lift up his chin before going inside the shower.

I dress up in my grey dress and put on my slippers.

"Hey. What are you watching?" I climb on top of the bed and sit next to him.

"Some weird show about animals."

"Everything's got to be animals with you, huh? Oh, don't worry I'm not complaining. I just love how you love things. Come here, put your head on my chest."

He looks at me with a puzzled face like 'What did you just say?'

"I'm always the one laying on your chest. It's your turn, plus I got two soft pillows." I grab my breasts.

He chuckles then shifts over to put his head on my chest, he then sits between my legs and I put a big pillow on my back to accommodate both of us.

"Can you change the channel?" I ask.

"Sure. Want to watch 'Contagion'?"

"That movie about a virus that destroyed the world? No thanks, I'm good."

"Here. You take the remote."

He hands me the remote and I start looking through the channels. Since the television is mounted on the wall, I have to squint my eyes to see.

"Damn, it's hot here." He says and takes off his shirt.

"Really?"

"Is it not hot?"

"So hot that you had to take off your shirt even though there's an air conditioner?"

"Yes."

I just chuckle and continue browsing through the channels. We finally set on a movie that neither of us have ever seen.

'Knock knock knock'

"Go away!"

"T! Why do you keep doing this?"

"I don't like people."

I roll my eyes and go open the door.

"Boss lady! We are looking for boss man, it's time." Thabang says. He's looking really good actually.

"For the bachelor party. I'm the best man." He lifts up the collar of his shirt.

"It's already 17H00?!" I ask.

"Actually, it's 18H00. We thought we should give you more time to yourself wabo (you see)?"

I sigh and go to the bedroom.

"Hey T. Your testosterone gang is here."

"We heard that!" Oscar bellows.

"I wasn't gossiping!" I yell back.

"Tell them the bachelor party is cancelled, I want more time with my wife."

"Heh?! Hai (no) boss man! There will be no such shame! We are going! Put on a shirt and let's go! Can you imagine Tory? Your brother saying 'nyis cancelled, nyis cancelled'. Yoh!"

At this point, they're all in standing inside but by the door, waiting for Troy to dress up. He puts on a white shirt but I take it off of him.

I then go through his bag and give him a black one instead.

"Better?" He asks.

"Better."

"I gotta go. I guess I'll see you tomorrow. God, I'm going to miss you."

He says a word then kisses me, then says another then kisses me.

"I'm. Going. To. Miss. You. So. Freaking. Much. It's. Un-be-lie-va-ble."

"Honey moon phase is still going strong?!" Oscar asks.

"Ask them bro! Hey! Hey! You have the rest of your life to kiss each other, let's go boss man."

I slap Thabang hand when he grabs Troy with his shirt.

"Don't you dare! I ironed this shirt." I warn him.

Troy chuckles and kisses me one more time before going out with the boys.

I look around and pick up the remote before climbing the bed. It's crazy, but I miss him already. Love is seriously going to be the end of me.

Just as the movie is about to end, a knock comes through the door.

"In a minute!" I yell still on the bed, watching.

Before I know it, the door swings wide open and the girls get in with a commotion.

"Shhh! Layla is about to find out who her real father is." I silence them.

"Darling, who is Layla?" Pepper asks with a black, shiny and dazzling jumpsuit on. He even has his make up on and everything.

"Layla is he foreign exchange student in South Africa. She-"

"Oh hell no! Darling have you been smoking soap again? I know damn well, you're not going out like that!" He scans me from head to toe.

I scan myself as well as if I don't have a clue what I put on earlier. I just ignore him and continue watching the movie. I

turn it up louder when they start ruffling through my bag to get the 'perfect outfit for today'.

"Layla. I'm your father!" The man on the television says.

"I knew it!" I yell in excitement.

Pepper grabs the remote and switches off the TV.

"Darling! Focus! Now. We knew that you might come unprepared so we have a little something for you."

I look at all of them in suspense.

Mutsa goes to her room and comes back in a minute with a paper bag in her hand.

"What's that?" I ask.

"Your outfit." Karabo says.

"Oh no!"

"Oh yes. Now try it on darling. Fast, we need to get going."

I get up from the bed and find myself shorter than all of them. I look down and they're all wearing high heels. Eh.

Anyway, I put on the short, tight black dress with an open back and star glitters on the left side. It's actually gorgeous, but it's short! I'm used to wearing long pants so this is definitely new. I tie my braids up and by the way, I'm planning on taking them out on Friday.

I put on black and silver heels that aren't so high, because I'm already tall and finally add my cross necklace as an accessory.

I step out the bathroom and they all start 'whooping' and whistling at me.

"Lesbians." I say and they laugh. They laugh!

"Forgive us darling, but you look amazing. Not better than me of course but definitely right below me. We thought the dress wasn't going to fit."

"Well it fits but-"

"Here we go!" Kganya rolls her eyes.

I frown at her and grab my phone and black purse before sitting down with the girls, as they instructed me to do. Pepper takes a out a gold crown from the paper bag and places it on my head and a sash. They're cute really.

"Now we all know that Karabo is the maid of honor, but I'll be in charge tonight. Okay?" Pepper says and stands in front of us with a white pamphlet with golden font colour.

We all agree with a murmur.

"Good. Now let me read to you the bachelorette to-do list.

1. Take memoirs and photographs at the Grand Hotel.

2. Go to Grills and stuff faces (if you're on a diet, your diet will have to wait).

3. Spa day (because the bride is stressed about Saturday.)

"I'm not stressed." I interject.

"4. Pole dancing class.

5. Strip club."

"Wait what?!"

"6. Play dare or drink.

7. Special surprise.

8. Explore the city in a limousine.

9. Chill in the Jacuzzi with cocktails."

"What's the 10th one?" I ask.

"No. The list ends at 9 darling. Now, let's all fix ourselves for the photoshoot downstairs." He says that and attaches a few fake lashes on his eye. While the girls are talking, I go to the bathroom to speak to him.

"Pepper, strippers? Drinking? Pole dancing?!"

"Will you relax? I got you. We're in Kenya darling and besides, we're all together. We're not going to drink till we vomit."

"Well what about this strip club you're talking about? No boy toys, remember?"

"Yes, no boy toys like inflatable dingalings or such, we're just going to watch hot men performing a steamy dance for us. No biggie."

I sigh and look at him with concern.

"Darling, you're probably my favorite bride ever. I won't let anything happen to you and I won't do anything that will put you in harms way. We're just having fun darling but if you disapprove then-"

I start thinking about what momma said and how I should loosen up a bit and have fun.

"Okay. Let's do it!" I say.

"Really? Oh my gosh, thank you. You're in for a treat! This will be a night you'll never forget."

~Naledi~

"Don't pose like you're an abused chicken! Try another style! Darling, I mean try standing differently not smiling differently! Although, it would be effective if you tried both."

I scoff and just laugh to myself, Pepper is really bringing it on tonight. Poor Mutsa has been trying to pose for the photographer but Pepper just slams every idea she has.

"How's this?" Mutsa asks.

"Yes darling yes! Take the picture fast!" He exclaims to the cameraman.

"Alright. I'll have your photo's by tomorrow morning." The photographer says.

"Then you'll have your money tomorrow too. Come on ladies, let's get our eat on!" He says and taps on his phone again. The very same black cab that took us from the airport to the hotel appears in less than 3 minutes.

"Are you some kind of magician?" Karabo asks, clearly perplexed as we are.

"Something like that." He winks at her.

We all get in and find the four seats facing each other, I get the window of course and then Pepper calls out shot gun.

"Driver, take us to Grills please." Pepper excitedly says.

"Yes sir." The driver says.

"Do you want to lose your job? You'll refer to me and my home girls as 'ma'am', do you understand me?!"

"Y-yes ma'am."

"Pepper, calm down. Chill." I say in a gentle tone.

"Argh, I'm just having a hurricane of a headache right now. If it's not this driver then it's Mutsa and if not, then it's the team back home." He says in frustration.

"Why? Is everything okay? Are there any hiccups about the wedding?" I ask in a panic.

They all respond with a 'no' and tell me to calm down, that everything is on track and I shouldn't worry.

I relax a bit on my seat and nod is reassurance. Pepper shouldn't scare me like that, I've been watching wedding disasters on the net and it's most definitely not pretty. On your wedding day nogal (even). I just need to lay back and relax a bit. This is going to be fun.

We get to Grills and we order our food. While the girls are talking, I just look around and enjoy the scenery. Families enjoying a meal together, a couple sharing one dish and kids playing in a game room. It's beautiful really.

My phone rings and I see that it's Troy.

"Darling, if you keep getting distracted like that I'm going to have to take away that phone." Pepper points at me with his manicure.

"Give me one minute. Just one." I say and go to a quiet area where people pass when going to the bathroom.

"Hey." I say with a whisper.

"Hey. Why you whispering?"

"I have no idea." I giggle.

"It's Pepper isn't it?"

"Something like that. We shouldn't be talking, according to them."

"So I should book an appointment to talk to my wife? Nah. Anyway I just wanted to hear your voice."

"It's great to hear your voice too."

"Okay, you're okay right?"

"Yeah I'm good. We're at some restaurant called 'Grills' now. How about y'all?"

"Still at the hotel. We ordered in and we're playing video games."

"T, you don't have to lie." I chuckle.

"No I'm serious. Listen."

I listen attentively as the guys in the background keep shouting that someone should steer to the left and that they're doomed if the 'magladon' comes back.

"You heard that?" He asks.

"Yeah! I can't believe y'all are still at the hotel. Anyway, let me head back. He gave me one minute to talk to you."

"One mi- hey! That's my game control. Yeah I'm coming! In a minute gents! Okay let me get going too. I love you, okay?"

"I love you too."

I hang up and go back to the table with a huge smile on my face.

"Did you win the lottery or something?" Kganya asks.

"No, I'm just happy. That's all." I smile back at her.

We get our order and dig in while talking about what is going to happen tonight.

Pepper says that we don't need order desert because we're already late for our massages.

He calls the cab again and we drive to the spa downtown.

"Okay darlings, this place is high maintenance so please be yourselves. If you try to act all 'high and mighty' then it's me versus you. It's a bit stuck up if you ask me." He says as he gives us our white gowns to put on.

"Do we choose what kind of massage we want?" Mutsa asks.

"No. Now put on the robe." Karabo says.

We put on our robes and go to the massage room where we find a dozen white males waiting there. They're wearing white pants and white tops on. I look at Pepper and he just winks at me.

"Okay fellas, here is our bride." Karabo holds me by the waist.

The men look at each other then two of them come towards me.

"Hi." One says.

"Uhm... hi." I nervously say and take the towel in their hands.

I then go to a private place and put on the towel then head back to find them all on white massage tables getting their backs pampered.

"Please lay here ma'am. Should we perhaps help you?" One of them asks.

"No! I mean, no. I'm good." I say and lay on my tummy.

One of the takes the towel lower so they can expose my back and cover my bottom.

I feel so exposed and shy but that doesn't last long when the magic fingers start mooshing my back. The guy puts oil on my back then continues rubbing and kneading. The other guy is massaging my feet.

This is heavenly, I tell you. I've been so tense, this is exactly what I needed.

"Hey boys, any one of you wanna take me home?" Pepper asks.

We all laugh and continue talking about how the waiter at Grills was totally flirting with Mutsa. Her accent must've charmed him.

After 20 minutes we put on our robes and go on white chairs so they can massage our hands and heads.

"Oh, this is the life!" Kganya says with a grunt.

We all agree and the men massaging chuckle. Call me crazy but the one that was doing my hand kind of winked at me.

"So you're getting married on Saturday?" He asks while doing my fingers.

"Errr... yeah." I reply.

I thought the girls would stop talking and eavesdrop but they just continued talking.

"You love him?" He asks.

"I do." I say with a smile.

He smiles and looks down at my hand. He then stops massaging and looks at me.

"Is there anyway I can make you forget about him? Just for tonight? We can make you forget about him." He says and back at the one doing my head. I find him smiling too and he winks too.

Are these guys for real? Hitting on the bride and not the bridesmaids? The ones that aren't getting married?!

"I'm okay thanks." I say with a forced smile.

"Did I tell you how much I love a woman who plays hard to get?" He asks.

"No. No, you didn't mention that." I comfortably say.

"Well I do. I find that erotic, just makes the entire situation... sexy."

"Hey pal, if I were you I wouldn't be hitting on her." Kganya says to the guy massaging my hand.

"Why?" He asks.

"If I could show you a trailer of her husband then you'd understand. He's more handsome and can probably beat you up and your gay massage friend with one hand behind his back." She says.

"I'm not gay!" He exclaims.

"Just a friendly warning buddy."

I smile at Kganya and back at him.

"In another life maybe you'll be mine." He says and kisses my hand before getting up and goes through the 'Staff Only' door.

Soon as our slot was timed up, we got dressed and Pepper calls the cabbie again.

"Hey Pepper. That was amazing. Thank you, exactly what I needed." I hold his hand.

"It's okay darling. You're gonna thank me even more for our next activity."

"What's that again?"

"Pole dancing!"

~Blandina~

I'm all set up! Just waiting for the guys to go to the club then we're all good to go.

What's risky is that the girls will be in a club not very far away from this club. However, I don't think that anyone one of them might bump into each other. It's 20H00 now so the guys should be here in an hour.

"You ready dude?" I ask Bandile who's busy stuffing his face with lasagna.

"I was born ready! I'm just fueling the machine wabo (you see)? My engine is going to be working overtime!"

"That's really gross." I say and smoke a blunt. I nearly got in trouble at the airport for the weed but a quickie in the bathroom with the guy working at the airport solved my problem.

"Are you seriously going to take Viagra dude?" I ask.

He doesn't answer me, he just pops the lid open and takes two of them.

"Gross!"

"You better be out of this room in an hour or else I'm going to have to introduce you to my long friend here." He says and holds his penis.

I just gag and look at my lingerie and the dress that I'm going to be wearing tonight. I'll pretend to be on a vacation too and as soon as Troy sees me, he'll be mesmerized. He'll be horny and drunk too so this works in my favour. Okay! Time to party!

~Naledi~

After the gruesome and fun hour at pole dancing class, Pepper took us to the strip club. I'm in the bathroom now because I needed to pray. Yes, I needed to pray because this is sinful city at its best. There's a nice vibe going on but what happens behind closed doors is what sickens me.

"Darling, we're at the bar okay?" Pepper yells from outside the bathroom.

"Okay! I'll be out in a minute!" I yell back.

I look at my reflection on the bathroom mirror and start laughing. This is both a sweet dream and a nightmare. Strip club?! Me? I never thought this day would come. What baffles me the most is that I find these men quite attractive. Not to sleep with them but I just enjoy cleaning my eyeballs with their

dance moves. The whole reason why I came here to pray. Okay. I can do this. I can do this? I can do this! Okay.

I step out the bathroom and I'm met by the purple lights going around in the club and some loud music playing with a few women screaming or chanting for the men on the dance floor. I go to the bar and find that they left a seat for me in the middle. Looking around, I see that I'm not the only bride here. Strip club is on every lady's bachelorette party list.

"Hey! So we're playing Dare Or Drink now!" Kganya yells for me to hear her through this loud music.

"What's dare or drink?!" I ask her.

"Dare or Drink goes like this. We dare you to do something and if it seems too much for you then you take a drink. In this case.... you take a shot." Pepper says before placing 5 shots in front of me.

"If you do the dare, then you become the one to dare one of us!" Karabo says.

"Whoo! Fun!" Mutsa ecstatically squeals.

"Okay. Since I'm the MC, I'll go first. Mutsa, I dare you to take that microphone by the stage and yell 'I need some dick!' right now." Pepper says.

We all gasp in shock. If I were dared that, I would instantly take a shot. No doubt.

However, Mutsa just gets up and goes towards the stage. Bare in mind that there are men that are currently dancing there to some sexual song that's loudly playing.

She gets up and everyone is startled by who she is. The men just continue dancing, I think they think that Mutsa is drunk.

She grabs the microphone and yells, "I need some diiiiiick!" and all ladies in the club yell 'Yes!' in agreement. The men on the stage smile and continue dancing. One of them even blew a kiss to Mutsa. They probably don't even know that she's married!

She returns from the stage and looks at our mouth-open expressions.

"Now. Who shall I pick? Pepper! I dare you to kiss the bartender." Mutsa says then takes a swig of her martini.

Pepper clicks his fingers in pride and waits for the bartender to come to our side.

"What can I get for you?" He asks Pepper with a dishcloth in his hand.

Pepper pretends to have a soft voice so that the bartender leans in close to hear what he's saying.

Without thinking, Pepper quickly grabs his face and gives him a long kiss before letting go of his head.

We laugh at how shocked the bartender looked and then he says something we thought he wouldn't say.

"Unfortunately, my lips aren't on the menu. Come after hours and I'll see what I can do." He then winks at Pepper then goes to the other group of ladies on the other side of the bar.

"What just happened?" Kganya asks.

"I have no idea! Is he... gay too?" Karabo asks.

"Naledi. Your turn." Pepper says.

I swallow the lump in my throat and wait for my doom.

"I dare you to... go touch the bouncer." I sigh and get up.

"On the dingaling!" Pepper exclaims.

I turn around and walk back to sit down. There is no way I'm touching someone down there, bottoms up!

I take a shot and instantly hurl at how sour yet hot it tastes. First time I drink it actually.

"What did I just drink?!" I ask Pepper.

"Vodka."

A chill goes down my spine, that's probably an indication that my body did not like what I just put in it. What worries me is that I actually want more now.

"Since you didn't do the dare, someone else gets to dare you." Pepper says.

"Ha!" I complain.

"I dare you to... ask for a lap dance from that guy that was talking." Karabo says.

"A lap dance from him?" I ask.

"He's the owner of this club but he's a stripper too. So you can ask for a particular stripper or him instead for a lap dance."

I look at the tall

dark and muscular guy on stage and tell myself that that is crazy talk.

Bottoms up!

"Either way, you're going to get a lap dance." Karabo says.

"What?!"

"Yes darling. The special surprise is a lap dance from him. It took a lot of money so you best not disappoint. He's a master at this!" Pepper says before downing a shot.

"The special surprise is a lap dance?!" I ask.

"Yes!" Karabo excitedly says.

Before I can interject, the guys finish dancing and then go back stage but the owner stays behind and takes the microphone.

"Whoo! Now ladies how was that?" He asks.

Almost the entire club screams 'hot' to the top of their lungs.

"Yeah! That's how we do it! Now it's time for the one-on-one special bride lap dance. I see there's a lot of brides in this room so who's going on? Who's getting a lap dance from me, The Chocolate Tease?"

Groups of women keep pointing at the bride in their circle and my girls too.

"Shhh! Guys what are you doing? I don't want a lap dance!" I tell them when they keep pointing at me.

The guy takes out a card from the back pocket of his black jean and speaks.

"Can we get a 'Naledi Mapulane' on the stage please?" He says and looks around the club.

"Yes! Yes! She's here!" Pepper yells.

He looks at us and tells a bunch of muscular men to come get me to the stage.

No. No. No. I don't want to. This is so wrong on so many levels.

"Pepper I'm gonna get you!" I yell as the men carry me.

The ladies and the men around the club keep cheering me on and whistling at the guy when he takes off his shirt and pants.

Oh dear Jesus! Lord have mercy! Modimo (God) wa Israel. Se natla sa bophelo (the giant of life)! What is happening?

Some sexual music plays on and I'm forced to sit on a red luxurious chair in the middle of the stage.

The Chocolate Tease? What does that even mean? I can see my girls whooping and clapping their hands in excitement. I. Am. Going. To. Kill. Pepper.

"Hey? It's alright, relax. Let the chocolate tease take care of you." He says when he gets very close to my face.

What happened next was so sensual and dangerously sexy that by the time the Vodka kicked in, he was now on the floor and walking on his hands and knees towards me with sweat and everything. He then takes both my hands and puts them on his butt and stands in front of me.

The ladies around the club scream in lust that I feel a little embarrassed. I hope no one is taking a video or else I'm not getting married on Saturday.

The dance gets done and a part of me frowns and saddens that it's over. However, I am relieved that it's over! He kisses my

cheek then grabs the microphone. The lights go on and he speaks to the ladies.

"Now ladies, how was that? Who's wet from that steamy dance?" He asks.

I'm shocked at what he just asked but I'm more shocked as men and women keep saying 'they're wet' and screaming for him. Are all these people thirsty like this?

"Unfortunately, that's all from me but tomorrow... I'm all yours again. Let me give you a taste of what these other boys can offer. I'll be taking Miss Naledi here... backstage." He says and looks at me. Oh God!

"Relax, I'm not going to do anything. I always take the people I performed a lap dance for so that they can tell me how their experience was." He says and offers me a seat while wiping his sweaty chest. He has an accent.

"I'm... lost for words." I finally speak up.

"I get that a lot. This was your first time yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Yeah I can tell. You were distracted most of the time. You're beautiful, you know that?"

"I do."

"Hm. Feisty. Okay." He smiles and offers me a drink.

"No thank you. I've had two shots already."

"Only 2? That's a shame. Wanna go back to my place and finish where we left of?" He asks with his face deadly proximal to mine.

Before I can answer, my girls come through and keep smiling and whooping for me.

"Girl! That was soooooooooo hot! I'm proud of you!" Karabo exclaims.

"I'm going to murder you guys! No warning, no nothing." I say and fold my arms.

"Yet here you are, blushing." The guy says and goes out somewhere.

The girls squeal again and I just grab my purse and tell them that we need to go. This place is unholy. Sexy, but unholy.

"Okay let's ride the top-down! The limousine is outside."

"Limousine!" They all squeal.

~Blandina~

"What are you talking about?" I ask through the phone.

"I was supposed to talk to her at the strip club but the guy decided to not tell me until he was already done giving her a lap dance. Mxm!" Bandile says.

"Wait, she got a lap dance? Lucky! I'm still at the back, I can't go out there when I'm a nervous wreck."

"Who cares about your nervous wreck? I just drank a bunch of pills to make my big guy awake and she's nowhere to be seen. The bartender said that they drank a bit more too much after her lap dance. So wherever she is, she's drunk, horny and alone."

"She's probably at the hotel. Or jail. Try either one. I gotta go get my man back."

"You sure you don't want a proud, handsome Zulu man. We are rare and quite special. Make you feel like a woman all over again."

"No thanks. Y'all are just hypocrites. Troy is the one for me."

"Voetsek Blandina!"

I hang up and throw my phone on the table back stage. I need to go out there. Unlike the strip club, this one is just full of alcohol and music so I'm a nervous wreck. Seriously. I was once

naked in front of him so I don't know why I'm sweating. Okay, here we go.

I go out the curtain and go towards their table. I'm not wearing my lingerie, just a really short dress that highlights my edges and curves.

He sees me and I thought he'd be happy but he just looked shocked.

"Hey guys." I say and move a strand of my hair behind my ear.

"Hello babes. Come to daddy." One of the guys there says. I'm assuming he's the best man.

"Tory? Is that you?" I ask.

He waves at me and whispers something to Troy. I can't believe he's here. I never thought I'd ever see him again since Sheryl drove him away.

"What are you doing in Kenya Blandina?" Troy asks with an annoyed tone. Okay, not what I was hoping for. He doesn't even look a bit tipsy yet I saw him and the boys drinking.

I inhale and get in between them on the couch so that I'm in the middle, sitting next to Troy. Some lady comes to sit on the lap of the guy that spoke to me first. She looks like a hoe. Did he think I was a prostitute? The nerve of that guy!

"Hey Thabang, you'll pay for her drinks." One of the guys says to him. I guess his name is Thabang.

"Blandina, I asked you a question." He says and waves his hand in front of me. God, he smells good.

"I'm here and you're here. It's a nice coincidence that's all." I say.

"I thought you were back home."

"Nah, SA is beautiful. Just decided to stick around for a while."

"How convenient that you're in Kenya, in this particular city, in the particular club, at this particular time."

Shit! Smelly shit!

"Uhm... it's just a coincidence Troy. So what are we drinking boys?" I ask all of them. It looks like it's a nice setting here, they're even in the VIP section.

"Hennessy." Tory says with look I don't think I like very much. I wonder what's his problem.

"Hey T-"

"Don't call me that."

"Okay, TROY. I got something for you."

"And what is that Blandina?" He asks and leans back on the couch.

I put my hand in between my boobs and they all stare at me in lust. Well, except for Troy and Tory.

The girl sitting on Thabang's lap pokes his head when he keeps staring at my breasts jiggling.

I take it out from under my left breast.

"Tada!!" I wave the blunt in front of Troy.

He and I used to smoke this baby when we were still together. I'm the one who introduced him to weed, but after it started getting a problem he left it.

"I don't smoke no more dude." He says.

Did he just call me dude? The nerve!

"Well, since Troy and the rest of us don't smoke, how about you crop yourself out of here." Tory says and takes a sip of his drink.

I just look at him and back at Troy.

"For old times sake. After we smoke it, I'll leave you guys. I'm here with my girls so we gotta leave soon."

Troy looks at me and reluctantly agrees.

"Yes! Okay! I'll start so that you don't think it's poison or something." I look at Tory.

I take a puff or two before passing it onto Troy. He looks at it and sees that I left my lipstick mark on it.

"Go on." I pressurise him.

"Troy if you don't want to man-"

"Nah it's okay Tory. It's just a blunt." He says then takes a long drag of it.

"By the way, why'd you take law classes? I thought you were into animal behavior." I try to make small talk.

"I did both but I never finished law because when Nay graduated I just left it."

"Oh. How's Naledi anyway?"

He smiles and I instantly regret asking about her.

"Hey man. I'm buying the next round, want anything?" One of the guys ask Troy.

"Nah I'm good Oscar."

He takes another long drag and I tell him to stop. The blunt didn't just contain weed of course. There's a drug in there that makes you energetic. It's not exactly a drug because it doesn't affect anything and athletes use it when they're tired. I added it so that he gets energetic for something else in mind.

He gives me the blunt then tells us that he needs to use the bathroom. Bingo!

Once he was out of sight, I tell the rest of them that I need to use the ladies room then I'll leave. I too disappear from their sight. Instead of taking a left into the girl's bathroom, I make a right and go into the guy's bathroom. Some men that are exiting the bathroom stare at me in shock as I get in. It's not the first time I get in a men's bathroom.

I wait by the sink when he gets in the actual bathroom and waits in there. However, he's not peeing or anything, he's just breathing in very deeply.

"You okay?" I ask.

He swings the door open and asks me what I'm doing in here.

"I came to check on you." I say and get closer. His pupils have dilated, his adrenalin must be going crazy.

"Well, I'm fine. You can leave now." He says and splashes water on his face.

"Troy..." I keep repeating his name as I'm massaging his shoulders.

"Don't-don't touch me." He says in a hazy voice.

"Really? By the way, when was the last time you were an animal in bed?" I attempt to get in the mood.

"Say what?" "You heard me."

"Nay requested we shouldn't do anything until our wedding night. Why am I telling you that? Sorry, you don't need to be hearing that."

"No it's okay. I'm glad you told me because I'm willing to help."

"Blandina what exactly was in that blunt? Why am I feeling hot and disoriented?" "I said I wanted to help."

"Help with what?"

"With this." I say and hold his down there guy. Soon as I touch it, it goes hard right there.

"Oh, so you do want me?" I ask with a whisper.

"No. N-no I was uhm... thinking about my wife."

"Stop lying." My patience is running thin.

I grab it harder and he groans. I let him look at me in the eyes and I ask him if he wants me or not.

"I'm feeling hot. Uhm... brfush-take-the-grr" Shame, the weed, the drinking and the drug is making him dizzy.

"Say it, say you want me." I say and look at his dilated pupils.

"I-I want you."

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~Blandina~

"Really?" I ask totally taken aback by his admission.

"Yes." He says and rolls his eyes to the back of his head.

"Then kiss me my love." I lean in to kiss him but he slaps my hand off of him and looks at me dead in my eye.

"No, I meant I want you to leave. Right now. How didn't I see this coming? I don't know. I mean I thought you'd strike when you came with Sheryl a year ago but I guess you really planned this didn't you? You think I want you? I don't want you skimpy. I really am aroused but that's because I mentioned my wife, not because you touched me. Now, what the fuck was in that blunt?" He asks and holds me by neck, he does it forcefully that I begin choking.

"Troy stop man! You're gonna kill her!" Tory comes in and grabs Troy off of me. I hold my neck and cough multiple times as I try to regain my senses and my breath.

What just happened? He was playing me?

"Blandina! Leave, now! If you ever and I mean ever... come near Troy or his girl, it's gonna me and you. Do you understand? Get a life and stop being so pathetic!" Tory says and points his gun on my torso while looking at me.

I frown and fold my arms in annoyance. He thinks he can keep me away from my Troy, he better think again.

"You seem to not be understanding, let me try speaking a different language." He cocks his gun and points it straight to my head. At this point I'm panicking and Troy is just there looking at me, not trying to defend me.

"What do you think Troy, should I just kill this bitch right now?"
Tory asks Troy.

I keep pleading for him to let me go and at this point even tears are running down my face but they just keep laughing at me.

"Nah." Troy says.

"Give me one good reason why I shouldn't pull this trigger."

"It's going to be a real mission to clean her up."

They look at each other and start laughing aloud. The guy that wanted to get in the bathroom immediately turned around when he saw the gun.

"On second thought..." Tory says and places his finger on the trigger before pulling it!

"Maybe next time. Now beat it!" He says and puts his gun away.

He waits for me to move but I can't. I thought I was going to die! Why would Troy let this happen to me? I look down and I see that I even peed myself.

"It's your lucky day. Blandina! By the way, stay off that weed. It makes you age faster." Troy says and he walks out with Tory.

Before they were out of an ears reach, I hear Troy asking Tory how did he know that he was in trouble.

"You were taking too long and that bitch was no where to be seen."

"Damn. I really am hot though. What you carrying a gun for anyway?"

"You're forgetting that I'm a certified bodyguard. I always carry protection."

"Tory, were you really going to do it?"

"I was, downside is that I forgot to reload my gun."

~Naledi~

"Is that an office building or what?" Kganya asks.

Pepper squinches his eyes to see thoroughly then shrugs his shoulders. They've been up there for a while now and it's not fair. Mutsa and I want to peek out the sunroof of the limousine

too. We all can't do it at once because only two people can fit up there due to its small size.

"Hey! Hey! It's our turn now." Mutsa says and keeps tickling Pepper's feet.

At this point, I don't even care anymore. The view from the window is all I need to feel the aura and for me not to hurl. We've been drinking ever since we got out from the club. It may be a cider but, it's still too strong for me. Pepper says that I'll know when I'm drunk when the liquor starts tasting like water or isn't strong anymore.

"Okay okay! We're coming down." He says and comes down to sit with Kganya following.

We all laugh when we notice that Pepper's hairstyle is completely ruined from all the breeze up there.

"Whatever! That was fun! So bride, how are you enjoying your bachelorette party?" Pepper asks.

"It's definitely sentimental. Thank you guys, I love you guys soooooooooo much!"

"Errr.... are you okay? You're acting funny." Mutsa asks.

"It's probably the liquor." Kganya asks.

"I feel like something is missing man! Yeah something is missing." Pepper says with a frown.

"Well, we're going to the jacuzzi aren't we?" I ask.

"Yeah yeah, but not that. Something else is missing. I got it!
Trouble with the law!"

I think I instantly became sober when he said that. Trouble with the law? Is he nuts? He's forgetting that there's a crime fighter right here in this limo.

"Uhm... Pepper? Hello? It's me. ADVOCATE MAPULANE!"

"I'm not saying we go murder someone or steal from orphans. I mean something small darling!"

"Something small? Any crime is a crime. Now matter how 'small' it seems."

Just as I'm done with that, there comes a traffic car behind us.

"Driver, pull over to the side of the road!" We hear from the car.

Pepper waits till the driver stops then goes to sit next to him.

"Did we do something wrong? I mean why are they pulling us over?" I ask.

"Just relax. Relax." Pepper says and lowers down his window when the cop knocks on it.

"Hi officer. Is there a problem?" Pepper asks.

"Sir, do you know how fast you were driving back there? You just passed a school zone at a 120." He says to the driver, completely ignoring Pepper.

This scene kind of reminds me of my personal experience with a traffic officer. I pray to God that he doesn't want a bribe or something. That would ruin everything I stand for about corruption.

"Officer, it's 00H47 now. Who's at school at this hour?" Pepper asks.

"I'm going to have to ask for your license and registration." He says with a straight face.

I've come to see that most black people complain of being pulled over by white traffic officers just because they're black. There's something illegal bound to be bind to us.

The driver panics and I instantly know we're in trouble now.

"Okay officer. Just give us a minute." Pepper says and closes the window. The cop is baffled by this but he waits still peeking through the window.

"When I give you the signal, drive like Dominic Toretto. Do you understand?" Pepper asks the driver.

The driver nods vigorously and puts both his hands on the steering wheel.

"Pepper! What do you think you're doing?" I ask.

"I told you to relax a bit." He says then lowers the window.

"Here you go officer. Pa!" Pepper holds out his hand and then taps the driver on the lap.

Without a blink, the driver steps on it and Pepper holds out the middle finger outside the window.

"Pepper are you crazy? Why would you do that?" Karabo asks in a blur. She's been napping for a while after she vomited from taking too many shots.

The driver takes a rough turn that my drink spills out of my glass.

I peek out of the sunroof and see that there's no cop car that's following us. I go back down and find Kganya breathing in deeply through a paper bag. She does that when she has anxiety attacks.

"Will you guys chill? In a few days we're going to look back on this day and laugh and laugh. Besides, it's not like they're chasing us. We didn't even do anything wrong."

It's at this point of any story when a character's words come to life because as soon as he said that, we heard a siren behind us. The driver looks on his rear view mirror and starts speeding up. Speeding up? A limo?

"What's going on?" Kganya asks.

Karabo peeks out of the sunroof and then comes back down with a horrifying look on her face.

"We're in trouble. Two cop cars are behind us." Karabo says.

"What? Darling are you sure?" Pepper asks.

"I think I'm smart enough to spot a cop car when I see one Pepper. Now look what you've done. We're going to jail, I've already had trouble with the law but now I got a baby to think about. Kganya will never survive inside. Naledi is an attorney! Mutsa has a husband to get back to. You're a media personality for Christ sake!" Karabo exclaims and starts downing the tequila.

"Driver, speed up!" Pepper orders.

The driver keeps taking rough turns so that the cops get dizzy.

"Guys, this is a limousine. It's slow and it's easily detectable. The only way to make them lost is if we hide somewhere." I say in a panic.

We're all just panicking and keep looking backwards as the siren and the lights remind us that we're in deep trouble.

"Take a left there." Pepper says to the driver.

He nods and takes a left then parks the limo in a dark alley.

"Seriously? An alley with rats running everywhere and dustbins? Plus we're backed up, if they see us we're doomed!" Kganya says.

"Shhh! Okay darling okay. Calm down. Driver, turn off the engine and all the lights. We're just going have to pray that they drive past us." Pepper says while drinking tequila too. To calm the nerves I suppose.

Just as we hear the siren approaching, the two cop cars pass us like we aren't there. The siren keeps getting fainter and fainter until we cannot hear it anymore.

God, thank you. Thank you so much! I thought I was going to jail for real, running away from the law is never a great idea.

Pepper speaks first with a tremble.

"See? We made it. Who's ready for the jacuzzi?"

We all look at him in anger but the jacuzzi idea does sound marvelous.

"At the hotel?" Karabo asks.

"No darling, it's a few streets away from the hotel. It's actually a pool area but I told them we are just there for the jacuzzi."

"Jacuzzi? At 1 am?" Kganya asks.

"Yes. To calm the nerves and maybe have a prayer session where we thank God for what just happened."

"Ladies, I'm never driving with you guys again!" The driver says.

We all look at each other and start laughing. It's not about the situation, it's just how he said it that we found hilarious. Poor guy must be traumatized by now.

"Whatever darling! Take us to the pool area and try not to speed a little." Pepper says and goes out of the passenger seat to come and sit at the back with us. Whatever happens, I pray that it stays between us all.

"Mutsa you okay?" I ask.

"Yeah, I'm alright thanks. I'm just planning Pepper's murder." She says with a chuckle.

We all laugh as we agree that he's been getting us into trouble lately.

"All I know is that you darlings love me so..." Pepper proudly says.

The driver is reluctant at first, but then we hit the road after we were sure that there were no cops around the street.

Let's go!

"So we get in with our underwear? Why didn't you just tell us to buy a swimming costume Pepper?" Mutsa asks.

"Just get in ladies! It's heavenly." He says and starts floating on the water.

We all just get in and the lights around the jacuzzi turn on.

Some muscular man gets on the lifesaver dock and sits down.

"Uhm..." I look at the mysterious man.

"He's the lifeguard

don't worry." Pepper says.

We all chill around the jacuzzi with drinks in our hands, talking about the cop chase incident.

"Pepper, were you dropped as a baby?" Kganya asks.

"Yeah, my dad dropped me when he ran out of my life and went to go start a family elsewhere."

Since he laughed, we all laugh too.

"So bride, how are you feeling?" Karabo asks.

"Today is Thursday. I'm getting married on Saturday. I'm a little anxious." I truthfully say.

"I know what you mean, I felt the same way when it was my time too." Mutsa says with a smile.

"Oh! I forgot that we already have a married lady amongst us. Mutsa, what can you advice Naledi about marriage?" Kganya asks.

"Good question darling! High five."

"I'll high five your face if you ever get us in trouble with there law again!" Kganya says with an annoyed look.

"You guys. Well, all I can say is nothing. Nothing at all because there's so many things that you need to know, some things you need to learn along the way and some that you won't like going through. You see Troy? Troy is a man, so when he says 'I love you' it doesn't mean he loves you. If he takes you to expensive diners and gives you his card, it doesn't mean he loves you. He can make love to you till you can't feel your legs anymore or post you on his socials, that doesn't mean a thing. Heck! He can even propose to you and buy you the most expensive ring on the market, that's still not reassurance. If you want to know whether a man truly loves you, then look at how he's changed just for you. My own husband used to beat me up."

We all gasp in shock.

"Yes, he did. Soon as he had alcohol in him, I knew that I was going to receive a lash. He wouldn't even shout or say bad things, he would just find fault at something then punch me or slap me. My mother is 6 feet under and my dad was out there,

running a drug empire. I had no one to talk to except my therapist. Even her herself said that I should just leave the 'bugger'. But what did I do? I stayed. Well, after a month I left. I was taken in by some old woman and she told me how she was in the force in her youth. That's where I found inspiration to become a detective. A year later, I too was in the force but not a detective yet. I kept thinking about him, how he's been doing all this time because we were in South Africa and far away from Nigeria. It's tough for a foreigner you know, I received my fair share of racism and discrimination. Anyway I was invited to this other rehab facility because that's where my next case. Guess who I found there all clean with a shave and navy suit on?"

"Your husband!" Kganya answers.

"Precisely. At that time we weren't married though. I was shocked to say the least. We caught up and he told me that once I left his side, his world came upside down. He went to rehab himself and admitted himself. After a year, he got a job as a pharmacist. He was already studying when we were together but never did his final year. So now he was okay but he was incomplete. I told him that I went to the doctor that day I left and I was told that I could never conceive. His beatings ruined my womb and eggs."

We all gasp yet again with the occasional 'sorry' in between.

"It's okay. I dealt with it. After I told him, he left. Yes, he went out of the rehab and into his car and just drove off. I was shattered, I didn't know what to do. After 20 minutes his car was on the driveway again and he came to me. I was bracing myself for a slap but he just held my hand and went on one knee. Even though I was bruised, barren and not all beautiful or curvaceous, he still went down on one knee. And I said yes. So you see? If a man really loves you, then he'll change just for you. It doesn't even have to be as extreme as my experience. It could be that he stopped hanging out with his friends a lot or eased down on drinking."

I think about how Troy doesn't drink in front of me as much because I felt uncomfortable watching him drink whereas I've never tastes alcohol in my life.

"It could be that he changes his behavior towards his family because you said so."

I think about how he respected my wish that he should be respectful towards Sheryl.

"Heck, even something as small as him to stop swearing and cursing."

Is she talking about me? Wait, but I never told her about Troy's habits or what he's changed just for me.

"If he does change, permanently change just for you... then by all means hold onto him because you just found your soulmate."

Pepper starts crying and we all chuckle at him.

"I'm not crying darlings, it's the tequila. It's making my tear ducts wet."

"Mutsa, that was beautiful. I'm glad you found your soulmate." I say.

"I'm glad too. You kept smiling at everything I said about change which means that you too found your soulmate."

"Hello ladies!"

We all turn back and find... Bandile? What the? What is he doing here? Where has he been all this time?

I step out the jacuzzi and put a towel on. I may be drunk but I'm still sensible.

"Bandile? What are you doing here?"

"I heard that you were doing your bachelorette party in Kenya. Since I was this side because of business, I decided to look for you. The limo outside gave me a clue."

"Oh my gosh. Uhm... girls, this is Bandile and Bandile these are the...girls."

They all wave at him except Pepper.

"Well, I'm kind of busy and since you've seen me. Goodbye." I say.

"Hai! Are you still angry at me? Look can we talk about... something?"

"No." Pepper says. "I'm in charge of the bride so you'll be taking her nowhere.

"Please Naledi. I want to talk about my mom's death. I never really dealt with momma Deborah's death you know?" He says and starts tearing up.

Bandile? Crying? I've never seen him cry before. I tell Pepper that I won't be long. I'll just be there for 5 minutes.

He nods then I accompany Bandile to his car outside the pool area.

He opens the car then tells me to get in.

"No. Uhm... I'm good out here."

"Out in the street with a towel on?" He asks.

Since I was cold and couldn't stand still without tripping, I get in.

He locks the doors and I stare at him.

"Just for safety. Crime in Kenya will shock you. Are you warm?"

"A little."

"Take off your wet towel and take my sweater."

"No thank you. So what did you want to talk about?"

"No no ntombi (girl), I mean it. Take off your towel."

"Bandile what's going on with you?" I ask.

"I know you're horny and been drinking. Relax, this Zulu man got you. It'll stay between us. What happens in Kenya, stays in Kenya." He says and touches his fully erect manhood.

"I will not have this. Unlock the door, I want to go back."

"No."

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~Naledi~

"What did you just say?"

"You're... you're not drunk are you ntombi (girl)?"

"No!"

"I meant no as in, not yet. We still need to talk about other things."

"It's been 3 minutes now. Unlock the door then talk for 2. Now Bandile!"

People passing by keep looking at us as I'm shouting. He unlocks the door while still looking at me. I don't even want to know what he was planning or thinking, I just needed to get out of that car. How could I be this stupid? Giving him the benefit of the doubt has always been a bad idea. Even when we were friends back in high school.

I get out and stand by the door.

"You didn't have anything to tell me, did you?" I ask with my arms folded.

"Yes I did. Kante-"

"Bandile. Stop. Please. This... is pathetic. Even for you. So you thought since I'm drunk I'll want to sleep with you? I'm on my

bachelorette party dude! I'm getting married in less than 48 hours! And you-"

I massage my temple before continuing.

"Listen. You and I have high school memories, that is something I can never change. I don't even want to anyway. You were a good friend, well sometimes. We were friends but we've outgrown ourselves. We're on different paths Bandile. It happens. It's okay. It doesn't mean we should hate each other and all, what we had was just temporary. Believe it or not, you've taught me some things. You made me laugh and listening to music with you after school was a bliss. But that's behind us. I'm going to pretend that you didn't just do what you just did. If I do, Troy will skin you alive. Literally. Move on Bandile. Marry Tshepang or whatever that other girl's name is. Make a family. Remember that was Koko Deborah's wish? For her to have grandchildren? Well, dreams never die. She may be gone but her spirit is still here. It still roams around because she has unfinished business with you. You didn't attend her funeral and now you're here, using her death as bait. Do you think she's happy?"

He looks at me without uttering a word. Before I can continue, Pepper appears with a towel around him.

"Five minutes is up. I gave you 12 seconds extra. Let's go bride!" He says and grabs my hand.

Before I disappear out of sight, I smile at him and wave a goodbye.

"Hey ladies! Our bride is back!" Pepper exclaims.

I see that the lifeguard is inside the jacuzzi with the girls. I'm not even going to ask anything, I just need that burning liquid in me. I just had a bittersweet moment back there and I need a neutralizer to calm the nerves.

I take a swig at the tequila and the girls cheer on.

"Yes girl! Yes girl! Yes girl! You're ready to party!"

"It's 3 am and we're still drinking? Thank God I'm married. This life isn't for me. I gotta go back to the hotel, my head is pounding and I just got my period. Not a nice day for me." Mutsa says and wraps a towel around her torso.

"Are you okay?" Kganya asks.

"Yeah. I just need to lie down. I'm a mess. Congratulations bride!"

I raise a thumbs up still downing the tequila.

"Okay darling. Ask the limo driver to take you back to the hotel neh? You rest babes." Pepper says.

She waves at us and we all say goodbye. Maybe I should join her too, I reach for my phone since I was forbidden to touch it the entire night. 34 missed calls from Troy? Yoh! Bottoms up! This day just keeps getting better.

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~Troy~

Fuck! Shit! Shit, I don't swear no more but I think this situation is appropriate for vulgar words. Why isn't she answering my calls? Did I say something? Is she okay? I need to calm down, she's out having fun. I need to relax. Shit, who am I kidding? I'm losing my mind. I mean, I've been at the hotel for an hour and even party goers need sleep. Knowing Nay, she's probably just sitting somewhere drinking cranberry juice and waiting for the party to be over. My poor mamacita.

~Naledi~

"Whoo! This night should last forever! Give me that vodka honey! This drink is weak! Yoh, turn up the volume! Whoo! Life is good baby!"

~Troy~

Shit, I hate not knowing things. I give her 20 more minutes. It will be 4 am in 20 minutes so that should give her time. Ever since that Blandina facade, I've been on high alert. It never really crossed my mind until I arrived tipsy in here that that bitch could have a plan for Nay too. Not just for me. Tory told me to relax but it's not his woman that's out there doing God-knows-what with God-knows-who.

I get a call from Tory and I pick it up instantly.

"Talk to me."

"Hey uhm... Pepper just called me. Said I should come pick up Naledi. I don't know why but I'm on my way."

"Wait for me."

"No, you stay there. I'll bring her to you. Call Pepper and ask him what's up. He hung up on me before-"

I hang up and dial Pepper's numbers. He better have a good explanation.

"Hello darling."

"Where's my wife?"

"She's right here with us, we've been drinking a bit too much so I called your brother to come fetch her."

"Why her alone?"

"Well darling, I got a date with a bartender at the strip club and Karabo is coming with. Naledi and Kganya will be coming to the hotel. They're both drunk like its not even funny."

"Naledi is drunk? Anyway, is she okay?"

"Yes darling. She's okay. Calm down. We were just having a great time. Oh, here's your brother pulling over now. Gotta go byeee!"

"Wait, why didn't you just call me instead?"

"Tory's number was above your number. Sorry."

"Next time, you call me. Do you understand?"

"Oh. Yes sir!"

He hangs up and I stare at my screen as if it'll blurb out answers. I smile a bit when I think of Nay drinking when she even hates the smell of alcohol. Let alone the taste. Guess she really had fun.

I try to eat, watch TV to pass the time but I just ended up pacing up and down the hotel room. Waiting for Tory to get his ass here! I'm not even going to argue with Pepper and how he should've called me instead of my brother. Besides, I think I wouldn't acted then and asked questions later.

The door swings open and it's Nay. Wearing a really sexy dress and a crown on her head. She's banging on the door with her heels and purse in her hands while singing a song I cannot yet fathom.

"Babe!" I exclaim and rush to catch her.

"Thank you chauffeur Tory! You're a real life saver!" She yells at the hallway. I get her inside and close the door. She hangs on me and looks at me with amazement.

"T! T! I'm so glad you're here! Oh, I missed you so much baby! Kiss mommy for me." She brings her face closer to mine but I get out of her grip and ask her if she's okay.

"I'm okay baby! I'm oooooooooooooooooookay! Hahaha! Kenya is the bomb, I tell you that!"

"Stop yelling." I flatly say.

"Well someone's in a bad mood? Are you hungry? Here. Have some food!" She says and points her butt at me. Tempting but she's not in her right state of mind right now. She trips a bit then goes to lay on the bed.

"Wow. This duvet is so white and soooooooooo soft! It's like a... like a... like a baby polar bear. A polar cub! Nah that doesn't sound right. A polar bear cub? A-"

"Take off your dress." I say.

"Oh! Are we getting it on now?! Okay!" She says and tries to unzip but places her hand on her mouth anyway. Before I can blink, she rushes to the bathroom and vomits in the toilet. When she feels like its coming back up again, she closes the door and continues hurling and groaning.

"Are you okay?" I ask through the door.

"I'm okay! I'll be out in a minute then we'll get frisky? Okay baby boo?!"

Baby boo?

She flushes the toilet then there's a disturbing silence in the bathroom.

I open the door and find her laying on the cold tile with her hair a mess and the toilet seat too.

I pick her up and with her cooperation, I was able to get her in the shower.

"Get out!" She says and throws a rubber duck at me.

"Babe, I've seen you naked a million times. What's the big deal?"

"Just go! I'm showering and you're a boy and I'm a girl so! Go!" She explains.

For peace's sake, I go out the bathroom but leave the door open. Hopefully she can still shower even when drunk. While she's showering, I tidy up the mess she made when she kept tripping and leaning on something.

A few minutes later, she steps out of the bathroom with an underwear and a white vest on.

"You know what T? I really love you! And it's weird because I still miss you even though you're right here!" She says.

"I miss you too." I smile back at her.

"We're coming down on a pivotal moment here like we're actually bonding and we've already bonded before. This is like ultra bonding moment! Yeah!"

"Babe?"

"Hi!"

"How many glasses did you take?"

"Glasses? More like bottles sweetie!"

She looks in her bag and starts getting annoyed when she doesn't find whatever it is she's looking for.

"What are you looking for?" I ask.

"Food! Like I'm starving right now! I know, I'll go to the restaurant front opposite the hotel!" She clicks her fingers and opens the door.

I rush to the door and get her back in.

"Are you nuts?" I ask.

"Hey! I get to act crazy tonight. Not anyone else. Me! I've had to deal with my dad's passing, betrayal from family, my friends disappearing, Koko Deborah's passing, your mom hating me, society's judgement and a really stupid boss without any alcohol! Oh, add Tshedi and momma 's new boyfriend to that list! All those things I dealt with them sober and the one chance I get to get drunk, you ask me if I'm nuts?!"

"I was asking if you're nuts because you were going to go out with your underwear bumshot." I correct her.

"Oh. But I'm still hungry so please go get me food! Please! Get me a large pepperoni pizza with extra cheese. Like a lot of cheese!" She screams and snacks her lips.

For her not to go anywhere, I grab my wallet and lock the door. Shitty things happen to drunk, vulnerable girls in here anyway.

"Hi! Can I get a large pepperoni pizza?" I ask the lady.

"Okay, one large pepperoni pizza. With extra cheese?"

"Yeah whatever." I flatly say. She's been charismatically flirting with me and it's starting to get annoying now.

She taps on her screen and tells me the price of which I swiped away.

I sit down with a receipt in my hand, waiting for my order. It's 5 am and there's so many people here, ordering pizza. On a Friday! The lady finally calls out my number and I give her the receipt and she gives me the pizza. I look at it and thank her before she said anything else. Her mouth stank anyway.

I get back in the hotel and go up the elevator to the room.

I unlock it and find her sleeping with a TV remote in her hand. I was only away for a few minutes and she's already-

Okay. I put the pizza box down and get her under the covers. Since I haven't slept too

I change into comfortable clothing and switch off the TV before hitting my head on the pillow.

I kiss her forehead as I kept pondering on her words about how she's had to deal with everything. I didn't even know that her mom had a boyfriend. Wish I could help, but my Nay is one heck of an independent woman. She's so strong and she's proven that to everyone, even me. I love her. Fuck, I love her!

I'll always love her. This world is going to try to tear us apart, turn our smiles into frowns. However, with her by my side, we'll do the complete opposite. Our smiles will be the ones changing everyone else's frowns.

~Naledi~

"Hey. Hey! Wake up. Babe wake up."

I keep hearing his voice but my eyes are still closed shut. I'm finally able to open them when he brings a cup of coffee near my nose.

"Hey. You're awake. Here you go." He says with a smile. He looks neat. He's already showered and gotten dressed up.

I sit up and take the cup then thank him.

"Mmm. This is so good." I say and sip some more.

"You hungry?" He asks.

I nod and he fiddles with a paper bag before taking out some chocolate and coffee muffins.

I instantly grab one and take a bite.

"Oh my gosh. I'm in Heaven right now."

He smiles and just stares at me.

"You're staring." I say with an awkward smile.

"Is it wrong?" He asks.

"If you want to take a bite, you can. I give you my permission."

"Hold up! Hold up! I need your permission to eat the food that I bought?"

"That you bought for me." I correct him.

"Hehe. How's your head?"

"I feel like a drummer was using my head as an instrument in a hard metal concert for hours long."

"Well, let's get some coffee in you and you'll be good to go."

"You look nice." I say and take another muffin.

"Thanks. And you look... unbelievable."

"Whatever!" I say and nudge his arm.

"What time is it?" I ask.

"It's 2 in the afternoon."

"What?! I thought it was 9 am!"

"No. Our plane is at 16H00 anyway so don't worry."

"Okay. That's better."

"So, do you remember what happened yesterday?"

"Uhm... I remember until the jacuzzi party. After that, I have no idea. I don't even remember getting here and changing."

He tells me the entire story and even how I nearly went out with my underwear. I bury my face in my hands in embarrassment.

"Hey. Hey. It's okay. You had fun, that's a good thing." He chuckles.

"Yeah I did. I'm with Mutsa on this one, this life is not for me. No sir. Where are the girls anyway?"

"I don't know. Mutsa and Kganya came to check on you earlier but I told them you were asleep. I last heard from Pepper and 'Karabu' when they were going back to a strip club."

"Oh. Right. Pepper kissed a bartender and he said that Pepper should come back later. Why? I don't know."

"So y'all were at a strip club huh?"

I can't tell whether he's amused or pissed, so I just smile and nod.

"What happened?"

"Nothing. Nothing happened. I just... we had shots and danced."

"Danced huh?"

"Yep. Danced."

"Danced with who?"

"You already know don't you?"

"Yeah I do. But I wanted to hear it from you first."

"They organized a lap dance for me but there was no touching or anything like that. He was just... dancing."

"Did you have fun?"

"Uhm... well. For the time being yes but, it was 50% fun and 50% gross."

"Babe, you don't have to lie. I get it. I'm not mad or anything. Just as long you promise that'll never happen once we get married."

She makes a cross with her finger along and her chest and raises her hand up.

"Why are you okay with this? Did something happen at the bachelor party?"

He tells me about Blandina and how she was all over him trying to seduce him.

"So... what happened?" I ask.

"Nothing. Just like how nothing happened at the strip club. Right?"

"T. I'm going to honest with you, I'm a little jealous."

"I was too. However, it happened and it's behind us now. Just watch out for Blandina babe. She's more capable than I realized she was."

"Something tells me this is the last time we'll ever see her again."

"I hope so too."

"So. We're getting married tomorrow." I say with a grin.

"No we're not. You made it perfectly clear that you'd rather have shots and lap dances for the rest of your days then be married so..."

"What?! No I didn't! Are you-"

"Kidding. Calm down." He says with a chuckle.

"T! Don't do that! Nearly had a heart attack. I love you too much for that."

"I love you too."

.

"Ladies and gentlemen this is your captain speaking, we are about to land at our destination. Thank you again for choosing to fly with SAA."

"Yoh! Finally!" Pepper exclaims from the back.

Troy and I look at each other and laugh at him. We've been on this plane for 4 hours and it sometimes gets to you. We're back! Kenya was a delight though, I'm definitely visiting it again. Just for sight seeing though, it has beautiful landscapes that are out of this world.

"You ready?" He asks.

"Yeah."

The plane lands and it's now 20H30. We still have to drive all the way to our apartment and-

"Say goodbye to your better half darling." Pepper says.

"What?!" We both exclaim.

"Don't you know that seeing the bride before the wedding is bad luck? You shouldn't have even seen her today but I let you."

"Pepper is right. So bachelor party 2.0?" Thabang asks with a grin.

"So what we're going to do is, we're going to a hotel just as you boys are going to a different hotel. You darlings will see each other tomorrow."

"But-" I interject.

"No 'but' darling. Do you want bad luck? Even if it's nonsense, would you rather take the chance?"

"Nay, I need to talk to you. In private." Troy says and pulls me to the side.

"As much as I hate it, he's making sense." I say.

"What?"

"Please T. For me. It is bad luck to see me before the wedding so, tomorrow?"

"I need you."

"Me too baby. Just hold on a little longer okay? We're going to get married, it's going to be perfect!"

"For you, okay."

"Okay."

I peck his lips and we go our separate ways.

Pepper gets an uber for us and he takes us to the same hotel Troy and I were at when he proposed. It's still beautiful and golden as ever.

"Ladies. Unfortunately I will see you tomorrow too. I have a wedding to get back to but that was a lovely bachelorette party. Ain't that right Karabo darling?"

"Hmm."

You know Karabo hasn't been herself lately. I don't know what's going on and I asked her if she was okay in the plane but she claimed she was. I know my maid of honor and I'm telling you, something is bothering her.

"I got to go too ladies. I miss my husband so y'all have a goodnight. Try not to get into trouble."Mutsa says.

We all laugh when we remember the traffic officer incident yesterday.

"Rivonia will be here in a minute." Pepper says.

Oh, Rivonia is one of my bridesmaid too. We have 4 bridesmaids and 4 groomsmen. Mutsa will be with Thabang, Karabo will be with Oscar, Kganya will be with Tshedi and Tory will be with Rivonia.

"Okay. Bye." I say to Pepper and Mutsa as they leave.

"Hello ladies!"

We all turn around and find Rivonia with a lavish outfit on. It's purple, of course, but it's beautiful still. She comes to hug me and since she's shorter than me, I had to bend my back a bit.

"Hey Rivonia. So good to see you." I say.

"So good to see the bridesmaids again and the bride herself of course." She says.

We get our keys and I'm alone in a room while the 3 are sharing a room. I appreciate the privacy and space because I can finally call momma now.

I put my travel bag down and dial her number.

"Momma."

"Oh. Ngwanake (my child)! How was Kenya?"

"Amazing momma. It's so beautiful there. I'll take you with next time neh? Don't cry."

"Hey wena (you) Naledi. Who's crying now?"

We both laugh then share an awkward silence.

"Momma. I'm scared."

"Why do you say that ngwanake (my child)? Is Troy-boy giving you trouble?!"

"No no. Why do you call him 'Troy-boy' anyway?"

"I will call him that until he says 'I do'. All of these men are boys until they put a ring on it."

"Really momma?"

"Yes really. Now, what's going on? Why are you scared?"

"What if I'm making the wrong decision? I mean don't get me wrong, I love T. With everything in me, but what if getting

married knocks down our relationship? What if marriage makes us hate each other or break up? I can't lose him momma. Not him. Maybe our relationship is just meant for us to not get married, just stay boyfriend and girlfriend."

"..."

"What if it's not written in the stars?"

"Then it's not meant to be."

"Really momma? That's what you have to say?"

"Ke bua nnete (I'm telling the truth). If marriage knocks down your relationship, then it wasn't meant to be. If it's meant to be then it shouldn't matter what happens. Whether you get married, have children or let the world drive you two against each other. If it's meant to be, it will be."

"Have you thought about being a prophetess momma?" I ask. She laughs a bit before talking.

"No my baby. I'm fine where I am. Your father was my soulmate, but God always gives us a 2nd chance. And a 3rd and a 4th and a 5th chance. It all depends on how you use it. Something tells me though, that you and Troy-boy are meant for each other. Made for each other."

"Thanks momma. I feel... much better now. So you're coming right? Tomorrow?"

"I wouldn't miss it for all the muffins at Bean & Mugg!"

"Momma. It's actually Mugg & Bean." I chuckle.

"I know. I knew all along. It's worth it if you keep smiling and laughing whenever I say it wrong. Get some sleep okay? Tomorrow is a big day. I don't want you to stress. Pray before you sleep."

"Okay momma. Love you."

"I love you more ngwanake (my child)."

I take a deep breath and pray. I don't know but I just prayed right on that bed.

"Amen."

I open my eyes and find Kganya at the door.

"What are you doing here?" I ask her.

"We're lonely so we brought a pillow and duvet to come sleep in your room. It could be like a sleepover like we used to do. Remember?"

"Yeah I remember. Okay."

They all come in and sit on the carpet.

I feel weird that they are down there and I'm on this bed so I join them too. Besides, it's hot and these duvets are really comfortable.

"Snacks anyone?" Kganya asks.

"Yeah! Give me all that! Are those chocolate bars?!" Rivonia seems excited.

"Karabo, are you okay? Please talk to me." I say to her.

"I'm okay bride. I just miss my baby you know?"

"Is that all?"

"Yes, that's all. I'm okay, seriously. Don't stress." She says and just hugs me. Really tightly.

I'm not believing a word she's saying. She may miss baby Obitshepo but something else is bothering her. I'll ask her later on, I'll just give her space for now.

"Sorry I'm not being the best maid of honor ever. I'll make it up to you." She says and goes through her bag. She then takes out some small wrapped box and gives it to me.

"What's this?" I ask her.

"I was going to give it to you tomorrow but..."

I open it and it's... a stone. It's a beautiful stone.

"Uhm..."

"Turn it around." She says.

I turn it around as instructed and it's a red hand print with 'congratulations' written at the bottom.

"That's Obi's hand print. He was busy with paint and he made that print. I'm the one that painted 'congratulations' at the bottom though."

"K-baby, this is so beautiful."

"Just a little something from me and Obi to you. I wanted to buy you jewellery but..."

She looks at my cross necklace and I smile at her.

"It's beautiful. Thank you." I hug her and she grabs tightly onto me again.

"Wow Karabo! Now our gifts are going to seem small compared to that!" Kganya says.

"Whatever I get, it's still great."

"Okay. We're watching comedy tonight!" Rivonia says.

"Yes!" We all agree.

We all sleep in a line facing the TV. I get to go change into my pajamas that I didn't wear since I slept with a vest yesterday. We kept talking about the wedding and our trip to Kenya and how the movies this Friday are really let us down. Before we knew it, we all dozed off.

.

"Naledi, your phone is ringing." Kganya whispers next to me.

I groan and put my hand under the pillow to reach for it.

It's Troy. I instantly stop being drowsy and go out the slide door to answer the call.

"Hey. Did I wake you?" He asks.

"No." I say and yawn.

"Liar. Anyway, did you check the time?" He asks.

"Wait a second." I say and look back at my phone. It's... 00H02

"It's midnight. It's Saturday."

"Yes it is." He says. His bass is out of this world, he must've been sleeping too.

"It's the day of our wedding. November 6th."

"Anyway Nay..."

"What's up? What are you thinking?"

"There's something I need to tell you."

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"What do you want to tell me? Please don't tell me it's bad news."

"It's bad news but good news for me."

"T..."

"Sheryl isn't coming to the wedding."

"What?! But but but-"

"I know. She didn't come for the lobola and everything else and now she's not coming to her own son's wedding. I told you sending an invitation to her was a waste of paper and ink."

"But T... why? Is she okay or..."

"She's not in Albania anymore. She's in France now, they're having an annual model show something-something and she's part of the programme."

"Can't see reschedule or miss it or have her PR handle it or-"

"I don't know. She didn't tell me that she's not coming. She told Tory to tell me. Through a text message! I saw it myself as it appeared on his phone."

"Call her."

"Over my dead body. She decided she's not coming to the wedding and that's okay. She never really wanted to be part of the wedding anyway."

"Are you mad?"

"Nah. Not really. Relieved actually, her presence is toxic anyway."

"T. It's okay to be upset."

"You know all my life, I've always wanted her to stop focusing on me for a second and take part in Tory's life but now... now she's in neither of our lives. Tory blocked her number after she sent that text. He resents her and I'm on that path now babe."

"T..."

"It doesn't matter okay. I'm fine. The rest of my family and yours will be there. Our bridal party is there and Pepper is sending me countless emails about... flowers. Why am I getting these emails?"

"You're part of the wedding too T."

"Yeah but flowers?"

"I'll tell him to send me the emails okay? You're okay?"

"Yeah I am. Are you?"

"Couldn't be better."

"Okay darlings! Wake up! It's time!!!" Pepper exclaims as she gets in the hotel room. The girls and I have bathed early (Pepper's instructions) and now we're on the bed with white robes on.

Pepper and 7 people come in with white and black and rose gold t-shirts.

"Pepper. What is going on?" I ask completely shocked by the amount of people in this room.

"Uhm... you're getting married darling. That's what. You, set up your make up kit. You, you're the photographer Sheryl sent right? Mickey? Start shooting! You're the media team so we want this to be like a movie, we have lights, camera and sound so start filming. No static disturbance or anything like that. You darling, put the dress over there next to the bride. Bridal party, go to Karabo's room. The bride is going to be taking up this entire room. You darling, go get her bouquet from the car. You lose one petal you lose R1 of your paycheck! Let's go let's go let's gooo!"

The people start working and going up and down and the camera man whose going to be making the film for the wedding kneels in front of me.

"Hi. Are you ready?"

"Uhm... I think so. This is definitely extravagant." I awkwardly chuckle.

"This is nothing. You should see a movie scene where there's explosions and you'll see a mess. Now I'm about to take one, please act as natural as possible. Do not even look at the camera, pretend like we're not here."

"What? But you are here..."

"He he he. I know. Just try not to pay attention to us. We have the set at the wedding venue but here we're going to need real acting skills. Okay?"

"Got it!"

"You know, you're the first advocate bride I had to film. Especially one that's marrying an American. We're making history here." He says and gets up to talk to his team.

Pepper comes to me and tells some make up lady to start doing what she does.

"Natural please. It shouldn't even show that I have make up on-"

"Darling, I got you. She already has her instructions. I'm the wedding planner with a plan. Okay darling?"

"Pepper, what about the groom?" I ask.

"The groom and his groomsmen are getting ready too. There's a team already at their hotel. Your mom is on her way and Tshedi too."

I nod with a smile when I realize that everything is falling into place. I'm getting married to the love of my life today. It's unbelievable, and it's also a dream come true. I wonder how he's doing. Just with that thought, I get a text message from him. While the make up lady is busy setting up her kit next to me, I read the message.

'Hey. I can't wait to make you mine.'

I smile and laugh a bit too.

'I can't wait either. No backing down.' I write back.

'No backing down.'

"Darling, please let the lady do what she's paid to do. Please darling. I don't want you to be early but I also don't want you to be late."

"Okay okay. This is a big day anyway. You look nice." I say.

"Honey, I'm still going to change. I have 3 outfits that are waiting for me."

I chuckle and shake my head.

"Did you even sleep?" I ask as the lady starts laying the foundation.

"Yes. For 4 hours. Now stand still darling, I need to take this phone call. Talk to me!" He says on the phone and goes out the hotel room.

Soon after, a few people follow him and now there's only 4 people left.

"So, you're thee advocate?" The makeup lady asks. She's a black, short woman.

"Thee advocate?" I ask.

"Yeah. Pepper has been making such a big deal that you're an advocate and I instantly wanted to decline this job."

"Why?"

"All brides that have high stature are too difficult to work with. If they're not happy with your service then they treat you like shit. Especially lawyers!"

"I'm not like that."

"I know. I saw his you were smiling at everyone and just being a calm soul. You're not a bridezilla and I'm grateful for that. Now, let me work my magic. Advocate."

I smile at her and close my eyes.

~Narrated~

She unzips the plastic cover and reveals the dress she'll be blessing her day with. Ball room gown. Pure white, with strapless arms and white duplicate diamonds on the upper portion of the dress. The dress seemed too big at first but once she stepped into it, it fit like a glove and tailed way behind her. Her entrance was going to astronomical. Her face is puffed with the ideal look and her natural high tied up with braidings on the side. The veil gets placed by her mother on the bun. It fits perfectly and reveals the crown that sparkles like her eyes. She has an entire row of jewellery options to put on however, she already knows which one she is to pick. The cross necklace she received from both her mother and her husband to be in an hour. She's completely forgotten about the film crew that's been in the room the whole time, her excitement overshadowed everything. She picks up the white rose bouquet that has dupped diamonds in each centre. It has a black sparkling strap to hold it together. Her mother kneels down and puts on her high heels that elevate her height. She asks her mother to get up but she puts them on and sits next to her. While she looks down at her shoes revealing her glittering eyelashes, her mother stares at her beautiful daughter with

pride. A tear drops from her right eye and Naledi wipes it with her veil.

"Oh ngwanake (my child), look how beautiful you are." She finally speaks.

"Momma." Naledi says on the verge of tears herself.

"How many advises have I given you?"

"Thousands." She responds with a smile full of gloss.

"This one I need you to listen attentively. Naledi Mapulane. You're about to become Naledi Lane soon. The surname change does not mean you change you character. What have I always said to you?"

"A person with a strong character is like a tree with strong roots. When wind comes, one never gets scared of being blown away." Naledi responds as if it's something she's always been studying her entire life.

"Exactly ngwanake (my child). Oh! I had a whole speech prepared but I'll save all that for later. Naledi, you're a star. Ka nnete ngwanake o shin'a gofeta sechaba (truthfully, you shine better than the entire nation). I'm a proud mother Naledi. You rose from everything and made something out of yourself. The devil tried, but failed because you're the child of the most high. You know you, me and your father nearly died when you were an infant?"

"What?! No, you never told me."

"Hehe. It was raining, your father's car was repossessed because of our financial issues. It was your birthday so we made a plan to have a picnic at a park nearby. It rained and we had to take the bus home but something was not right."

"What wasn't right?"

"The presence in the bus man! It was not okay. It was heavy. So even though your first word was 'papa' your second word was 'apela'."

"Apela? What does that even mean?"

"I didn't know back then but now I think you meant to say rapela (pray). That's what I did, I prayed silently. Even your father looked at me like I'm mad or something but I prayed. Never deny that feeling that says 'pray' because as soon as I said 'Amen', the bus lost a wheel and started to move out of control. Everyone was screaming and children started crying but not you. You were just so quiet and when the driver hit the emergency break, that's when you started laughing. No one got hurt and it was a relief. Well, we got off our stop after the wheel was replaced and later on in the news it was said that the bus spun out of control and crashed into an oil truck."

"What?!" She asks with her hands over her mouth.

"Yes. The sad news, there were no survivors. All I'm saying is that if you turn to God, He will never ignore you. Your ideal timing and his timing are not similar. However, he's never late. If you can put God as your center of comfort in your marriage and pray, then you'll overcome everything. Prayer does not prevent bad things from happening ngwanake (my child), it simply acts as a crutch to overcome those bad things."

Naledi starts tearing up and fanning herself so as to suppress the tears.

"Don't cry baby. It's your day, you should be crying tears of joy not sadness. Okay? Go live my baby

Advertisement

go live."

Naledi's mom hugs her tightly and leaves the hotel room. She's now alone and alone with her thoughts. She's ready though, she's always been.

Mutsa knocks on the door and gets in with an elegantly evening white dress with sparkles around her waist. Black and white with a glitter was the theme for the day. Salt and Pepper with a spark.

"Hey. You ready? The car is outside." She says.

"You look beautiful." Naledi says.

"What? This? Girl, these rags?"

They both laugh then share an awkward silence.

"You ready, because we can bounce. Right now! I got cash and we can just bribe the driver to take us back to Kenya."

They both laugh yet again and Naledi stands up and finally speaks.

"I'm ready."

Naledi and her bridal party enter the limo with a few ululations. Only her bridesmaids and her mom was present so the ululating was limited. They all get in and the driver goes for the botanical gardens.

"Girl! Why so serious? It's your big day!" Kganya says with a glass of champagne in her hand.

"Are you drinking Kganya?" Naledi's mom asks.

Kganya instantly puts the glass down and shakes her head. Oí vey.

As soon as the driver parks in front of the gate, Naledi is mesmerized by the view of swans just wondering around and doves flying up above. The drivers parks near the grass area and Peppers steps out of the main office to the limo.

"Hi darlings, you're a little late but it's okay. You're the bride, they can wait. The groomsmen are ready to go down the isle, they're just waiting for you ladies."

The bridesmaids step out with the film crew still following them. Another film crew stays with Naledi and Pepper.

"Come on darling, the reception isn't here."

"Well where is it?"

"Follow me. Well, follow the vines." Pepper says and picks up Naledi's dress from being stained by the grass.

"Just follow the music darling." Pepper says.

Naledi walks a bit further then turns a right and sees an enormous space with a waterfall at the back. Everyone is sitting down on the white chairs as the groomsmen go down the isle and the bridesmaids too. Naledi sees Troy with a black tuxedo on and a white handkerchief on. She gasps as she sees that he even had his hair done and it was still curly as ever. He has a golden watch on and shoes that shun the entire ceremony. A pastor with a white cloak was also standing at the altar while the bridal party was going down the isle. There's even teenagers playing their harps next to the altar. The film crew was surely prepared for this.

"What do you think darling?" Pepper asks.

"Pepper! This is beautiful! A waterfall?!"

"I did say that you're getting married at the botanical garden. Here comes Tshedi. He'll be walking you until the white isle and then you will walk slowly and alone the rest of the way. We don't want him stealing the spotlight. Although I doubt he will with this long long dress you have on."

"Thank you Pepper. Thank you."

"Don't thank me yet darling, we still have the decor to look at. Now go, your song is playing."

Soon as the angelic teenagers played the harp, the slow, instrumental version of 'Fall Again' by Glenn Lewis played too.

Troy moved his shoulders and everyone stood up and waited for the bride. Ten seconds passed and there was still no bride.

"Hey boss man, calm down. She's coming." Thabang says to the nervous Troy.

Troy nods and smiles then waits for his bride to go down that isle.

At 20 seconds later, she emerges into the light with Tshedi by her side. She smiles at him then they begin walking and Tshedi stops when they reach the white carpet. She lets go of his arm then holds the bouquet with two of her hands. The song changes and the instrumental version of 'Here and now' by the

Luther Vandross plays. She knows that Pepper did this on purpose so she smiles and even though there's a veil over her head, she can see Troy sniffing a bit. Perhaps he was crying, is what she thought as she walked slowly on the carpet.

Everything came back to her, the first time they became friends, the first time they became lovers, their trips, their arguments and their make ups, their moments when they laughed and cried together. All those sentimental memories came flooding back and by the time she was emotional, she was already at the altar.

"Who gives this man to this woman?" The pastor asks.

"I do." Uncle Murray says and holds Troy and Naledi's hand.

"And who gives this woman to this man?"

"I do." Naledi's mom says and holds Naledi and Troy's other hand.

The two elders combine the couples hands and Troy holds Naledi's hand as they face the each other.

"Am I even going to talk like the other pastors? No way. I'm so excited, it's like I'm getting married again." The pastor says.

The people laugh and then smile at the couple in front.

"Okay. Ladies and gentlemen, we've gathered here today to join these two in holy matrimony. Like our Father said, what He

put together, let no man put asunder. So I'm not going to ask if anyone objects or not because if you do then you got an invitation by mistake. We move."

The crowd laughs again and Naledi's mom just smiles to herself.

"I was told that the couple had prepared their vows so now I leave the floor to them." The pastor says and closes his Bible.

Troy unveils Naledi and breathes out when he's met by her beauty. She was so breathtaking, he didn't speak for a minute. He just stared at the woman who was already staring back.

"Anytime now boss man." Thabang says.

The people chuckle and then silence grows around them.

"Naledi Mapulane, you're the most... it doesn't even matter what I say anymore. You've proven to me and everyone else that you're a diamond. You. Are. The. Most. Exceptional. And. Beautiful. Woman. I've. Ever. Met. Thank you for grooming me into the man I am. Thank you for your love, because this kind of love comes once in a lifetime. It doesn't matter what happens in this life, I'll always be there. I love you for my heart. I love you for my soul. Let it be known that even if we both die, I'll still wait for you in another lifetime." Troy says and places an indigo diamond ring on her finger.

People keep saying 'nchoo' with the occasional ululating in between. Naledi is not one to cry but what Troy just said made her a bit nervous. She slowly exhales and looks at him in the eyes.

"Troy Sebastian Lane, my other half. You walked into my life unexpectedly, I... I never thought I'd love anyone like the way that I love you. I don't just love you, I adore you. I was made for you. And you for me. I now know that I can conquer the world with one hand, just as long as you're holding my other. I vow to care for you unconditionally and to teach you how to make a dagwood. I will forever be by your side, through and through. It doesn't matter what happens in this life, I'll always be there. I love you for my heart. I love you for my soul. Let it be known that even if we both die, I'll still wait for you in another lifetime." Naledi says and places a ring in his finger.

They both smile at each other before the pastor continues talking.

"Well, the November air must be the one making me teary like this. Yes, it must be the air. With the power invested in me, I now pronounce you Mr. and Mrs Lane. You may kiss your bride my man!"

Troy smirks and leans in for what seemed like an eternal kiss to which everyone stood up and cheered on for. They chuckle to

each other and unite their hands for everyone to see. Karabo places a broom for them to jump, just for tradition.

At that moment, everything seemed perfect until an unrecognizable figure loomed in the botanical shadows, away from the gaze of everyone.

~Sheryl~

Well, well, well. Isn't this lovely? Sugar and Troy are finally married. Is... is this a Marlin 25MG in my hand? How did this gun get in my hand? I don't know. Crazy. I must say, she looks beautiful. Takes my breath away just looking at her, I wonder what would happen if I took her breath away... permanently.

~Narrated~

Strange. The looming unrecognizable figure is not there anymore.

Nonetheless, the merriment for the day went on. After the lovely couple said their vows, a group of men and women with unison shirts on led the people to the reception while Troy, Naledi and the VIP's went to go make memories.

The VIPs were to follow an employee of Botanical Gardens while the couple were to take a different route.

"Pepper, we're going on a boat?!" Naledi asks.

"First of all, that was beautiful darlings- the vows and how you two were looking at each other. Flawless! Makes me believe in love once again. Second of all, yes darling, y'all are going to the photoshoot section with a boat. It's cute isn't it?" Pepper asks with excitement.

Troy chuckles and helps Naledi get on the boat, once settled, the boat driver led the couple behind the waterfall where they will be taking photographs.

Naledi leans on Troy's shoulder as they both take in the scenery of the garden and all its Glory.

"Beautiful, isn't it Mr Lane?"

"It is Mrs Lane."

The boat ride finally stops and more of Pepper's team helped them get off. The film crew were also on another boat to capture the scenery.

"Okay okay darlings. Yes, it's another waterfall but this one is real. The one where the couple got married in front of was man-made. As you can see this one has more... prada!" Pepper says and talks a little bit to Mickey, the photographer.

Naledi looks up at Troy when they both saw Mickey, she knows that Troy seeing one of his mother's employees brought a bit of sadness within.

Troy looks at Naledi and smiles to reassure her that he was okay with the occasional 'I don't care' expression.

They take their pictures and even though it took a while, Naledi convinced her mother to take photographs with her.

"Okay darlings, you're late for the reception but it's okay. The rest of y'all, thank you for your beautiful selves. This man will take y'all to the reception and the couple will join y'all in a sec." Pepper says.

They all follow the employee and Pepper pulls Naledi, Naledi's mother and Troy to a secluded house.

"Okay darling, I brought your mermaid dress with me. Troy darling, here's your tie. You'll only be changing that black tie to this champagne one. Hurry."

Naledi and her mother go into a room to change and yet again, the dress fit perfectly. The mermaid dress had a shorter tail than the ball room gown but it still qualified for a lengthy dress.

"Mrs Lane." Naledi's mom says to her while helping her put different shoes on.

"Yes darling!" Naledi imitates Pepper.

They both laugh then follow Pepper to the reception.

"Okay darlings, time for the step." Pepper says.

Troy, Naledi and the bridal party look at him in confusion.

"Please tell me y'all didn't prepare a dance to enter with."

They look up and down in guilt.

"Yoh, okay. Bridal party will go in the same way you went down the isle. I'll make a plan with the couple."

All 250 guests settle down and wait for the couple to get in the enormous hall. She may not be inside, but she can already see

the white drapes inside. The teenagers dressed as angels are still playing their harps near the entrance.

"Okay darlings. I will not have a disaster wedding. Y'all will just do the traditional wedding step with a song. Maybe the electric slide, and I'll talk to the DJ. Okay?"

They both nod before Pepper goes out of sight.

"I'm having so much fun watching him go crazy like that."
Naledi says.

"He really thinks we didn't prepare a dance for our big day? Shame man." Troy says with a chuckle.

"Mom called me Mrs Lane earlier."

"But you are Mrs Lane."

"I am aren't I? It was just a bit odd coming from her you know? Anyway I'm glad I'm Mrs Lane. N.L."

"Okay darlings, the DJ has her orders. You ready?" Pepper asks.

"Yes we are." Naledi replies.

"Okay. Let me go check if your cake is still standing." He says and struts off again.

What's a wedding without HotStix Mabuza? Boring! As soon as one of his songs played, Naledi and Troy started dancing when going in. Half of the people there were taking videos of the

couple and dancing to the tune themselves. Troy may not be much of a dancer but Naledi grew up with this kind of music. She was going up and down and taking her tongue out in enjoyment. They danced until they reached where they were supposed to sit. It was only when they were seated that Naledi took in the decor. The black, white with a sparkle theme was out of this world. White roses, beautiful, black royal chairs and golden chandeliers filled her eyes with amazement.

Since Pepper was the MC of the wedding, he changed into his golden suit and went for the mic.

"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Mr. and Mrs Lane's wedding!"

Everyone cheered like they were in some sort of concert.

"Our lovely couple just served us some moves so we'll hold back with the dancing... for now. Now Nay and Troy's closest people will spare a word for them. The first one on the list is Mmabatho Mapulane, the bride's mother!"

People clap and music plays while Naledi's mom made her way to the front.

"I greet you all in the mighty name of Jesus." Naledi's mom says.

"Naledi (ngwanaka). This is your day. Look how beautiful you you are. I bless your marriage with Troy. I bless your union and

your children and your children's children. Troy my boy, you've done me proud. You're now my 2nd son but don't get any ideas, dare my child come to me with tears. You'll know me. Ask her. Anyway, Naledi my child. Do you see all these people in here? They may all be happy but there's always that one person who is not happy with your union. 'Love them all but trust no one', isn't that what 2Pac said Troy? Yes, I know Tupac. Bathong! Now that you are Mrs Lane, you and Troy are one. The pastor said that what God put together, let no man drive apart. Hold on to each other, pray together, fight through the storm together and get to the end of the rainbow together. If you hold each other's hands, there will be no way to penetrate your marriage. Marriage is hard, believe me it's not easy. There are things that will drive you mad and there are things that will make your love strong. It's all worth it though, when you realize that God loved you enough to bless you with a man that loves you too. I love you baby, both of you. Even if I am to be remembered by my father, I'd die a happy old woman. Your father would've been so proud. The key, my child, is to forget a 1000 reasons it won't work and believe in the 1 reason it will. Thank you." She says and gives the mic to Pepper.

Naledi suddenly stands up and goes down the two stairs to her mother. She let's go of her dress and hugs her mother with everything she has. Troy joins in and hugs both of them. Soft

music plays while they're in each other's embrace until they finally let go and take their seats again.

"Those were some powerful words darlings. I absolutely adore Naledi's mom. She has wisdom, like me. Okay ladies and gentlemen, uncle Murray is next, Troy's uncle."

Music plays yet again and the uncle advises Troy and Naledi about marriage and commitment. Seeing that he's been married 4 times, his words were definitely sentimental. Some of Naledi's relatives from her mother's side and Troy's relatives too had a seat on the programme. To everyone's shock, even Troy had something to say, but it was sweet and short. The last person to talk was Karabo.

"Thank you MC. Naledi my friend, you look exquisite. You're so beautiful and kind, you inspire me. Ever since I met you, my whole world has changed. I no longer feel alone because I have a sister by my side. Unfortunately, we cannot do things we used to, Troy is your new best friend now. However, anytime you need me, I'll be there. I... I love y-you so... m-m-much chom, I-"

She starts tearing up and unable to speak. Everyone thinks it's sweet how emotional she is for Naledi but that's not the whole truth. Thabang, being the best man, comes to the front and takes Karabo elsewhere to calm her down.

Naledi wanted to go and check on her too but Pepper assured her that her friend will be okay. Those were tears of joy.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it's now time for our bride and groom to have their first dance."

Troy holds Naledi's hand as they walk to the big space in the middle of the hall. She might be a bit shy, but she's been waiting for the dance too. 'Sentimental' by Kenny G plays and the couple sways side to side in each other's embrace.

"Ncoah!" Is what filled the hall as the guests kept looking at them dance slowly.

"Babe?" Troy whispers when the song plays half way.

"Yeah?"

"I'm gonna need you to sit down." He says.

Naledi looks at Troy and then behind her when she sees a white chair placed for her.

She raises an eyebrow but happily sits down. Troy stands in front of her and then takes off his blazer. The groomsmen stand behind Troy and take off their blazers too. Now everyone is puzzled by this, until 'Can you stand the rain' by New Edition plays.

Troy starts lip syncing the song while dancing with the groomsmen too.

Naledi blushes when she realises that they must have probably planned this at the bachelor party or something. They move so perfectly with a few intimate moves that make every lady in the hall fan themselves.

Soon after the song is done, Troy goes underneath Naledi's dress and takes out the wedding thigh band with his teeth. He then stands up and throws it for the single men to catch it. Thabang caught it then had a dance moment to everyone's amuse. Pepper says that all single ladies should line up too, the bride was about to throw her bouquet. Naledi counts to 3 then throws it over her head to the screaming ladies with their hands in the air. Kganya caught the bouquet then went to hug Naledi as a thank you for the good luck.

Naledi and Troy are told that it was time they cut the cake, and the 13-tier cake shocked everyone. Including our couple. Before anything, they all make a toast to the newly wed couple with a glass of champagne.

They both hold a knife and slice a piece for them to share. Naledi playfully smears a piece on Troy's mouth and to much enjoyment rather. Since everyone was craving to have a piece of the cake, Pepper brought out the caterers and said that it was time to indulge.

The menu for the day was:

Chicken piccata

New York strip steak

Brisket and mashed potatoes

Sunburst vegetable Medley

Yellow Rice

Macaroni salad

Prime rib sauce

Red pepper dip.

Naledi had told herself that she was too excited to eat but the food smelled so heavenly, a plate was sure to satisfy her tantalising taste buds.

The guests murmur amongst themselves while having a drink or two.

The DJ decides to turn up the excitement and started playing songs for everyone to dance to. Before everyone was to report to the dance floor, Naledi and Troy got a chance to thank the guests for coming and Pepper for an outstanding job on the wedding.

The couple joins in and they all do the electric slide. When the DJ started playing 'amapiano' songs, they took that as a signal to sneak out.

"Let me go tell Pepper quickly." Naledi says to Troy.

"Look, we're going to bounce. We're tired but Pepper, this was all beautiful. Thank you."

"No problem darling

your wedding gifts will be sent to your mother so that when y'all get back, you know where to find them. Congratulations again darling."

They hug each other before Naledi spots her mother talking to Tshedi. She goes over to their table and tells them she's leaving.

"Okay ngwanaka (my child), beautiful ceremony. Give it to him good akere ngwanaka (my child). Come back here with my grandchild."

"Ah ah ah! Ma'oulady!" Tshedi exclaims.

"Why o rasa (why are you making a noise)? You know exactly what I'm talking about." Naledi's mother says.

Naledi hugs her and Tshedi then takes Troy's hand to the rest of their lives.

~Naledi~

"A plane? Where are we going?"

"It's a surprise babe. Now buckle up." Troy chuckles.

We went back to the hotel to shower and pack our bags. I was thinking we were going back to the apartment or something. I took that a shower and was ready to sleep until he told me that we had a plane to catch. We never really discussed the honeymoon, I didn't bring it up because he had already spent so much on the wedding.

We're now in a plane with people I don't know, obviously, to God knows where.

I hold his hand as the plane takes off. It's now 20H00 so we better get to wherever we are supposed to soon. I'm so tired, I just need need a bed with warm blankets and him next to me. We keep looking at each other and our rings as if we've fallen in love all over again. That reception was so beautiful, the decor lady really knew what she was doing. I chose the decor obviously but it was nothing compared to the pictures. The pictures did no justice to what I saw. It was so beautiful, too bad that it only lasted for a day. The plane keeps going and although I tried, I fell asleep before my conscious mind was aware.

"Babe, babe wake up."

I open my eye and look at him. I sit up straight and find that we're still in the air.

"What the? It's still night time?" I ask.

I didn't even hear what the captain said, I just needed water and a bathroom.

I get back to my seat when the flight attendant tells me that we are about to land.

"I can't believe it's only a couple of minutes passed 3. It's only 3 am?" I ask as I check my phone.

"Actually, you've been asleep for 13 hours."

"What?! We've been on this plane for 13 hours? T, where exactly are we going?"

I try to look out the window but all I'm seeing is tropical trees and an ocean. Nothing else.

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The plane lands and a car pulls up in front of us at the airport.

We load our luggage and get in the car.

"You still don't know where we are?" Troy asks.

"I really don't. I've tried to look for clues but nothing. Are we in Atlanta?"

"No. It starts with a B."

"B? Bora bora?"

"No."

"Brazil?"

"No."

"Bloemfontein?"

"Really babe?"

"I know it's not the place but it's good to keep my options open."

"Ask the driver." He says with a smirk.

"Hey uhm... driver?"

"Yes madam?" He has a Jamaican accent.

"Where are we?"

"Are you telling me that you're lost?" He asks in shock.

"No no, my husband here doesn't want to tell me. I'm going to get him later. Please tell me where we are."

"Barbados of course."

"What?! Barbados?! T, you genius! I've always wanted to go to Barbados and now I'm here for my honeymoon. Thank you so much baby!!!" I squeal and hug him tightly. It may be early in the morning but I can see some of the great trees and amazing

landscapes. I cannot believe I'm in Barbados right now. This is amazing.

"You happy?" He asks.

"So happy. So very very happy."

"Then I'm happy too."

"Hi. Welcome to Bougainvillea Barbados. My name is Nikki, anything you need. You direct your queries to me okay? Now, I just had a word that this is your first time in your Barbados so... welcome! Will you be staying long?"

"Uhm... T? I think we're here for a day or two right?"

"A day or two? We're here for an entire week babe"

"Wonderful, here's the key to your room. We do hope you enjoy your stay. Your husband requested a little bucket list for things to do so we' start all that tomorrow. It's 4 am, I'm sure you're tired so settle in and enjoy your stay."

"Thank you uhm... Nikki."

"My pleasure."

As usual, we go into an elevator and look at the room number that belongs to this key number. The key is actually a card. Fancy I must say.

We find our room and we open it, there's already a TV on and a real welcome fruit basket.

"This is so beautiful." I say in awe.

"Not as beautiful as you." He says behind me.

"You know, momma gave me some advice for this."

"What's that?"

"She said that I should do whatever it is that you want me to do."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. I'm thinking of not even wearing any underwear this entire week, so that whenever you want to, you can have full access to it."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. So you wait here and I'll change real quick. Unless you're tired and would rather-"

"Been waiting for this the entire week." He says and smashes his lips on mine.

I stop him and peck his lips before winking.

"Ten minutes." I say and go in with my travel bag.

I didn't think we'd be in Barbados honestly, but where ever we were going to, I knew that I'd have to bring my A-game. I'm glad we slept on that plane. Now we have energy for... well you know.

I clean up a little and put on perfume. I take out the black lingerie and raise it up to see it a bit. I bite my lip when I think about how good I'm going to look in this.

I take off the tracksuit and put it on. The mirror in the bathroom may be small but I can see that I'm good. Good enough to eat. I let my hair lose and spray it a bit so it adds volume. I put on lipstick and decide to go barefoot this time.

I go out and the light is off but the lamps are on.

"Hey." I quietly say.

He coughs a bit and wide eyes me. That's exactly what I was looking for. I smile a bit and inch closer to him.

"Now you can have me."

Before I kiss him, I look into his travel bag behind him and see that he has weird red and purple items that I couldn't fathom.

"What's that?" I ask.

He looks behind him and then smirks.

I look through the bag and take out red fluffy cuffs and a purple blindfold. There's something else but I don't know what it is.

"Uhm... T?"

"You like?"

"I didn't know you liked it kinky."

"I wanted to marry you first before introducing you to this side of me."

"What side?"

"The side of the cuffs you're holding."

"BDSM?"

"Yeah. So? Wanna give it a try?" He asks while kissing my neck.

"I guess... uhm. It's a little scary though."

"Don't worry. We'll have a safety word."

"Safety word?"

"Yeah. Since I'll be in the driver's seat, you'll decide on a word to say when you're uncomfortable and would like me to stop. Make a word up for when you want more of what I'm doing."

"Okay. Uhm... I'll say red when you need to stop and green for when you need to go on. How about that?"

"Perfect. First order of business. Take off the lingerie."

"What?! You know how much this cost?"

"Shhh! I love it babe, I really do but I'm saying you're going to have to take it off slowly with some music on." He says and starts playing '1+1' by Beyonce.

He then sits on the corner chair and waits for me.

Since I've undressed in front of him before, it wasn't really a struggle.

The struggle was when he said I should lay on the bed and spread my legs.

I do as I'm told and then he comes over with the blindfold.

"I'm going to put this on. Remember your safety word?"

"Yeah." I say and close my legs.

"What did I say?" He asks.

"Sorry."

He puts on the blindfold and then kneels down, I know this because I lifted up the blindfold when he wasn't talking.

"Blindfold on."

"Okay."

'Okay what?'

"Uhm... okay T?"

"Ha-ah. Okay Mr Lane."

"Okay Mr Lane." I say and giggle a little.

He slaps my thigh when I giggle that I start breathing in heavily.

He goes on his knees again and starts kissing my inner thigh. I know what he's about to do and with Beyonce singing too, I might climax before he even starts.

He then stops and before I can ask, his tongue is already doing the works.

I moan a bit and bite my lower lip as he goes around and around the clit, he sucks, nibbles and licks me slowly. I reach out to grab him or grab something.

"You keep doing that and I'm going to have to cuff your hands."

"Sorry Mr Lane."

He continues licking and sucking until I was near climaxing. When he notices me breathing in heavily, he stops then I hear him unzipping his pants.

"I'm about to cuff you, I don't want any interruptions. Got it?"

"Yes."

He slaps my thigh again.

"I mean yes Mr Lane."

He cuffs my hands to the bed post then gets on top of the bed, I can't see nothing and I can't feel anything really.

Without warning, he goes in slowly. He's so hard and dry that it hurt a bit.

"Red. Red." I say.

He takes it to out then goes in again, it's a bit wet this time so I get comfortable.

He goes in and out, then in and out and in and out while sucking my erect nipples.

"Ah! Oh my gosh, T take these off, I wanna touch you."

"No."

Did he just say no? No time to think, he goes in and out slowly while groaning too.

"Green." I manage to whisper. The blindfold doesn't do any justice, I would've kept my eyes closed at how good this is anyway.

He goes a bit faster but still keeping it classic. He then stops and takes off my blindfold.

"Why'd you take it off?"

"I wanna see you as you cum." He says and carries on going in and out.

I moan and groan and bite my lower lip when my moans get too loud. I feel it coming, I feel it coming and I'm trying to wait for him.

"I'm going to cum." I say with eyes closed.

"Cum and open your eyes. I want you to see me. Now Naledi!"

I open my eyes and look at him straight in the eyes as he went in and out and in and out until... until... until I climaxed. We climaxed together.

He groans a bit then uncuffs me and tells me to bend over.

I do as I'm told and he wasted no time, he went in and out while slapping my ass whenever I moaned.

"Fuck! Sorry I'm swearing." He says.

"It's... it's fine." I manage to say.

He might've gone slow the first time but now he was roughing me up a bit.

He pounds into me before climaxing inside of me. We both pant in satisfaction and you'd think that that was over but... no.

He puts me on the carpet in front of the fire place and places a pillow under my head. He then puts my legs on his shoulders and goes in for it, when I was about to climax, he put my legs around his torso then placed a hand over my neck as he went in

and out and in and out, picking up the pace with each thrust. He fumbles with my breasts while groaning and penetrating deeper. We finally reached our climax then he leaned in for a kiss.

"I love you."

"I love you too Mr Lane."

We made love until the sun came up with Beyonce still singing in the background.

'If I ain't got nothing

I got you

If I ain't got something, I don't give a damn

Cause I got it with you

I don't know much about algebra, but I know

One plus one equals two

And it's me and you

That's all we'll have when the world is through,

Cause baby

We ain't got nothing without love

Darling, you got enough for the both of us, so

Come on baby

Make love to me

When my days look low

Pull me in close and don't let me go

Make love to me

So when the world's at war

Let our love heal us all, right now, baby

Make love to me, me, me, me, me, oh, oh

Make love to me

Hey, I don't know much about guns but I

I've been shot by you (Hey)

And I don't know when I'm gon' die but I hope

That I'm gon' die by you (Hey)

And I don't know much about fighting but I

I know I will fight for you (Hey)

And just when I ball up my fist, I realize

I'm laying right next to you, baby

We ain't got nothing but love

And darling, you got enough for the both of us

Make love to me

When my days look low

Pull me in close and don't let me go

Make love to me

So when the world's at war

Let our love heal us all, help me let down my guard

Make love to me, me, me, me, me, oh, oh

Make love to me, me, me, me, me.'

49

Two months later

"Can you believe your uncle gifted us this? What is this anyway?"

"It's a recipe book. He was a great chef."

"Your uncle Murray was a chef?"

"Yeah, that's where I learned how to cook. Whenever it was Sunday and my friends were forced to go to church and Sheryl gallivanted around, I just took my cellphone and some cash and took the bus to his house."

"These look so good. Whoo! There's a lot of butter in these."

"Yep. So to keep shape, I would go to Tory's sports invitations and run a bit. Man, I can't believe he still has this."

"Wow. This is so beautiful. I'll try and cook a few so you can experience some Deja Vu a bit. Yeah?"

"That'll be great. He was and still is the only one that truly cared about me."

"Excuse me?"

"I mean from a family's point of view."

I sigh and rub his back a bit.

"Have you heard anything from her?"

"Who?"

"You know who I mean? Sheryl."

"No. I stopped trying to learn where she was and what she was doing. Her clothing line is more important anyway."

"Baby..."

"It's okay. It's a blessing actually. Tory and I are... well we're getting there."

"I know. I saw how you two were bonding at the house warming party."

"You know you never really told me how much you liked the house." He says and opens another gift.

"You're lying. I told you I loved it. Whole reason why I said we should go 50/50."

"The house was already built babe."

"That's my only regret. Still though, I love it. It's so beautiful. My dream house."

"Anything for you."

"How did I get so lucky huh? When and what did I do to deserve you?" I ask and sit on top of him.

"All you did was breathe and I was already there." He smirks and starts kissing my neck.

"What are you doing? In my momma's house T?"

"What? We're in your old room. She-"

"Okay. Here's your tea and-" Momma stops walking with the tray in her hands when she sees that I was on top of Troy.

"Oh. Sorry momma." I ashamedly say.

"That's okay ngwanake (my child). You're married now, even if I found you two making my grandchild I was going to give you privacy."

"Momma!"

"Did I ever mention how you the best mother in law a nigga- I mean a man could ask for?" T corrects himself.

"Yes Troy. You mentioned it when you were here a month ago." Momma chuckles and puts the tray down.

"And did I also mention how much I love your scones?" He asks and takes a bite.

"Momma, he has been going on and on about your scones. He left half of the wedding gifts here on purpose." I say and fold my arms.

"And why is that honey?" Troy asks.

"So that we can come back here and get the rest so you can get more scones."

"Yes! I confess advocate! I'm guilty."

"Mxm. Momma do you see what I deal with everyday?"

"He's your husband, you don't have a choice." Momma says.

"Yes I do." I smirk and look at Troy.

"I'm not signing any divorce papers. Miracle will tear them up for me." He says and sips his tea.

Momma chuckles and looks at Uncle Murray's recipe book.

"Who gave you this?" She asks.

"Uncle Murray." I reply with a smile.

"Ao! He's a chef?"

"He was. He was also a mechanic." Troy says.

"Oh. Ntate Joe is also a mechanic." Momma says.

I instantly frown and continue unwrapping the gifts. I open one from my aunt, Kganya's mother.

Upon opening it, I see that it's traditional beads. Zulu beads. They look so pretty but because they're from her, I make a mental note to donate them or something. I'm not wearing these, I don't trust her much.

'Knock Knock!'

We both stop what we're doing and look at momma.

"Maybe it's one of Tshedi's friends. Where is Tshedi anyway? Tshedimogo!" Momma exclaims.

"Yeah yeah ma'oulady." Tshedi exclaims from his bedroom.

He's doing his grade 10 when schools open in a few days and I'm so proud. With age however, he's also become a little disrespectful. Nothing I can't handle though, besides, he's no longer causing trouble with theft or such.

"Oh. Ntate Joe. Momma is in the bedroom. Let me go get her." He says from the lounge.

My heart starts beating a bit quicker when I hear his voice. I've never really met him or had close interaction with him. Every time momma brought him up, I would try to divert the topic.

Momma looks at me then stands up from the bed and goes out the bedroom.

"You okay?" Troy asks.

"Huh? Yeah." I lie.

"You're going to have to meet him one way or another." He says.

Momma calls me out from the lounge and I already know that meant, 'come and greet the visitor'. I stand up from the carpet and dust myself off. Troy stands up too then holds my hand.

We go out the bedroom and see momma and Ntate Joe on the couch. Tshedi is busy talking to him about something. I remember when I asked Tshedi on what he thinks about Ntate Joe and his response disappointed me. He said he liked him. I didn't blame though, he never really knew papa.

"Naledi, o ke Ntate Joe (this is Ntate Joe). Joe this is Naledi, my first born and her husband Troy." Momma says.

The man takes off his hat and stands up to me.

"Oh. Naledi, star!"

"Only my dad called me star. You'll refer to me as Naledi." I firmly say.

"Oh. Tswarelo (my apologies)." He says and scratches his head.

Troy squeezes my hand.

"I'm sorry, I'm just tired. It's... it's nice to meet you Ntate Joe." I say through my gritted teeth.

"Oh. It's nice to meet you two. Congratulations again." He says.

"Thank you. Momma, we better get going. I have work tomorrow." I say and clear my throat.

I go back inside my old room and grab a bunch of unwrapped gifts to Troy's car.

"Babe, be nice." He says.

"I am being nice."

"I'm serious Naledi. If I can respect Sheryl, you can respect Joe." He says with a straight face and carries some of the gifts to the car.

We load all 40 of them and then wait outside. Momma comes out with Ntate Joe to bid us goodbye. She keeps laughing at something he's saying and I don't know how to feel about that.

"Troy do come back soon. Akere ngwanake (right my child)?"

"Yes mama. We need to help you move remember?" He says.

"Eish... I'm going to miss this RDP of mine, but I'm happy that my baby built me a house." She says and looks at me.

Yeah, it took a while because I was busy with some things but I paid the last installment for the house and the builders were done. I gifted her the house I've been saving for almost 3 years on New Year's Day. She was so ecstatic, it was worth it. I had to build the house here in Kagiso because that's her preference. It's a bit far from our RDP but closer to Tshedi's school that he doesn't have to take transport anymore. There's also a senior centre near where momma can make new friends. The house

has 3 bedrooms, two toilets, lounge, diner and a kitchen. It has a yard and space at the back if momma wants to grow some vegetation or something. I had finally achieved my life-long dream ever since papa passed on.

"You're welcome momma... again. We'll be back in a week to help you move." I say and go to hug her.

Tshedi comes out of the house and hugs me too. He's so much taller now, he's the same height as Troy and it's a bit disturbing. People are going to think he's the first born.

Ntate Joe still has his hat off. Troy shakes his hand then gets in the car to start the ignition.

"Le tsamaye hantle (travel safe)." He says and extends his hand to shake mine.

I look at it and then shake his hand back. Strange, it wasn't hard but I'm still keeping my eye on him. Momma sees that we're shaking hands then smiles at me.

I smile back and wave at them.

"There you go. Was it so hard?" Troy asks.

"No, it actually wasn't."

"Babe, all I'm saying is this is a golden opportunity. You're never going to get that chance again." He says while still keeping his eyes on the road.

"T, I've been working at that firm for a while. To just up and leave because I got another offer?"

"I know you love Jacobs and Attorneys but your boss is no saint. His poor conducting skills have been making that firm lose momentum."

"But-"

"And baby you can win as many cases as you want, but it's already tainted. Done for. Tory doesn't even work there anymore."

"I just feel like I'm leaving because I'm weak. You know? I'm leaving because the going is getting tough." I admit.

While we were in Barbados, I received a phone call and an email from another firm that was offering me a job as one of the advocates. I was even going to be part of the 'senior advocates' and although I was flattered, I told them that I'd get back to them. That was in November, today is Sunday the 9th of January and I still haven't replied to them. Troy didn't even check to see that my salary was going to increase, he just wanted me to leave Mr Cornish.

"Babe? How many firms falls under Jacobs and Attorneys?"

"Four in four different provinces."

"Exactly. The legacy of Jacob will live on still."

"But the one here in NW is the original
the one where Advocate Jacob worked in."

"Change is inevitable babe. It's a good thing." He says and stops
by a gas station.

"Think about it." He says before rolling down the window to
talk to the employee.

The female employee saw Troy's black jeep and decided to be
extra friendly towards him.

I just browse around Facebook and watch trending videos.

Soon after, we were on the road again. Looking at a fur coat
reminded me of something.

"T, since you decided to give me something... something huge
as a wedding present like a HOUSE! I decided to give you
something too." I say.

"What? What is it? Is it that black number you wore in
Barbados?" He smirks.

"No. It's something small. Just stop at that primary school
there." I point.

He raises an eyebrow then parks his car near the school.

"I'll be back in a minute." I say and cross the street to the shop.

"Hi, I'm back and I think it's time I took him home now." I say to the shop owner.

"You're one lucky woman, they don't usually last long. Congratulations!" He says and puts him in a box full of holes so he could breathe.

"Thank you. You sure you don't want anything in return? Cash or?"

"Ek is reg (I'm okay)." He says.

I nod then cross the street to the jeep again.

I get in with the box.

"Okay. We can go now." I say.

"Uhm..."

"I'll show you at the house." I say.

He drives on while still looking at the box as it keeps moving and making sounds.

He's going to love it.

.

We finally arrive. Let me tell you about the house, unlike mom's, this one has 4 bedrooms. It has an upstairs and a balcony with a black glass. The entire house is painted dark brown with a pinch of black on the window frames, garage doors and gate. It has an attic instead of a basement, a pool and two bathrooms. I'm not into gardening so it's entirely brown and maroon paved. There's already a tree that looks like a Christmas tree anyway. Two garages, one for my car and one for his. I like how not extravagant it is, but still quite classy. I also love how I don't live near Nancy now, she's become quite a difficult person to talk to. Here, there's friendly white neighbours and a few black families too. I'll always love our apartment though.

"Okay, we're here. Now what's in that box?" He asks.

"Go stand outside and I'll show you." I say.

He sighs then goes out the car and stands at the big space in front of the door.

I bite my lower lip in excitement and get out of the car too.

I stand a few feet from him and put the box down.

"T, I'd like you to meet Pumpkin." I say and open the lid of the box.

The puppy pries out of the box and attempts to get out.

"What? A dog?" He asks and comes over to me.

"You don't like it?" I ask in disappointment.

"What? I love it! You're asking an animal lover if he likes dog or not?" He asks and picks it up.

"Right. I wanted to make our house more... messy." I say and fluff his head a bit.

"What did you say his name was?" He asks as it licks his fingers and tries to bite them.

"Pumpkin. He's orange."

"No he's not."

"Well, almost orange."

"Yeah, he's a golden retriever. Welcome to the family pumpkin." He says with a chuckle.

"Babe, please tell me you thought about it." He says and pours me juice into a glass.

"Uhm... well-"

"Nay."

"I thought about it."

"And? You do know that the deal ends on the 15th right? They gave you extra time actually. If you don't take the job, they'll give it to someone else."

"I know, I know. How would I even break the news to Mr Cornish?"

"He'll understand. His big gut has all the understanding you need."

"T! Anyway, I just can't bring myself to it. I'll think about it some more. Please give me time."

"Don't tell me that, tell the firm." He says.

He goes over to the box where Pumpkin slept in and puts a water bowl in front of him. He gets up and drinks, making a mess in the wooden floor.

"I think I'm gon' like you boy-boy." He says and rubs his head. The puppy tries to walk but it keeps slipping and falling. It's so cute how its trying walk and not slip. It yelps in front of me and I already know it wants me to pick it up.

"Maybe later okay boo-boo. Bye!" I exclaimed to the both of them and grab my bag and water bottle. I bought a new bottle as commemoration for the new house.

I park my car and turn off the radio when the weird radio presenter starts talking. You know the loove doctor? To this day, I still listen to him though. His odd theories about this planet make my morning.

I get out the car and see police tape and two ambulances at the entrance. I show my card and go through to the reception where everyone is shook and some employees are crying. I go over to Rivonia who's face down on her desk.

"Rivonia? What's going on here?" I ask.

"They're back. After so long, they're actually back." She says with sadness.

"Who's back?"

"The reverend's murderers."

"What?!" I manage to say while taking in deep breaths. I already know what this means. Someone has died.

"Who's gone?" I ask.

"Rea."

"Rea?! Realeboga Goapele? The advocate?"

"Yeah. She came in early and since we thought the murderers were done. We stopped appointing bodyguards. She had a message and I went to her office to deliver it. That's when I

found her on the desk, her blouse ripped off and her chest stabbed multiple times."

"What? No Rivonia. No!"

"You know I didn't really like her. You know because how she treated you, but for her to die? Like that?"

"I'm so sorry. I know you worked with her for long. Oh my gosh."

"Will these murderers ever quit?"

"Wait, how'd you know it's 'murderers' not 'murderer'? It was never disclosed to anyone?"

She looks at me and says nothing. Just as she was about to talk, Mutsa comes out of Rea's office while removing white gloves.

"Oh. Mrs Lane, you're here at an unfortunate time." She says and gives the gloves to some police officer.

"Mutsa. What is really going on here? Where is Mr Cornish?"

"Mr Cornish has been taken down to the station. When he found out that Rea was dead, he was completely hysterical. He kept yelling for 'his baby' and we initially thought he was having an affair with Rea."

"Yeah?"

"He was yelling about a baby because Realeboga was pregnant. Three months pregnant. The medical team checked it out."

"What?!"

"Yeah. So she and Mr Cornish must've been... busy. It's pretty gruesome in there."

"Mutsa, there has to be something though. Look look, we have CCTV. Can't you look into that?"

"The camera's are busted."

"Why would the serial killer attack her? The case has been cold since it was a dead end and Rea wasn't working on it anymore?"

"I... don't know." She says and pulls down the sleeves of her blazer.

"Anything else?"

"Well, I will tell you one thing though, she definitely put up a fight. There's files scattered everywhere and usually the killer would stab the victim clean cuts like they are taking their time. This time, the cuts were uneven and it was like they were in a hurry or to just kill her fast."

"Oh my gosh." I gasp and put my hand over my mouth.

"Yeah. There's one more thing, the glass window in her office is funny. It looks like it was broken from the inside and not the outside. Her putting up a fight must've sparked alarm or something. To remove DNA, they stripped her shirt away and she was bare. I'm guessing she must've scratched the killer too."

"Why do you say that?"

"Obviously if she scratched the killer then their skin cells would be left under Realeboga's finger nails. So to make sure, they cut off all her 10 fingers clean. No fingers anywhere, no witnesses, no weapon. The lamp they used to break the window has no fingerprints."

"Ah."

"The window scene is still mysterious to me because if the killer went in through the window then the broken glasses would've been inside her office not outside."

"What does this mean?"

"It means that for the killer to get in, they must've been let in. They must've passed through this reception and went directly in Rea's office."

We both look at Rivonia who suddenly wide eyes us. She shifts in her seat and starts sweating profusely.

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"How many times should I tell you, I didn't see anyone!"

"Then why did you look so guilty huh? How do you know there's more than one murderer?"

"Because I overheard Rea talking about it. She was getting frustrated about the killers and me being a nosey person I asked her what she was talking about."

"And?"

"And she told me that she just had word from you yourself that there was more than one person when the Reverend was killed."

"I don't believe you. What time did you get to work?"

"07H00."

"You're telling me that you saw no one and heard nothing?"

"Like I said, she came in early that's why. The killer was probably done by the time I got there."

"Can you think of anyone else that would've done this to her?"

"No. Well, she was not liked by many so that's an open field on its own."

"Are you prepared to take a lie detector test?"

"Yes. By all means detective Mutsa. Anything to make you believe me that I had nothing to do with Rea's death!"

Detective Mutsa grabs her file and storms out of the interrogation room. I and a couple of police officials have been watching Mutsa grill Rivonia with difficult questions for an hour now. I think she's telling the truth though, she's had no slip up and the security guard told us that she did arrive at work around 7 am. Funny how he didn't see the killer.

"Hey. I... uhm. I gotta go. Mr Cornish's PA just told me that he wishes to talk to me." I tell Mutsa.

"Alright. Sorry but I had to ask you questions too."

"Oh it's fine. You weren't as brutal as you were with Rivonia back there."

"She's not barging and it's true what they say: the truth sounds insane. Now I need to tackle that security guard."

"Well, good luck. What's going to happen to this case now?"

"It's still a dead end because there's no new leads. Just another body count, but I've been assigned to it again."

"Please be careful Mutsa. Please."

"Don't worry, I can take care of myself." She says and pats the gun on her hip.

I nod and go out of the building to my car. This is a disaster. I've been trying so hard to not be in 'detective mode' and start investigating. I can't go back there. This killer is just playing with us now, and when they do that, someone's life is taken away. I always knew that Rea and Mr Cornish were sneaking around even though he was married, but her being pregnant? That's news to me.

If Troy found out that I'm back on this case, he would literally freak. To think that I was excited for work, excited that I'm getting a new case and then this pops up. I don't even know why Mr Cornish wants to speak to me. All I know, is that my future with this firm is hanging by a thin thread.

"Hi. Mr Cornish wished to speak to me?" I ask her.

"Go right in. He's been waiting for you." The PA says.

I nod and grab my handbag inside his enormous office. I find him sitting down with his chair facing me.

"Mr Cornish?" I ask.

He turns in his seat to look at me and his eyes are so scary. They're completely bloodshot like he's been crying.

"Sit down Naledi." He says.

It's the first time he calls me by my name. Odd. However, I smile and take a seat.

"How are you?" He asks.

"Uhm... I've been better. You sir?"

"Oh great."

I fiddle with my fingers and keep quiet.

"You always knew no?"

"Knew what sir?"

"About me and Re- about me and her?"

"Yes sir. I knew well I had my suspicions but..."

"Yeah. I knew you knew. I had to try by all means to make you keep quiet or not leave. New cases, increased salary, extended holidays."

"I would've said nothing even if you didn't offer all those things. I would've stayed still."

"Well, my wife isn't staying." He says and rubs his forehead.

"Sir?"

"She found out that I impregnated a girl old enough to be my daughter and told me that divorce is inevitable."

"What?"

"Yeah. I think she's mostly afraid that this killer would come after her or our kids. Even though they're practically adults now."

"I'm... I'm so sorry sir. Even though you deserve being divorced, I'm sorry nonetheless of the child Rea was carrying."

He chuckles and looks at me.

"Straight talker. That's what I've always liked about you Naledi. I didn't bring you here to talk about my personal life. People are resigning advocate, I'm under investigation, an employee is dead and this firm is going downhill. Exponentially so. I need to know something, you're not thinking of resigning no?"

I smack my lips together and decide to tell him.

"Sir... I received an offer while I was on my honeymoon. Black Gowns Firm."

"Black Gowns? Our rival?"

"Your rival sir. They offered me a job and... I'm going to take it."

"What? Is it because I took you off the Reverend's case? It is no? You can go back on it. The case is under investigation again. Please don't leave."

"Sir, had they asked me years ago, I would've declined and stayed here. You know I love the thrill of danger, but now I'm married sir. I have a better half to think about. Staying here on

its own is risky. It's not about the money or the cases, it's about safety. Look how you're so stressed that your wife is leaving, imagine my husband if he found out that I'm dead. Another statistic?"

"So you're leaving no?"

"I am sir. It's closer to my home and I won't have anything to do with the reverend. I'm sorry sir."

"It's okay advocate. I understand, you're young and you're powerful."

"Powerful sir?"

"Yes. Your law skills are quite pleasing. They're lucky to have you."

"Thank you sir. Maybe you should be as honest as you are right now with your wife. Do what's best for your family."

"And what's that advocate?"

"Quit." I say and stand up to leave.

"K-baby, maybe tomorrow okay?"

"What's wrong? I thought you liked spending time with us."

"Believe me, I'd like to see baby Obi again but I just had a rough day. One of my employees is dead and I just resigned."

"Jacobs and Attorneys?"

"Yeah. I got a better job offer at Black Gowns."

"Wow. That's amazing, that firm is huge! I'm a client there myself."

"Yeah. It was our biggest rival."

"Don't worry. Mr Cornish will understand."

"There's so much more I need to tell you but I just got back from the interview."

"Interview same day?!"

"Well, I had already gotten the job, I was just needed there for formality and so that they could see me personally."

"Did you have to sign a contract?"

"Yeah. I read it and I signed it. Pretty straightforward that's why I signed it on the spot. I'm starting tomorrow since I'm already late and everyone is at work."

"Well, good luck with that. Me and Obi are proud of you."

"Maybe you should try applying too, not for work but to socialize. Who knows? You might meet Mr Right." I smirk.

"I'm sick of men! All they know is to take and take!"

"Whoa! Calm down Karabo, are you okay?"

"Sorry, I gotta go. Congrats again."

"Thanks b-"

She hangs up before I can finish speaking. Something has been seriously bothering her and I don't know what it is. I've been trying to spend time with her and Obitshepo so that I could ask her what's wrong, but she'd brush me off every single time. Maybe she and Thabang fought about something, I don't know. I just pray that she overcomes it, for the sake of her child.

"Babe, guess what?"

"What?"

"A giraffe and an elephant gave birth yesterday. At the same time. Damn, I'm so happy. The new addition is exactly what we needed."

What's going to happen to Mr Cornish? The firm? Some Amazing advocates are still there but for how long?

"Babe? Babe? Are you listening?" He asks.

"Huh? Sorry T, my mind is just somewhere."

"Where is it?"

"Where's what?"

"Your mind."

"What are you talking about?"

"Okay. What's really going on?"

I sigh and put my bowl of cereal down. I don't usually eat breakfast anyway.

"I'm worried about the firm." I admit.

"This again. Stop worrying Nay, they'll be fine."

"But-"

"You did a great thing resigning with immediate effect. Your colleague died!"

"I know. My promise to Emmarentia will forever haunt me though."

"I know who can cheer you up." He says and picks up Pumpkin to put him on the kitchen counter.

He starts sniffing me and cuddling closer.

"My suit cannot handle your fur sweetie." I say and rub his head a bit.

My ears cannot handle his whining either. Last night he was whining and groaning to get in our room. We watched a movie together

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even shared a yoghurt with him, but once it was time to sleep, he went off!

"Sorry we left you outside buddy." Troy says to it.

"It's not like we left it outside the house, it was just outside our bedroom."

"How about it sleeps in our room today? What do you say buddy?" He asks and pats it's head. It jumps up and down in joy as if it understands a single word.

"No T, who will wash the blankets covered in fur?"

"Come on Nay. Please." He says and goes behind me.

"No."

"Please?" He starts nibbling my ear. Dang it! He knows this is a turn on.

"N-no."

"Please..."

"Okay fine! But if he messes up-"

"I'll clean it up." He finishes my statement.

"I got to go to work. See you later." I say and get up.

"Let me drop you off. It's your first day on the job anyway."

"Oh yeah? And how will I get home without my car?"

"I'll pick you up. Your firm is not that far from the reserve. That's why you're leaving the same time as I am."

"Fine. Wait, what about Pumpkin? Did we leave him alone yesterday?"

"Nah, I went to work with him."

"Oh."

I grab my handbag while T picks up Pumpkin to his car. I'm starting the new job today and I've got to say, I'm a bit nervous. Not because of the job, but because I'm thinking I might meet really bad people. Every workplace has those people that no one really likes and it starts making everything difficult to do. You're even lazy to start a conversation or interact with them because you know that hate will be spilling out of their mouths.

"Ready?" He asks.

I buckle my seat belt and smile.

"I'm ready."

"Call me 20 minutes before you knock off! I love you!"

"I love you too." I exclaim back as his Jeep drives off.

Married for 2 months and we're still in the honeymoon phase, I hope we never fall out of it.

I look at the tall, tall, tall building behind me and inhale anxiety. It's bigger than the one at my last firm. There's even valet parking. It's odd but it's here. What brings out my anxiety even more, is the amount of white people going in and out of the building with tuxedo's on. Back then I was a big fish in a small pond, now I'm a small fish in a whole ocean. I breathe in, out, then go inside.

"Hi, I'm-"

"Advocate Lane right? Welcome to Black Gowns Inc. My name is Melissa, just so you know. Your office is upstairs, 4th floor. Just look for your name engraved on the glass door and you'll know." She ecstatically says. She's a white woman, mid-20s. Blonde hair and a classy, black dress on her. She's slim and averaged height.

"My name is already on a glass door?" I ask, perplexed.

"Of course! How else are clients supposed to know your office. By the way, I sent you an e-mail a few minutes ago about your case okay?"

"An e-mail? You don't have folders?"

"We only have folders if the case is important or by a major client. Otherwise, e-mail it is."

"Oh."

"We're so happy you're on board, last night we received a client that specifically required your legal expertise about their case."

"Oh, who is it?"

"Everything you need to know is in the e-mail. We're expecting them to come in soon."

She smiles, widely smiles that it turns a bit creepy how her smile can be so big. I awkwardly smile back and take an elevator to the 4th floor.

People keep staring at me as I make my way to the elevator, probably because I'm the new girl around and they're trying to interpret my personality. Sorry fellas, I'm a mean-spirited woman when I'm at work.

I look around that I end up at the else of the hall. Did I miss it? I walk and keep reading the names on each door again until I found mine. There's only like 4 offices here, how did I miss this?

Anyway, I find mine and open the glass door. Glass table, glass background overlooking the city and a leathery office chair. This office is the size of Mr Cornish's office! It's huge! I don't even know if this is an office or an apartment.

Nonetheless, it looks great that I start customizing it with framed photos of Troy and I and some textbooks I still use. No vase so I'm going to have to make a plan about that. Flowers are a must in an office.

I sit down and switch on my computer. I take out a note beneath the keyboard about how to log in and set up my password and such. Is this what it feels like to be a senior advocate? I like it already. Before I can check my emails, Melissa knocks on the door.

"Hi again, I see you're already settling in. Sorry for not properly introducing you and showing you around, everyone's busy at this time of year you know?"

"It's okay, I understand. There's a map about the entire building anyway, I'll go on a tour at lunch."

"Great. Did you check your e-mail?" She asks.

"No, I was about to."

"Well, your client is already here so you might as well just leave it." She says with that wide smile again.

"Okay, call them in." I order. It felt good saying that.

"Wonderful. Come in ma'am. She's ready for you." She says to the person outside.

"Okay."

I can't really see who it is but I think I recognized that voice. That voice sounded familiar. All too familiar.

To my dismay, Karabo walks in with a hood over her hair and a bag clutched to her chest.

I open my mouth to talk but no words come out. What in the world is she doing here? She's my very first client? I hope she's not trying to sue Thabang or something.

"Let me know if you need anything." Melissa says and goes out the office.

Karabo sits down and takes off the hoodie. Her eyes are red and puffy, like she's been crying.

"Karabo?"

"I should've told you sooner but... I was scared. I'm ready now. I need your help." "Is it Thabang?" "No, it's Bandile."

"Bandile?!"

"Yeah. When Pepper and I went back to the club to go talk to the bartender. He was already there. Pepper was busy with the bartender so I was all alone. One thing led to another and he..."

"He what?"

"Naledi, Bandile raped me."

"Naledi! Talk! You've been quiet for a while... please."

I blink a few times before taking a big gulp of water down my throat. I clear my throat and start fanning myself, is it getting hot in here?

"Karabo, w... when in the... how... why did you... what?"

"I know he's your friend, but I really need you on this case. You're the only one I trust to win this for me and you're the only I've told so far."

"I'll take on your case. I will." I say.

She smiles a bit and reveals her pearly whites.

"But Karabo..."

"But you don't believe me, right?" She asks with a frown.

"I was going to ask why you didn't tell me sooner? Why didn't you tell me the next day or called anyone of us immediately?"

"He threatened to kill my baby if I did."

"How did he know about Obitshepo?"

"I... I told him."

I sit back on my seat and smack my lips several times. This... this is going to be difficult. That good-for-nothing, rat! Laying

his hands on my friend. Bandile! Raping?! Is this even reality? Am I dreaming? How could he do this? Of all the girlfriends he has, he chose to lay with a woman forcefully so. I look at Karabo and my heart bleeds for her. This was one thing I never could've been prepared for. However, all of hell would break loose before I decline defending Karabo. I will defend her until the sorry excuse of a man named Bandile, has his first meal in prison.

"I will take on this case Karabo. Okay? I will try and I will do everything in me to make sure you get the justice you deserve. Okay?"

She nods and wipes a tear from her eye.

"We can start right now but if you're not ready to talk-"

"No I am. I don't want to leave out anything."

"Okay. First order of business, what happened?"

"Shoot! Okay, like I said before, Pepper and I went back to the strip club because you remember the bartender said he should come after hours?"

"I remember."

"Yeah. It was around... 4 in the morning I think when the club was still going strong but most of the people were next-door"

"Nextdoor?"

"Yeah. It's a very private area, the bartender said that most celebrities liked it there because of the privacy."

"Alright." I say and write some notes down.

"Then we found the bartender knocking off. He had on his casual clothing. Another bartender came in and we ordered more drinks. I started getting bored when they were talking about their interests and I was just third wheeling so I went to the couch we were sitting on. I saw a guy there drinking alone and I thought I should join him. He has his back against me so I didn't see who it was. I hugged him from behind and whispered if he needed any company. When he turned his head, that's when I saw that it was Bandile. I apologized but he insisted I sit with him since he was bored and stressed like I was. I sat down and we ordered more drinks. Talking about our lives and such. That's when he told me that he was in love with you but you declined him. It was funny because I knew that you most definitely going to decline him. You were on your bachelorette party. Anyway, that's when I told him about my baby daddy issues and Obi and how my life is stuck. While we were talking, Pepper said that things between him and the bartender were getting heated so he was going to his place. I warned him but he said that he was fine and that he ordered an Uber for me. Bandile suggested we take our little party to the club next door and get something stronger. I had no idea he

was talking about cocaine but I went there anyway. It was more lively there. I saw some Nigerian actress there too. She was getting a lap dance and I figured it must be her bachelorette party too. We sat down, got more drinks and listened to the music. He said I should follow him he wanted to show me something. Being a bit tipsy and looking for more company, I followed him upstairs. There were rooms."

"Rooms?"

"Yeah like we were in the middle of a long hallway and there were like 10 rooms with the doors closed and such. He opened one of them and got in and said that I should get in too. There was a bed and some curtains. That's all. I started getting a bad feeling about it, I knew he wanted to sleep with me so I told him I was scared. He then called out some guy and said that he's looking for powder. The guy couldn't understand what he was saying as Bandile kept throwing in a few Zulu words there. He got his phone and called this other girl to ask what's the powder that makes you high and feeling relaxed. The girl told him it was cocaine then he hung up. He told the guy then the guy took out a pack and said that it was a 100 Shillings (currency in Kenya) for it. Bandile paid then told me to inhale it so that I could relax. He went first then told me to do second. I said no then he called me chicken and made fun of me. So I took it."

"Karabo."

"I know. But I did and it was my first time. I felt like my head was spinning and my weight was off or something, like I was really light. Floating maybe. He then pinned me on the bed and told me that he drank a pill and he... he wanted me to satisfy him. I told him no and to let me go but he... he didn't listen. He took advantage of me being dizzy and weak from the drug. He lifted my dress and pulled my panties then he... he said that I should suck his..."

She starts crying so I hand her some tissues to wipe.

"Thanks. He said I should suck his thing and he might not sleep with me. I did it. I did it and I was disgusted but better that than him forcing me to sleep with him. After he... was relieved, he raped me. I tried to fight him and I told him he promised not to do it if I sucked but he just kept going. I tried to scream and ask for help, I was laughing and crying out but all rooms were occupied. There were moans and groans coming from both rooms next to ours. It was an inn for prostitution! Some passed our open door with money in their breasts like they didn't hear me. One of them even laughed and said I must be new to this. Then walked away. He continued penetrating until he stopped and got off me. He said I should pack my stuff and leave before he calls his other friends to 'have a taste'. That's when he threatened to kill Obi if I said a word to him. He said he knows

my address so I shouldn't even try. I was hurt, crying and weak still. He then called the girl again and told her that he just raped one of 'Naledi's' friends. The girl was laughing on the phone and told him that he's crazy and that Bandile should give her my numbers so that she could have a great time too."

"What's the name of this girl?" I ask.

"I don't know. I keep forgetting the name because it's weird, but I wrote it down on my diary. I'll tell you."

"Then what happened?"

"Then I fixed my dress and left in a split second. I bumped into this other guy and he asked if I was okay or not. Just him touching me made me scream and cause a scene. I didn't care. I just needed to get out of there. That's when I took the Uber Pepper ordered for me back to the hotel. I wasn't even tired. I was wide awake. I kept crying... and thinking about... the entire thing and... I decided that I don't want to risk losing Obi. So when I was ready, I would press charges and make sure he gets locked up!"

"Where's the dress you wore?"

"Back at my place."

"Did you wash it?"

"No."

"Good. Did you go to the hospital?"

"No. I should've right?"

"Well, yes. A report from the doctor saying that you were forcefully penetrated and Bandile's semen would've made the case watertight but now..."

She leans down her head and starts crying again.

"Hey. It's going to be okay. Okay? I'm going to need that dress neh? Put it in a sealable plastic bag so that I can send it to a lab."

"Okay. Anything else?"

"I'll alert Mutsa to go have a word with Bandile and tell him that we're taking him to court."

"But-"

"And I'll make sure you and Obi are under protection from him. If anything happens to y'all, he'll be the first suspect. Black Gowns will have to organize a date for us to appear in court and present our problem. The magistrate will give us a date and that's where the patties will start grilling. Will you able to get on the stand?" I ask.

"Whatever it takes Naledi. Whatever."

Okay. So Bandile is a scumbag that's for sure. I actually thought he was going to take advantage of me that night I was in his car. I'll be my own strength. She mentioned a girl? A pill? She didn't go to the Kenyan police so it's useless. That club next door needs to be investigated. There could be more girls who were taken advantage of and the more the merrier. Not really, but it will definitely bring attention to Bandile's character.

Alright. I guess I'd better get to work.

"Hey babe. What's wrong?" T asks when I get in the house and throw myself on the couch.

I sit up right and let my braids lose. Maybe my head is just overheating and it needs air.

"Baby?!" He asks again with Pumpkin in his hands. He's been babying it since it came here and it's so adorable.

"T. I just had a rough day at work."

"Wanna talk about it?" He asks.

If I tell him, I would have to tell him about Bandile and the last thing I want to do is make him lose trust in me.

"No babe. Its fine. Nothing I can't handle." I smile and hold his chin.

"You're tense." He says and looks at me.

"Just tired. Let me go change and start dinner." I say with a huff.

"No. No, let's go out instead. Let someone else cook for us."

"Really?" I ask with a grin.

"Yeah let's go. Unless you're tired and would rather take a nap and then eat cereal, I mean I just got back from work too so--"

"No! I want to. I'm not that tired you know?" I say and get up to go change.

"Please don't take an hour like before. Twenty minutes and I'm leaving with whoever and whatever is in that Jeep!" He exclaims from the lounge.

I roll my eyes and I know he knows I've probably done that. I don't take that much time, do I?

"By the way, where are we going?!" I ask from the bedroom.

"To a restaurant!" He exclaims.

I roll my eyes again and chuckle.

"Don't you dare roll your eyes!" He exclaims again.

Told you. I settle on a high waist jean and my oversized, pink hoodie. All-Star shoes and tie my hair upright. I grab my phone and some cash and shove them in my pocket.

I go out and find him dressed in casual too. Good. I'm not all about fancy dining and such, atleast not today. Besides clouds are starting to cover up and that's an indication that it might rain.

"Shall we go?" I ask.

"Yeah. You look comfortable."

"Thank you.... I guess."

"Take it as a compliment."

"I am. Wait, what about Pumpkin?" I ask.

We both look at Pumpkin who's sitting on the wooden floor just staring back at us.

"Don't worry, they allow dogs where we're going." He says.

"They do?"

"Yeah. There's a section where pets hang out, that's why I bought him that collar."

"Okay. Let's go."

"I'm back." He says and takes a seat opposite me.

I keep looking over at the pet section to make sure he doesn't exit and wonder off.

"He'll be fine." He says.

"I know." I say and look at my phone.

I guess I'm just waiting for Karabo's phone call. I'm glad that she said Obitshepo is spending a lot of time with Thabang. He'll be even more safe with Thabang. That's where Obi has been living, she just told him that she needed to sort out something's then she'll take Obi back. I know that Thabang doesn't mind anyway, he may be an idiot but he's a loving father.

"Hello? Earth to Naledi?" He says and waves his hand in front of me.

"Sorry. I'm sorry. Here." I say and put my phone down.

"Good."

"Argh! When are we getting our food? I'm starving."

"In a minute. Drink my water." He says.

"Why would I drink your water?"

"You always want what ever I put in my mouth. Pretty sure you're going to want to eat my food too."

"No! I don't do that."

"Hmm."

"Anyway, how's the new addition to the AMA family?"

"Huh?"

"The newborn elephant and giraffe?"

"Oh. You were listening?"

"Yes I was. I'm always listening, like how you talk in your sleep after a long day of work."

"I don't sleep talk, you do." He says.

"Whatever. Now the babies?" I ask with a smile.

"We took them to the vet, make sure they get everything they need. Then we took them back to their parents. That elephant nearly trampled us when we took her baby." He chuckles.

"What?!"

"Don't worry, we do it safely. We don't want to be on the end stick of some angry elephant. She'd trample down the entire reserve in an hour."

"And then you say my job is risky."

"People are unpredictable babe. Whole reason why I love working with animals instead."

"True that."

"And another thing-"

"Shhh! Our food is coming." I say and wait for the waiter to bring our food.

"Here you go. Enjoy." He says and walks away.

I look at my plate and my taste buds are already jumping for joy. The ribs, sauce, fries, onion rings... whoo!

I pick up my fork and knife and as I'm about to start slicing, he interrupts me.

"Aren't you going to pray?" He asks and takes a bite of a fry.

"Oh, yeah." I say a silent prayer and then open my eyes.

I find Troy nearly halfway through his meal.

"T, that's not fair." I say with a pout.

"A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do." He says with a mouthful.

I chuckle and dig in. This is going to be so good.

"Thank you." I say to the waiter.

Troy stands up and I follow him to the pet area to get Pumpkin. We then head outside and that's when the rain decided to bless our Earth. Heavy rain.

"Are you kidding me right now?" I ask.

"The car isn't that far." He says.

I put on my hood and look at Pumpkin.

"T. He's already shivering." I say.

"We'll heat him up when we get back."

I grab Pumpkin and put him inside my sweater. It's oversized anyway.

"This is cute." He says with a smirk.

"He's breaking my heart when he's just shivering like that."

I put him inside and make sure he can breathe. He's still shivering even inside the sweater.

"Okay you ready?" He asks.

I nod then we exit the restaurant and start brisk walking through the rain to the car. We would've ran but Pumpkin is a heavy puppy, I'm not jogging no thank you.

People are also trying to get to their cars and some are trying to get back in the mall to seek shelter.

We get in the car, and to say that we were wet would be an understatement. We were soaking wet for just being under the rain a few seconds.

We begin laughing at how silly this whole situation is. Even Pumpkin peeked out my sweater and began licking my face.

"Argh! Pumpkin." I say in disgust.

"That's his way of saying thank you."

We get back to the house and Troy and I take a steamy shower so that we don't catch a cold. We laid out Pumpkin on his dog bed in the lounge and switched on the heater.

Troy and I dress in our comfortable clothing. My phone rings on the bed and I tell T to go downstairs and check on Pumpkin. That dog is so naughty, it has probably already ripped out or scratched the couch. I also needed him to leave so that I can talk to Karabo freely.

He goes out then I close the bedroom door and answer the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hey."

"K-baby. Are you okay?"

"Thought I'd give you time to reach home before I called."

"Oh. What's up?"

"Been going through my diary. Thank goodness Obi is at Thabang so that I could have the time."

"Oh come on, Obi is not that bad."

"Iyoh! He's such high maintenance that one. Always wants himself on my lap. Anyway I found the name of the girl Bandile called that night." She says.

"Okay. Give me a second let me get my notebook. Okay go ahead."

"Okay. It's an odd make really but it's... Blandina. Someone named Blandina."

"What did you just say?"

"Blandina. Does the name ring a bell to you?"

"As a matter of fact, it does. We need to meet up tomorrow again. We need to talk some more."

"Okay. What time?"

"11H00."

"I'll be there."

"Be safe. Bye." I hang up and breathe out. I'm not even going to start pulling out theories. I need a clear head for tomorrow.

I put down my notebook and sigh in frustration. Okay. Calm down. Mutsa has probably figured it out before I have. I look through Facebook when I keep getting notifications from the app.

I gasp when I look at the trending post of Troy and I brisk walking in the rain. Why would people capture such a horrifying picture? I look at the caption and giggle to myself. They think I'm pregnant? What a joke! I would think I was pregnant too. The angle at which the person took me holding my stomach that's definitely noticeable is suspicious. It looks like I'm 9 months pregnant. Told you Pumpkin was thick. I look at the comments section and laugh a bit when people keep congratulating my 'apparent pregnancy' and some saying that we are their favourite couple. I'm not even a celebrity! This is so bad it's good. I go downstairs so that Troy and I can laugh at the rumour that's being spread around about us.

I find him pacing up and down with a phone on his ear.

"What's going on?" I ask.

He comes closer to me and calls Thabang. When it goes to voicemail, he calls him again. Thabang answers on the 3rd ring.

"Boss man?"

"Thabang? What's going on my man? Why is Oscar panicking?"

"Eish... boss man, I can't talk right now. Obitshepo is in the hospital."

~Sheryl~

No! NOOO! NO! SHIT! NO NO NO! NOOOOO! Look, I can handle sugar taking my man, sleeping with my man, even marrying my man... but being pregnant for him?! No! No! That's what I was supposed to do! I was the one that was supposed to be carrying his baby. Now this picture of sugar heavily pregnant is driving me nuts. No! I wanted to shoot her, Lord knows I wanted to. Then it occurred to me that sugar would be dead and I'd be in jail with the amount of security that was around. My dream of being with Troy would come crashing down. So I took a breather and went back home, I knew it was useless going there anyway. Now? Now I'm mad! A baby is where I draw the line! No! I will tie Troy up myself and have my way with him.

I unlock my phone and book a plane ticket to South Africa. Usually I chicken out, but this time? This time I'm there to stay! Troy is mine. Mine! If I have to kill her and that thing in her, I'll do it without thinking twice. Even Tory won't stand in my way. Acting holier than thou and blocking me to show his loyalty to Troy. He knows damn well that I saved him from going to jail. If sugar found out that he was one of the rogue navvies that was the dead Reverend's bodyguards, she'd definitely question him. He even knew about the fake prophecies and fake miracles. He went all over the world with these. Who knows what else he's done for the Reverend. Money made him stay, and now that he's bonded with his brother for 2 seconds he thinks he can just throw me on the side. Rubbish!

Fate must not even think of stopping me, it'd better ask somebody. It better ask my husband how he ended up when he told me what to do. It don't know me like that. I'm Sheryl Lane, the fresh bad bitch!

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~Naledi~

"What exactly is going on? My client is worried sick about her child. Start talking." I say to the doctor.

He starts shaking when Troy gives him the devil look.

"Uhm... well, nothing." He says.

Troy and I look at each other then back at him.

"Well, something it's just that... uhm ma'am, your husband is making me nervous." He says to me.

Even in this scary situation, I still find the strength to chuckle.

"May you get you and I some coffee T?" I smile at him.

He kisses me like he's making a statement then leaves. Heck, I was shocked myself.

"Talk."

"Obitshepo just had a mild fever. It's summer now and so this is very much common. The father said that he was with a friend and Obitshepo inside the house with the windows closed and no fan. While their bodies can regulate heat, Obitshepo couldn't. He is okay now but I will keep him overnight for observation."

"That's all?"

"Yes."

"Okay. Thank you doctor." I say.

He smiles then frowns and starts walking away. I look behind me and see that Troy was coming back with two cups of coffee.

"Hey." He says.

"Hey. Thanks. "

"So what did he say?"

"Mild fever."

"Thabang really loves drama. Why was he so jumpy? Talking about death and such?"

"That's his child. You'll understand."

"What do you mean by that?" He smiles. Is that his way of saying he'd be excited if I was pregnant?

"I'm saying there's already a rumour being spread around that I'm pregnant." I say and show him the Facebook post.

"Why would people think- oh, I see it now. Pumpkin."

"Yep." I chuckle.

"This is funny." He says with a straight face.

"I know right? I kept thinking about us and how people are treating us like we're a celebrity couple. Eh."

Thabang goes out of the hospital room Obitshepo is in and walks towards us.

"Boss man. Boss lady."

"Thabang it's okay. Obitshepo is awake now and he's giggling in there. It was a mild fever." I reassure him.

"I was just worried boss lady. Karabo lena (herself) has been acting up. I called her and although she was panicking, she never came."

"I told her that Obi is okay."

"Yeah but this is her child too. Even if you told her Obi is doing great! She's a mother. Ay!"

I sigh and decide to keep quiet. I won't tell him anything, only Karabo will. When she's good and ready.

"Babe you kept mentioning that Karabu is your client. Are you and her on a case?" Troy asks.

Thabang stares at me too.

"Uhm... no. I just said that so that the doctor could take us seriously and tell us the problem. That's all." I say.

"Oh. Ta (thanks) boss lady."

We're at the hospital and we've been here for half an hour now.

"T, I think we should go back now. Obi is fine and we have work in the morning." I say.

"Yeah. Yeah let's go. Keep in touch Thabang."

"Sure boss man."

"Babe. What's going on?" Troy asks.

I stop applying the cleanser on my face and look at him.

"What do you mean?" I ask.

"Back at the hospital, you said you were Karabu's attorney. The very same mother who didn't come to see her child in hospital. It don't take a math genius babe."

I look back at the mirror and continue being busy on my face. I apply the night cream and tie a big doek around my head for my braids.

When I turn around, he's still on the bed, looking at me.

"Well?" He asks.

"T, it's not my place."

"What's not your place?"

"To tell why she's my client."

"So you don't trust me?"

"Client confidentiality."

"Bull."

I sigh and go down stairs to see if Pumpkin is alright. We left in such a hurry, we completely forgot about him. He wakes up the minute I reach over to touch him. He's going to be one heck of a guard dog. I pour myself a glass of water and look through the kitchen blinds. The street is so quiet, so innocent at this time of day. Which is 22H34. I put the glass down and go back upstairs to find him still on the bed but this time he's half naked and looking through his phone. I close the bedroom door and get under the covers.

"T?"

"Why don't you trust me?" He asks with his face still buried on the screen.

"I do."

"So what's with the secrets? You could tell me about a national case but not about this one? Is that why you arrived so tired earlier?"

"This one is different T. We both know Karabo and you're friends with her baby daddy."

"So? Am I going to blab out everything?"

I close my eyes and decide to tell him. I started at the bachelorette scene with Bandile up until him taking advantage of Karabo. He keeps a straight face as he's listening.

"Bandile?" He asks.

"Yeah."

"I think Bandile and Blandina were working together."

"What do you mean?"

"How convenient that they were both at Kenya and they were after us."

I think for a second and then it hits me too. Oh my gosh! Are these people sick? This was all a game?!

"Karabo said something about a pill and when I saw Bandile, he didn't seem like himself. Could it be a drug?"

"What are the symptoms? Was he sexually aroused?"

"Uhm..."

"Nay we're both adults."

"I think so. I don't know."

"Pill to enhance his guy maybe?"

"Maybe. Gross!"

"So you'll be her attorney?"

"Yeah."

"Okay. Babe, promise me that you will be honest with me. Trust me. I'm your husband remember?"

"Oh yeah. Gross." I say with a grin.

"Shut your pretty mouth with that." He says and leans in for a kiss.

"Hey Kganya. Still with that muscular guy at the plane?" I ask with a chuckle.

"Hell no. He's a player and a liar. Turns out he already has a girlfriend. Said our thing was 'just for fun'. Can you imagine?"

"Oh shame. Sorry hey. You'll find love sis."

"I hope so too sis. Anyway, I'm back at Johannesburg and it's soooooooooo boring here."

"You need to finish your studies sis. How else are we going to go international shopping?"

"Becoming a pharmacist can be a real nightmare sometimes but you're right."

"Yes girl. You're on your last year so hold on. You'll get there."

"Yeah. Anyway, I was also calling to see where your friend Karabo is. I tried calling her but she's not answering. She knows

a thing or two about being a pharmacist so we exchanged numbers at the bachelorette party."

"Uhm... well she's very busy but I'll let her know that you're trying to reach her. Must be the baby stress." I awkwardly chuckle.

"Please do. Oh, my class is at 11H00. Talk later sis."

"Bye!"

It's Wednesday morning and I'm already sick of this week. I just cannot wait to get it over and done with. Before Kganya called me, Mutsa informed me about the reverend's case and that Miss Kethe has been in jail ever since. She's the only one that judge is still suspicious of. Rea was never able to convince him otherwise. Now that the killer has struck again, they're starting to question if she really is the murderer. I've been saying that she's innocent, it's just that she's not stating the entire truth. She'd rather face a crime she never committed than confess. Either way, I am so out of there. I have bigger fish to fry. Like putting Bandile behind bars. There was no need to do a background check on him since I know most of the things he's done and the kind of person he is. What I didn't know is that he's actually single and spent an entire month in Durban when Koko Deborah passed on. I don't know whether that's how he dealt with her passing or not, either way it's good to know about this. We've alerted the Kenyan Police about the secret

strip club and I was informed that they found no illegal behavior or substances. It was just an ordinary club.

Back to square one. Our court date is on Friday and that came quicker than I anticipated. Of course, after that will be where the real work steps in. Trying to find clues and ideas on how to sway the jury on our side. I do believe that the power of social media will be in Karabo's favour, especially since she's an independent YouTuber.

Her appointment with me is actually right now and I'm expecting her to come in soon. Thabang called Troy this morning saying that they discharged Obitshepo and he was now back home. If they can just hold on until Friday, that would be great. The protection we need will only be available once we have that day in court.

On other news, this firm is out of this world. I cannot believe how kind everyone is towards one another. Something tells me that some are pretending but it's better than scraping and causing chaos in the workplace. There's a male colleague that has been extra kind to me. Maybe he's the friend I'm going to make here, he's also a senior advocate. Simphiwe. He's a Xhosa guy, y'all, dark and very well spoken. I see other females staring at him when he'd walk past or something. However

I only have eyes for T thank you.

"Hey. You busy?" Speak of the devil.

"Oh. Simphiwe."

"Hallelujah, she remembers my name."

He told me his name yesterday and I kept calling him 'Sphiwe' instead of Simphiwe.

"Yes I do. Anyway, I have a client that's going to be coming in soon."

"You've been here for 5 minutes and they're already overworking you. I need to have a serious conversation with the manager." He says with a serious face.

I laugh at how he's making such a big deal out of this. I love what I do, and they did say that if you love what you do, you'll never have to work a day in your life. Your work will be like a hobby.

"I'm alright thanks. I love the work." I say to him.

I see today that he's dressed in a brown suit instead of the navy one he wore yesterday. While I love my black one, it's always a good idea to hype things up a bit.

"If you say so. Guess you won't be joining me for lunch then." He says and pouts.

"Sorry."

"It's okay. Maybe tomorrow?" He says and winks.

"Maybe." I say with a chuckle and go back to staring at my computer. I look up and he's still standing by the door.

"Problem?" I ask.

"I was kind of waiting for you to change your mind and just pull the middle finger to all this." He says.

"Fortunately, I won't be doing that. I do have a meeting soon. Whole reason why I brought lunch with me." I say and show him my Tupperware.

"Alright." He says and walks away.

Okay. It's 11H12 and Karabo is still not here. Maybe I should call her and-

"Mrs Lane? Karabo Maroga is here to see you?" Melissa says through the telephone.

"Let her in. Thanks." I say back.

In a few minutes, Karabo knocks on the glass door and then opens it.

"Karabo. Take a seat." I say.

"Wow. You really are at work. So formal." She says and takes off her hoodie. I don't know why she's always wearing it.

Bandile won't try anything now. Not when he's being accused of such a horrific crime.

"Did you hear that Obi is back home?" I ask her.

"Yeah. Thabang sent me an SMS." She says.

"Okay. Did you receive my email about the court date."

"No. I haven't been buying data. What's the court date?"

"The date we are to appear in front of the magistrate and present our case. He'll decide when we'll be able to commence everything."

"So he's been told?"

"Yes and knowing him, he'll try to make this about him so we need to be prepared. No loopholes. Blandina is Troy's ex."

"What?" She whispers enough for me to hear her.

"Yes. Troy thinks that she and Bandile were on a mission to break Troy and I up. Blandina tried to seduce Troy and Bandile tried to... I don't even know what he was trying to do. He thought I would be drunk enough to sleep with him I guess. Anyway, they both had one common goal and that was to break Troy and I up. None of them won but I guess they found an alternative to rattle things up. Troy also thinks that Bandile drank something to enhance his manhood, that's still not an excuse to justify what he did to you. He was in the right state of

mind and knew what he was doing. The court date in on Friday."

"Okay. Okay. What happens until then?"

"I get my A-game on and make sure to leave them think they're victorious."

"What do you mean by that? You're going to let them win?" She asks with her eyes wide enough to look like they were about to fall out.

"To make them think we're unprepared and we're incompetent. That's always been my strategy. That way, they stay relaxed and don't dig deep enough. Soon enough, that's when I'll drop bombs on them."

"Ohhh. I get it now. I just want this behind me Naledi."

"You dealing with it?" I ask with sympathy.

"One step at a time. I can't talk to anyone about it yet."

"It's okay. Take your time. When you're ready, you'll know."

"Oh. Before j forget, here's the dress." She says and gives me the dress she wore on my bachelorette party.

"You sire you didn't wash it right?" I ask her and take the plastic bag.

"Yeah. I didn't want anything to do it with it when I came back home. I just dumped it in a box." She says and shivers a bit.

"Okay. I'll get this at the lab. Let's see what will happen. Lay low and just try to go see Obi. He's missing you."

"I was planning too today. It nearly drove me insane when I heard he's in hospital and I couldn't be with him."

"Okay. You do that."

While working, my phone rings and I see that it's Troy.

"Mr Lane."

"Mrs Lane. Working hard?"

"A little. Miss me?"

"You have no idea! Guess what, Tory wants to come over."

"Really? Why?"

"There's a match that's playing today."

"On a Wednesday?"

"Soccer never sleeps babe. Anyway, I just want to make sure you're okay with that. Last thing I need is a lecture."

"Excuse me?"

"Nothing. So...?"

"I don't have a problem with it. It'll be good for y'all to bond some more."

"Yeah. It's slowly getting there. Maybe by the time you get here, he'll be here too."

"I'm about to knock off now. I'll see you at home."

"Okay. I love you. Hear that?"

"I hear you. I love you too." I say and make a kiss sound through the phone.

I guess this is an indication that I should be packing, it's nearly 17H00.

I pack my handbag and put on my blazer. I switch off my office light and go downstairs to the parking lot. Looks a bit empty now, I guess I'm the only one with a clock!

I open the door and find Troy making something in the kitchen.

"Hey." I say.

"Hey babe. How was work?" He asks with a smile on his face.

"Uhm... fine. What's going on?" I ask.

"Nothing. Just happy to see you." He says and kisses me, then goes back to putting bits of bread into a bowl of milk.

"Just got here?" I ask.

"Yeah. Making him lunch." He says and looks down at Pumpkin.

I didn't even see him, little spy ninja.

"Okay. Let me go change."

"Okay."

I go upstairs and put on my white, floral dress with golden sandals. It's good to feel free a bit. I go back downstairs with my phone and call out for him.

"Lounge." He says.

I go to the lounge and find him going through the channels on TV. I love how excited he gets when things between Tory and him smooth sail. They're slowly regaining their brother relationship and it's lovely to see it unfold before your eyes.

"Okay. I'll go make something for dinner." I say and hop to the kitchen. I look near the fridge and watch Pumpkin devouring his food bowl. He is just the cutest little thing.

Okay. Wednesday afternoon. Lasagna? Yes! I open the fridge to check if we have enough cheese for it. Just then, the door bell

rings. I saw Troy go upstairs to the bathroom so I must be the only one downstairs. I close the fridge and go to answer the door. I open it and find Sheryl with a long, black coat on despite the hot weather.

"Mrs Lane?" I ask.

"Mrs Lane to you too sugar."

This again. I thought she said she'd stop calling me sugar.

"Who's at the door?" Troy asks and comes to stand behind me. He sees Sheryl and instantly frowns.

"Sheryl? What are you doing here? You know what, it doesn't matter. Please leave." He says and attempts to close the door.

Sheryl blocks it with her black high heel then reaches into her coat and takes out a gun!

"Whoa. Whoa. Mrs Lane? Please put that down." I say and start panicking.

"Get inside sugar. We need to talk." She says. Troy steps forward and I look at him and shake my head. This is not the time to act like a hero. A crazy woman with a gun is in our house.

Pumpkin yelps at her when she gets in and closes the door.

"Shut up flea bag." She says.

It continues yelping and groaning at her until she aimed at it and shot it on the leg. We didn't even hear the gunshot or anything. Must be a silencer.

"Mrs Lane?! What's all this about?! This is my house and you're not welcome here." I say in a fed-up tone.

"Shut up slut. My patience is running thin." She calmly says with the gun now pointing at my stomach. She looks at it and starts frowning. The door bells rings again and the the door swings open.

"Anybody-" Tory stops talking and stops in his tracks when he sees us panicking and Sheryl holding a firearm.

"Tory my boy, glad you could join us. Go stand there next to your brother." She says.

Tory tries to reach for his gun he always carries but she quickly moves closer to me then points directly at my forehead with her gun.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you boy. I'll take that gun now." She calmly says. I just keep looking at the gun on my forehead and pray to God she doesn't pull the trigger. Tory takes it out then slowly gives it to her. He then walks to us and we all face her. Sheryl grabs the gun then tosses it next Pumpkin who's losing a lot of blood with every passing minute.

She indicates that we sit down with her gun and we reluctantly do so. Troy holds my hand firmly and I know what he's thinking, he's about to be a hero. What is going on?! Is she still angry that Troy married me instead of Blandina? Was her apologies not genuine? Why is she here with a gun?

The room grows quiet as we look at her still standing. I look over at our security system button. One press and this neighborhood will be swarming with cops, but it's so far away. She unbuttons her black coat and reveals the lingerie she has on. This was so wrong on so many levels. No one should see a woman of her age in a red thong. She's in her 50's for goodness sake! Tory looks away in disgust. She takes off the coat with a smile and then winks at Troy. She reaches into her coat and the throws us with two cuffs.

"Tie yourselves up behind your backs. Sugar tie up Tory and then Troy will tie you up." She says and raises her gun at us.

We do as we're told and then we notice that Troy is the only one who's hands are not tied.

"Troy hubby, take this here duct tape and tape their mouths. I'm the only one that's allowed to speak up in this bitch." She says. Did she just call Troy...

Troy doesn't move a muscle until she points the gun at me again. He takes the tape and seals our mouths with rage

written all over his face. He then sits down next to me and waits for Sheryl to speak.

"Now, how about I talk and y'all listen for a change. Huh? First order of business, Troy is going to fuck me on this here couch and y'all are going to sit your asses down and watch. If not, then the next bullet is going to sugar's head. Careful, I never miss."

What did she just say? What is going on? Is... is she attracted to-to... Troy? I try to move or speak but this duct tape is restricting. This is a nightmare. I look over at the life that's slowly leaving Pumpkin's body with each passing moment. I need to call for help, now!

"Say what?" Troy asks with a sarcastic chuckle.

"You're going to fuck me. Right now. Right on this here couch. You're putting a baby in me today!"

"I'm not fucking doing that. What kind of mother are you? Are you even human?!"

"Who said I'm your mother?" She smirks.

We all look at each other and then back at her. Lord please do something. I don't care about all this I just need to find help for Pumpkin. It's whining and wincing is traumatizing me. I look at Tory and he just has a guilty-looking face.

"If I explain, will you fuck me then?" She asks.

"No!"

"Rhetorical question baby. You don't really have a choice. Alright, since I don't like the way Tory is looking at me, I'll let him go." She says then goes over to Tory and uncuffs him then

puts the key back in her bra. Tory throws them away then slowly removes the duct tape on his mouth.

"Tory, since you paid me well. You can go." She says then stands next to Troy and leans on his shoulder.

"What are you talking about? What the fuck is going on here?" Troy asks.

"That's no longer your concern my love. He's an irrelevant subject in our lives. So will sugar soon." She says then looks at me with a devilish grin.

Tory stands up then looks at Sheryl from top to bottom.

"Mom. Are you retarded?! What the hell is wrong with you?" Tory exclaims.

"Don't you dare raise your voice at me. Know your place!" She exclaims.

Everyone is just bickering and yelling at one another. I'm just sitting on the couch looking at them quarreling about insensible things.

"Tory. That is enough! I gave you a chance to leave, now leave!!" Sheryl exclaims.

"No! I'm not going anywhere till you explain yourself!"

"Nobody is answering me! What the fuck is going on here?!"
Troy yells.

"I don't know what mom is talking about! How about you start opening your mouth instead of your legs mom!"

"Stop calling me that! You don't deserve to be my son! I wish Troy was my son, not you! This is just bullshit!"

We all go silent and look at her in astonishment. What does she mean by that?

"What did you just say? Sheryl you better start talking! Talk now! Talk! Talk! Talk! Talk!"

"You're not my biological son!"

Silence again. I'm just murmuring through this tape and trying to break the cuffs behind me open. This is usually the part of any situation where it gets critical. A shot will be fired and someone is going to get hurt.

"You're not my son. Your father cheated on me when I walked out on him for being the broke ass that he was. Once his life had meaning and got money, I went back to him and found out that he had a baby on the way. The girl died. Mysteriously, and then asked me to raise you with him like our very own. You were 2 years old when I decided to have a baby. Tory fucking-useless Lane! I never viewed you as my son Troy. You, Troy, were always meant to be my lover."

"I asked you a question, are you retarded?!" Tory asks.

"So, I'm not your son? When were you going to tell me all this shit?!" Troy exclaims.

"Right now." She snarks.

"So... so am I your only son?" Tory asks.

"See why I say I wish Troy was my son, not you? Useless like your father!"

"Dad was an amazing man mom. He carried us all and had no favours. I wish you were the one that died, not him."

"Well, that's too bad sweetie. He said the same thing when you were born."

"Sheryl leave." Troy calmly says.

"Don't get ahead of yourself hubby. I'm still the one with the upper hand here." She says then waves the gun in front of her.

"So... so you were crushing on Troy this whole time? You're sick! What about dad?! Your actual husband?" Tory asks.

"He was never a man enough for me. Too old, too calm, too tired. I stayed because of Troy and his insurance." She says with a vindictive smile.

"I said... leave. Leave now!" Troy roars.

"You don't tell me what to do! Your father did the same thing and look what happened to him. I'd hate for you to end up the same way."

"What do you mean by that? Mom what are you saying? You killed dad?!" Tory exclaims.

"Of course I did. He kept forcing me to go see that psychologist whenever he'd find me pleasing myself with Troy's picture."

"You did what?!"

"Don't be like that. You're not exactly a saint either."

"What the fuck are you talking about you, you murderer!" Tory exclaims. Troy is just sitting down with his head buried in his hands. I try to shift and make sounds through the tape so that he could release me while Tory and Sheryl were arguing. He's so lost in his thoughts, he didn't even hear Sheryl when she said that she hired Tory to spy on us.

"Mom! Stop lying!" Tory roars.

"Oh yeah. You think I'm lying huh? You want me to pull out voice calls and texts about it? Huh? Tory never wanted to be close to you Troy, he was doing me a favour by spying on you. I had to keep tabs on you to make sure this bitch doesn't run off with my man."

Okay Troy definitely heard the last part. He stands up with rage and hurt written all over his face. I stand up too but they don't notice. I go over to the security system and press the button with my nose, since my hands were cuffed. Knowing the police, they're going to arrive after the damage has been done. Something tells me this is not going to end well, in the meantime I need to make them calm or else.... someone is dying today.

"So you didn't just come back for me? You came under direct orders? Why would you work for a woman who thought you were nothing? A woman who took you for granted and ruined our family? Why? Answer me Tory!" Troy exclaims. Okay he's really upset. I need to break these cuffs off.

"I don't know what she's talking about man. She's trying to get between us all over again with her lies. She's the murderer here!"

"Really Tory? I thought you were incompetent, I didn't know you were dumb too. Tory had some trouble with the reverend that sugar was investigating. He got in trouble for helping with his money laundering and fake miracles. When he died, Tory got in trouble with the FBI and sooner or later, they were going to catch on. He never really wanted to bond with you Troy. He was just looking out for himself. Just like he's always done."

Sheryl says in disgust. I try to slip my hands out but the cuffs are too tight.

"Leave Tory. Leave right now before I do something I'll regret. Not when it comes to my wife. Leave!"

"But-"

Troy sprints over to him and holds him roughly.

"Leave now. You were never my brother." He says.

Tory swallows something then sees Pumpkin bleeding and goes to bend down next to him. I'm just hiding behind the couch but I see him looking at me then he picks up his gun and goes out the door. That betrayer! Leaving us when we need him!

Sheryl asks where I am and I take that as a sign to use the kitchen door and escape. She sees me then runs after me. When Troy tries to stop her, she shoots him on the leg!

"Now you won't be able to run away from me once I take care of sugar." She says

I get in the kitchen and look for the key to the door

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I don't even know how I'm going to unlock it because I'm still cuffed.

"Sheryl! Don't you dare touch my wife!" Troy yells while scraping on the floor and grunting to the pain.

My heart is pounding and when I see the key, she gets in and takes it.

"You thought you could take my man huh? You thought he's yours? Those vows were useless sugar. I'm the main bitch! No one else! Let me take off your tape so that I can hear you begging for your life before you go back to your ancestors." She says and removes the duct tape from my mouth. She then tells me to kneel down. When I do so, she points the gun on my head and starts praying.

"Sheryl? Sheryl! Put down that gun!" Troy says behind me while scraping towards me in a slow pace. They're the only one's talking, I'm just praying that God looks over momma and Tshedi when I'm gone. I pray that Troy finds love again and heals from this, this is all so traumatizing. I pray he gets over me and forgets me. For my memory will only bring back haunting memories for him. I pray that Sheryl pays dearly for her actions. I pray that Pumpkin makes it out alive. I pray that Karabo gets the justice she deserves. I pray that Kganya finds love. Real love. I pray that I see papa when I get to Heaven, which will be in a few seconds now because Sheryl's finger is on the trigger and Troy is far from me. I look back at him and close my eyes.

"Sheryl no!" Troy exclaims with a few tears.

Sheryl smiles at me with victory. This is where I make my stop. She continues her prayer and says I should say Amen. I close my eyes and take one more breath. Just then, with a blink of an eye, she pulls the trigger and everything goes blank. My life...

"Naledi? Naledi?! Naledi wake up! Naledi? Please! Naledi?!"

I open my eyes and close them again, I try to open them again and I'm met by Tory's face.

"T-Tory?" I manage to say.

"Oh thank God! I thought she had you. You're going to be okay." He says with a smile.

I try to move but flinch in pain. I fell on my arms and my hands are still tied behind my back.

Tory sees this and goes over to Sheryl's body next to me and digs through her bra to get the key. In disgust, he grabs it and uncuffs me.

"What happened?" I ask and massage my wrists.

"I came back and you fainted. That's what happened. Hey, I'm- I'm sorry for betraying both you and Troy. It was wrong of me. I

figured since I'm the one that put your lives in danger, I should be the one to save y'all." He says.

"Wait, where's Troy?" I ask.

Just then it occurred to me that there's sirens and commotion outside.

He opens his mouth to speak before he's interrupted by a bunch of paramedics rushing to me.

"Uhm..."

"Are you okay ma'am? Where do you feel pain? Have you been shot?" They all ask at once.

"I'm fine. Please help me get up." I say. One of them helps me get back on my feet and I don't dare look behind me and look at Sheryl's body. The blood that's trickling from under my golden sandals already proves her fate. I cannot believe she actually wanted to kill me.

I panic a little when I cannot see Troy anywhere.

"Where's Troy?"

~Narrated~

Naledi is told that due to loss of blood, Troy was rushed to the hospital the moment she woke up. Pumpkin was taken in too.

The paramedic made her sit outside in the ambulance to see if she sustained any injuries. After the check up, Mutsa comes out from inside their house with white gloves on and goes over to Naledi. With Tory following her.

"Naledi." She says.

"Mutsa."

"You just really adore law so much that you even bring it home with you?"

Naledi chuckles a bit and sighs at what Mutsa's saying. This was a scene taken directly out of an action movie.

"Well, Mrs Lane is definitely gone. No doubt about it. Tory makes one heck of a head shot. Which reminds me, you're coming down to the station with us. You're not out of the woods just yet." Mutsa winks at Tory then goes over to her police car.

"He's not dead. He was just bleeding really badly out of his leg. Pumpkin is also still alive." Tory says.

Naledi hogs the blanket closer to herself. She's not even cold and it's still late in the afternoon, but it's just so comforting. She'd rather have it on her.

"Yeah. I can't believe you came back. I thought you were gone." She says.

"I thought you were gone too. Anyway uhm, they took Troy to that other hospital on the mountain."

"Mountain? Oh, the private hospital?"

"Yeah. Just in case you wanna see him and... stuff."

The other paramedics come out of the house with a body in a body bag. Naledi already knows that that's Sheryl and she's gone. For the first time ever, she's happy over a person's death.

"Where is he? Where is Troy?"

"Excuse me, who are you? And are you okay, you're bleeding a little on the side of you head. Oh God and your dress is covered in-"

"Doctor please. I need to know where Troy Lane is?"

"Oh, Mr Lane. He was rushed into the ER. I suppose you're Mrs Lane?"

"Yes!"

"He's right over in that room, 47."

Naledi rushes over to the room before the doctor stops her.

"Ma'am. There are a few things you need to know about Mr Lane."

"He was shot by his mother, I know. I was there half an hour ago." She says and walks a few more feet before the doctor stops her again.

"Okay. However, I mean other things. He is okay yes, but he's lost a lot of blood. He's going to need a blood transfusion from a family member."

"Uhm... Tory? His brother?"

"If they're an exact match, then sure."

"Okay. Can I see him now?"

"One more thing Mrs Lane."

"What is it now?!"

"Mr Lane suffered from a bone fracture and tissue swelling around the spine. I'm afraid, his legs don't work any more and the chances of him using them are slim to none."

"What?" Naledi asks with a whisper.

"Your husband is paralysed."

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~Naledi~

"Ma'am? Mrs Lane? Are you okay?"

I grab the nearest chair and sit on it. I just felt a little dizzy back there.

"Ma'am?"

"How is this possible doctor?" I ask.

"Well, the swelling-"

"No, not that. I mean, how can we be going through all this and we've just gotten married a few months ago? We're supposed to be happy, not fighting psychotic middle aged women and dealing with paralysis. Do you the kind of work he does? He interacts with animals, out in the open wild not in cages. If one of them decides to make him their lunch meal, how will he run from that? How will he bend down and touch Miracle? How will he go outside and play with our puppy? Those little things mean a lot to him, and now..."

"Look. Don't lose hope. There's still a chance for him to walk again. It might take a few months or years even, but his stage of paralysis is not permanent."

"So... he also won't be able to use his..."

"Yes. Everything from the waist down, I'm afraid, will be shut down. He sometimes won't feel if he needs to urinate or excrete, which is why he has adult diapers on right now."

I cover my mouth with my hand in agony. No! This wasn't supposed to happen. Why is this happen to us? We didn't even wrong anybody. Why us? We're always dealing with something and it gets frustrating. How will this impact him? Impact our marriage? He's such a 'I can to this by myself' person. What will happen to his pride when he realizes that he's going to have to wear adult diapers?

"Don't lose hope. Alright? I need to do my rounds but I will come back to check on him and talk to you some more. Stay strong." She says then takes her clipboard and goes down the hallway.

I look at the door of the room he's laying in. Do I dare get in there? I dare.

I stand up and wait as a patient on a wheelchair passes. Pretty soon that'll be Troy's fate too. I open the door and I'm met by a hand sanitizer aroma and the beeping of a heart monitor. He has that oxygen mask over his mouth and nose. Just laying there. His hair is not even curly anymore. I look over at his hands and see that his wedding band is off. This is.... I don't even know. What am I going to do about this? I look at the TV and I'm glad that we aren't on the news or something. Last

thing I need is the public's eyes and comments about this. I check my phone in my dress pocket. It's 18H29. I have a few e-mails from work, a text from Karabo and a dozen missed calls from momma. Seeing that I'm going to be here all night, I call her back and she answers in an instant.

"Hello my-"

Before she could finish her sentence, I was already bursting out in tears and holding my mouth so that I couldn't wake Troy up.

"Ngwanake (my child)? Keng (what)? Naledi?!"

"Ma?" I ask in between sobs

"What's wrong my baby? I tried calling you earlier. Why are you crying?"

"Nothing. I just really miss you."

"Don't lie Naledi. You know you're not the type to cry. What happened? Are you okay?"

"No momma. I'm not okay."

"Why? Is it Troy?"

"Y-yes."

"What did he do?! Talk to me baby."

"He didn't do anything. He tried to save me."

"Naledi. Breathe. Do you have water near you?"

"Yeah." I say and look at the water on the bedside.

"Take a sip and breathe."

"Okay."

I pour myself a glass and take it all in one go. I take a breather and put the phone back on my ear.

"I did it."

"Good. Now what happened?"

I sigh and tell her everything. She didn't even know that Sheryl stayed with us that other time, but I told her that too. The confrontation and the sickening affection she had for Troy.

"She did what?! After not coming to the wedding she does this? Where is she now? I hope behind bars!"

"Tory shot her. She died a few hours ago."

"Good riddance man! She tried to kill my only girl child because she- yoh! Modimo waka (my God)!"

"It's fine really. Reason why I'm upset is because Troy is paralysed momma."

"What?!"

"The doctor just confirmed it. When he wakes up-"

"Oh my baby."

"Why is this happening to me momma? Why us? What did we do?"

"Naledi my child. Trust in God."

"It's the very same God that put my husband in a hospital bed! What is He trying to prove?! Huh? That we're strong? Aii voetsek (Afrikaans word for 'go away')!"

"I understand you're upset. The only reason why I'm not going to get in a taxi and beat your behind for saying such."

"I'm tired momma. You say God loves us but look what he's done. Where was he when Troy was losing blood? Look now."

"You're alive aren't you?"

"Yeah."

"And Troy too?"

"Yeah."

"So stop talking about our Savior like some boy at the corner. Have you been at church? Maybe you need to talk to someone."

"No. I gave up on church really. All these pastors are fake!"

"I can't believe this is you talking."

"If I need to talk to someone momma, I will. There are plenty of therapists who know their job well."

"Aii! Okay. Are you okay? I mean, you're not hurt?"

"I'm okay."

"Okay. Pray ngwanake (my child)."

"Pray for what momma?"

"For your marriage. Naledi, the devil is attacking you because you're worthy."

"Huh?"

"The bond between you and Troy is strong. You're beautiful together. You bring hope just by being together. Your destiny is great, that's why the devil is on you. Before you go complaining about your life, don't ask what is God teaching us. Ask why is the devil attacking me? Why me? That's because you're worthy! There's something wonderful inside of you that just irritates him! You winning cases and having a beautiful marriage is sickening to him. So he'll try to divert your focus. Don't let him. You're worthy ngwanake (my child). That's why. He'll try to spin your life around but he'll never... ever touch your soul. Unless you give it to him on a silver platter by giving up. You're worthy. I mean, would you rob a house that's empty?"

"Ma!"

"I'm asking, would you?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because.... it's empty."

"Exactly. All these people that face trials and tribulations have something in their hearts. Just like you. Something that is so beautiful, hell is going crazy just thinking about it. Don't give up baby. Don't let him win that easily. Okay?"

"Okay ma. Another powerful service to the book."

"Aii! I'm the chosen one my baby."

"Yoh okay! Oh, Troy is waking up. I'll call you later."

"Okay my baby. Pray akere (right)?"

"Yes mamma. I love you."

"I love you too ngwanake (my child)."

I hang up and put my phone on the table. He's been flinching his hands and eyes and I think he's about to wake up.

"Hey." I say with a whisper.

He opens his eyes and looks around, then turns to me. He stares at me but moves not, and speaks not.

I smile and mouth the word 'hey' to him. He just stares at me like I'm some kind of alien. Just then, the doctor knocks and comes inside.

"Oh. We're awake aren't we?" She asks and puts on hand sanitizer.

"Mr Lane? Do you remember what happened?"

He shakes his head and tries to sit up.

"Oh no it's okay. Lay there. You were shot in the leg and lost a lot of blood. We called your brother in and we saw that his blood is a match to yours. We'll be able to make the blood transfusion later. For now, I'm going to need to ask you a few questions."

She says. Troy takes off the oxygen mask and throws it on the floor.

"T?"

"Baby." He says with a strain voice.

I couldn't help it, I stood up and hugged him.... tightly. I revert and ask him if I hurt him.

"I was shot on the leg babe, not my chest. I don't mind."

"Isn't this sweet? Well, Mr Lane. I'm going to use this fork to poke your feet with it. You'll tell me if you feel anything."

"Errr.... okay." He says and chuckles. He's much more lively now and his voice is clear.

The doctor lifts the blanket to expose his feet then pokes his left foot then his right foot.

"I... I can't feel anything. Why can't I feel anything? Why can't I...."

He tries to slap his legs and ruffle them up. He looks at me then tries to walk out of the bed.

"Whoa. Whoa. T. Stop!" I say.

"Tell me Nay. Why can't I feel my legs? Why-"

"Well Mr Lane-"

"I'm not talking to you. I'm talking to my wife. Nay? Nay, tell me why I can't feel my legs. Tell me now."

A tear rolls down my face as I open mouth but no words come out.

"Why aren't you talking? Nay? Baby? Tell me. I know you won't lie, tell me." He says.

I look at him with sympathy and whisper a word.

"What?"

"You're... you're paralysed T. Everything from the waist down is numb." I say.

He stares at me with his mouth slightly open like he's expecting me to say more. I look away and to avoid his brown eyes.

"Nay, please don't say that. Nay pl- doctor get your men in here. I'm walking. Now! I'm not paralysed. Now doctor, right now!" He says. He takes off everything on him and starts groaning when his legs don't cooperate with his upper body.

"Mr Lane! Mr Lane, I'm going to have to make you calm down if you don't relax. Mr Lane?"

Troy isn't even listening. He's just knocking down some items and groaning in frustration.

The doctor calls in a male nurse to hold T.

"Hey! Hey don't touch me!" He exclaims.

While the male nurse is holding him still, the doctor taps on a syringe and then inserts it through Troy's arm.

The male nurse let's go of Troy when he begins calming down and being dizzy. I'm just looking at all this with horror and sadness. I knew he was going to take the news hard, but not this hard.

"He's okay Mrs Lane. He'll be out for a few hours so that he can get some rest. I suggest you go home and get some rest too."

"I'm not going anywhere. I'll stay here all night if I have to."

"Mrs Lane-"

"Doctor, you're married too. What would you do if it was your husband on that bed?"

She looks at me then nods. She takes out Troy's wedding ring out of a plastic and gives it to me.

"I didn't want it getting lost." She says.

I take it and put it on him. She smiles and goes out the room. I sit on the chair and play a game on my phone to pass the time. I'm not going anywhere.

Two days later.

"Can you please... please take my money. Take my offer for lunch. I beg you to fuel your body." He says.

"I gotta go Simphiwe. See you later."

"Hey, look. I heard what happened to you and your husband."

I stop packing and look at him with discomfort.

"Not a lot but I do know that y'all had an intruder. That's all. I'm sure that's why you don't trust me anymore." He says.

What is this man saying? I never trusted him to begin with. Besides, I have a paralysed husband waiting for me at home. After Tory gave Troy his blood

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we were allowed to go back home. Troy's in a wheelchair now and has a caretaker because I'm not able to do it. I do take care of him in the mornings and at night but I'm work during the day, so we hired some old lady nurse to do the job. She's really nice but Troy is so shattered he doesn't see it.

Momma has been calling me atleast 7 times per day on the past two days. When I say everyday, I mean EVERYDAY. I appreciate the effort though, especially considering how I told her she does not need to worry and come here in North West to check on me.

He's been real moody and I understand his frustration, but we're all trying to help him. It's just not fair how he'd snap at us for helping him and then apologize after we've been stung by his words. No one knows he's paralysed except for Tory. Everybody does know that there was an intruder at our house but what they don't know is that the intruder was Troy's mother. Well, Tory's mother. Speaking of Sheryl, the news hit Atlanta that the owner of 'Lane Clothing Line' has passed on. The internet has been buzzing with sincere condolences to Troy. If they only knew. Her body is still in South Africa because

Mutsa wants to wrap up the case before allowing the family to bury her. I don't even know if they're going to bury her. Uncle Murray said that he will do it since the boys want nothing to do with her. He knows too about Sheryl's shenanigans.

"Naledi? So? What do you say? Lunch? I promise to bring you back home before night time. I'm just helping a friend out."

I look at him and my stomach growls at the thought of someone cooking for me instead of the other way around.

"Okay. Lunch. A very quick lunch."

"Alright. Let me get my keys." He says and walks out of my office.

I hope I'm not doing anything wrong by this. It's just lunch, nothing more. Troy is home probably getting work done on his laptop. Since he's unable to get to work, he's been doing more of the paperwork job at home. So getting a break from work here and work at home is exactly what I need. Especially after the day I had. Today is Friday, which means I was at court presenting my case to the magistrate. The look on Bandile's face when he realized I was the one to help Karabo with the case was priceless. I saw that he even wanted to come talk to me but his attorney stopped him. I was probably going to cause a scene and slap him or something. He gets on my nerves just thinking about him. Anyway, the case will commence a week

from today. That's little time but that's a good sign. It shows that the magistrate can see that this case is straightforward and watertight.

I unlock my phone and decide to tell Troy that I'll be home a little later.

"Hey T."

"Hi."

"Uhm... I just wanted to tell you that I'll be a little late today."

"Oh okay."

"Aren't you going to ask why?" I ask.

"No. Does it matter anyway? It's not like I can put on my kicks and come get you."

"T that's not fair."

"Whatever. Enjoy whatever it is that'll be making you come home late."

"It's not going to take t-"

He hangs up on me and I just look at my phone in shock. I even clap my hands in the air about this. Is he being for real right now? Hanging up on me? See why I say he's been moody? We're not even husband and wife anymore. More like

roommates. I grab my car keys and switch off my computer. It's Friday so I knock off at 15H00 than my usual 17H00 time.

Simphiwe goes out of his office too with his laptop bag and smiles.

"What are you smiling about?"

"I finally got the mean girl to have lunch with me. That's why."

"I'm not mean."

He looks at me with his eyebrow raised up high.

"I'm not mean."

"You definitely are entitled to your own opinion."

"Whatever. Where are we going anyway?" I ask as we both go in the elevator.

"Where do you wanna go?"

"Home."

"We're going to a sea food restaurant downtown."

"I'm not into seafood."

"Just wait and see."

"Alright. The lady will have calamari, fish sauce and some of those onion rings. I'll have shrimp and the side's too." He says and hands over the menu to the waitress.

I don't even know what I was going to order at a sea food restaurant. Fish?

"I've heard of calamari, I've just never really paid attention to it. I don't even know what it is."

"It's squid."

"That's... barbaric!" I dramatically say.

"Nah, not like that. Totally harmless."

"Okay." I say and smile at him. I check my phone again... still no call or text message from him.

"We're not going to be here long." He says.

"Huh?"

"You keep glancing at your phone like you're checking for the time."

"Oh. Yeah. That's what I was doing. Sorry, this is just weird and romantic. Can we make it un-romantic?"

"Uhm.... sure. I wet my bed till I was 8."

"Gross!"

"What? You said to make it un-romantic."

"Yeah, not gross. Anyway, how long have you been with Black Gowns?"

"I started last year. Before that I was at a firm in the States."

"What? Are you serious? That's huge dude! Why did you come back to SA?"

"There's no place like home."

"Wow. I would've held on like a leech tell you that."

"Hehe. What about you? Where were you before Black Gowns?"

"Jacobs & Attorneys."

"No way. My buddy used to work there. Great firm, why did they fire you? Were you caught stealing ink?"

"What? How dare you?"

"Kidding. Why'd you leave?"

"Bad, relentless case that kept haunting me. The Reverend."

"You were on that? That's brave."

"Yeah. These killers are professionals I tell you that."

"I saw. Ratio?"

"2:0. Working my 3rd"

So you lost 2 cases and won 0? That's a shame."

"Hey!"

"Kidding. I know you won 2. My ratio is 4:1."

"Wanna talk about the 1?"

"Not really. It became personal so I lost grip of it."

"More reason why you shouldn't mix business with pleasure."

"Sometimes." He says then winks at me.

The waitress brings our food and I look down at my plate. Squid, fish sauce, onion rings and two slices of lemon. I don't even know which one I should start with. I'm familiar with the rest except for calamari so start with it.

"No no no. Here, put this sauce."

"I already have sauce."

"I know."

He puts some peach sauce on the calamari then takes one and with a fork then takes an onion ring and dips it in fish sauce. He then takes it with the same fork and lifts it up.

"It's better when they're all combined. Here." He says with a chuckle.

I look at it and let him feed me. I close my eyes and chew as fast as I could.

"Don't chew it fast. Savour it. Taste the tang and the sweetness." He says.

I chew it slower and open my eyes. It was... pretty good actually. I didn't know squid could be this delicious.

"Good?"

I smile and nod. He takes a serviette and wipes the corner of my mouth.

"Thanks." I say and take the fork to add more food in my mouth. This is so good!

"Okay. I'll tell you." He says.

"Tell me about what?"

"My bed wetting till I was 8."

"Dude! Gross."

He laughs at me and takes a bite of some of his food. That shrimp looks good too.

"Take." He says.

"What?"

"You're looking at the shrimp like its the love of your life so go ahead..."

"I'll only take a bite." I say and reach over to taste it.

"Oh my freaking- this is so good. Why is your food better than mine? I mean I've tasted shrimp but not like this..."

"It's my aura."

"Whatever!"

I open the door of the house and get in. It's a bit dark I must say.

"T?" I call out while switching on the lights.

"In here!" He says from the kitchen.

I put my handbag down and go to the kitchen where I find him doing dishes.

"Hey. Where's the caretaker?"

"She went home. After making us dinner."

"I'm sorry I didn't come earlier but T, you won't believe what I just had-"

"I just had another investor." He interrupts me.

"Oh. That's great babe."

"Yeah it is. I finally have purpose again."

"What?"

"Nothing. Want to help me with these? What did you want to say?"

"Uhm... I forgot. Eish!"

"It was probably not important. You going to go shower?"

"Yeah. Why do you ask?"

"You smell like fish and lemon. You ate seafood?"

"That's what I was trying to tell you, I just had-"

"Could you give me that dishcloth behind you?"

I turn and give him the dishcloth.

"Can I speak now?!" I sarcastically ask.

"Why are you shouting?"

"I'm not shouting. I just thought you couldn't hear me since you kept interrupting me."

"I can hear you. That fish smell is just disturbing me."

I sigh and look at him continue with the dishes. This... this is what I've been dealing with for the past 2 days.

I grab my handbag from the lounge and go upstairs to take a long, hot bath. That'll relax me.

After I'm done, I put on my pajamas and go downstairs with my phone. I find him watching TV. I sit on the couch and go through my phone.

'Hey. I had fun today, perhaps on Monday you can pause being mean again and we can go out for some prawns. Don't worry, I'll order the same so that you can stop eating my food.' I smile at Simphiwe's text and reply with laughing emoji.

"Something wrong?" Troy asks.

"Nothing." I say and continue watching the TV.

It's Saturday and I've done a New Years Resolution that I'd try to keep fit this year. Sure I'm curvaceous and all but my stomach is my problem. After we got back from our honeymoon, some of my tight shirts were really tight. Like really really tight. So every Saturday, Troy and I go for a run around the park and come back. Since he's still sleeping and won't be able to run anyway, I put on my exercise gear and make sure that I got the right tune to kick-start my day.

"Hey. Where are you going?" He says and pokes his eyes.

"Out for a run. It's Saturday."

"Oh right. Well, you go on then."

"Yeah. You're going to be good?"

"Yeah I'll be good. Go before you change your mind." He chuckles.

"Maybe I shouldn't go. I feel bad leaving you."

"Please, by all means go. You need the exercise anyway."

"What? You've always loved me this way."

"Well, now that I'm on this wheelchair and looking at you from a short person's view... sheesh! It's bad."

"T, I will not stand here and take insults from you."

"It's not an insult sugar honey. It's an observation."

"Why are you being like this?"

"Like what? Truthful? Come on, lighten up. You can lose a few kilos by turning off the light and shutting the door behind you. Some of us paralysed individuals have nowhere to go." He says and pulls the covers over his head.

This... this is- nevermind.

I tried to turn up the volume but Troy's words just keep ringing in my head. How could he say that? I'm being psychologically

abused. Is this how marriage feels like? Because if it is, I'm not sure I want it anymore. I get to the park we usually stop at and watch as other runners pass me by with their partners. I see one thick lady and a slim guy treating themselves to ice-cream so early in the morning. My heart breaks just by looking at all this. I sit on a park bench nearby and bury my face in my hands.

While I'm wallowing, my phone falls on the ground. I see two little hands pick it up. I look up and it's a boy who's in his dinosaur pajamas.

"Hey miss. You dropped your phone." He says with a donut in his other hand.

"Junior! I look away for 2 seconds and you're already stealing phones?"

I look up when I recognize the voice. Simphiwe?

"Simphiwe?"

"Naledi. Hi. What are you doing here?"

"Just out for a run. You? With donuts?"

"The donuts are for him." He says and points at the boy.

"I told him that if he didn't get me any donuts I was going to turn into a Tyrannosaurus Rex and rip him to shreds." The boy says and makes a growling sound.

"Oh. Well, we definitely wouldn't want that." I say.

"So you're uncle Simphiwe's friend?" He asks.

"Uhm... yeah. You can say that."

"I'm Junior. What's your name?"

"Naledi."

"What does it mean?"

"That's enough little man. You got your donut, now get in the car." Simphiwe says and points to his car near the park.

"Fine. Bye Naledi!"

"Bye Junior!"

We look at him as he takes a piece of his donut and throws it to a dog.

"Cute little fella." I say.

"Yeah. Well, he looks adorable now. Give him sugar at night and you'll see the Tyrannosaurus Rex he's talking about."

"Yours?"

"Nah. My sister's. Her man left her a single parent and now she's barely coping. I offered to take him on weekends so that she can rest you know?" He says and comes to sit next to me.

"That's thoughtful."

"Yeah. She's all I have so we need to stick together you know? Donut?" He asks and opens a box full of donuts.

"Oh no. Thanks. I told you I'm out for a run."

"Why would you go for a run? You look amazing already." He says with a smile.

I sigh and look away to stop my tears. I wish T could say that about me. I wish Sheryl didn't turn our lives upside down and make him a complete stranger to me.

"Hey. You okay?" He asks.

"I'm fine. Junior is probably waiting for you. I need to continue with my run."

"Hey you're not okay. What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"Okay. Whatever it is, I'm right here. Alright?" He says and pokes my chin.

"Thanks."

"No problem advocate." He chuckles.

We look at each other with a smile and before I know it, he's already leaning in for a kiss.

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"Simphiwe, what are you doing?"

"Oh... I'm sorry."

"Did you think-"

"I'm sorry."

"No, I'm sorry. Maybe I gave you false-"

"No it's okay. I gotta get going. I'll see you on Monday."

He gets up and walks to his car and drives off.

What was that about? He wanted to kiss me? Why? He knows well that I'm married and he has every girl gravelling at his feet. I thought he saw me more as a friend than a... potential lover. I guess momma was right, things will come my way to divert my focus from Troy. Even though he's been a real big whoopee lately. I check my phone and see that it has a scratch from falling on the pavement. I'll take it to a cellular shop tomorrow. Right now, I need to go home and get work done on my case.

"Oh. You're back madam?"

"Yes. I didn't know you come in during weekends." I say to her.

"I do. Everyday. Even tomorrow. Shall I get you some water?"

"Oh no, I'm good. Thanks. I'm just going to take a quick shower and get some work done. Where's Troy?"

"He's in his study madam."

"Okay. I told you before, it's Naledi. Not madam. You're older than me mama."

"Okay madam."

I chuckle at her and go upstairs to take that shower. She's a real nice woman, reminds me of momma.

I take a towel and as I'm about to go to the bathroom, my phone rings. It's Pepper.

"Hello."

"Darling! Hi! How's it going?"

"Good. You?"

"Haaaa! Just good? You're supposed to be swooning and sounding like you're drunk in love or something. What's wrong?"

"Nothing, I just went out for a run and I'm exhausted."

"Oh. Yes darling, keeping fit is a must nowadays. Diseases are many. Hold on man, I'm on the phone!"

"Who's that?" I chuckle.

"Is it not this hunk bothering me on the phone!"

"Who's that?"

"The bartender. I went back to Kenya because I have another project here."

"So you hooked up with the bartender again?"

"Of course! He's the only one that doesn't seem high on soap."

"Hehe."

We continue talking and catching up for half an hour that I ended up sitting on the carpet and playing with my hair.

"Wait! Pepper, may I please speak to the bartender."

"So you want a taste?"

"What? No! I need to ask him something."

"Okay."

There's a bit of shuffling then he greets me with his baritone.

"Hi. I don't know if you remember me-"

"Pepper's friend. The bride." He says with a chuckle.

"Oh. Okay well, I need you to tell me more about that club next to the one you work in."

"Why?"

"I'm investigating an incident there and I was hoping you'd give me a bit of light around it. Is it just a strip club?"

"Investigating? You're a cop?"

"Attorney."

"Oh. Don't worry about it. It's just like any other club. Girls, money, alcohol, music."

"Oh. Really? So there's no prostitution huh?" I ask.

He goes quiet for a while then there's shuffling and what sounds like footsteps and a door closing.

"Okay. Who are you?" He asks.

"Google me: Advocate Naledi Mapulane, Jacobs & Attorney's." I say.

"What exactly happened that's making you ask me this?"

"I'm afraid that's classified."

"You know how much trouble I could land in if I told you?"

"You know how many lives you'd save if you did?"

He goes silent and then sighs.

"You're right. It's not just a club. It's also a brothel."

"Oh my."

"Yeah. But the prostitutes are hired by the club to please celebrities. Nothing else. It's a strip club for both males and females so..."

"Can you give me the name of the owner?"

"The owner of the club? Forget it."

"Please man! I need this info."

"She's going to ask you where you found this info and she's going to find out."

"So it's a 'she'?"

"Yeah."

"Okay. It's fine. The club is not really a big factor here, but I do wanted to know. The police went there and they found nothing."

"Of course they found nothing. She has friends in the police force, even in the army."

"So do you know who Bandile is? He's a friend of the guy who owns the club you work in."

"Yeah. I've seen Bandile. He seems like a party animal. Got every girl on his side. Before y'all came, he was already a regular here."

"Really? That's interesting. Well, I do thank you. You've been a great help."

"I don't want my name anywhere near your investigation!"

"I don't even know your name."

"That's good. Let's hope it'll stay that way."

He says then hangs up the phone.

I just had to know that all this is a work of fiction. Bandile is going down.

6 days later

"I'm ready." He says.

I nod and then put on his comfortable tracksuit on. I give him a shirt and a sweater because he's able to do those. I take out the track pants and socks. When he's done putting on the sweater, I lift up his legs and put them in the right track pants whole. I ask him to lie down as I push the track pants up so that it reaches his waist. I help him sit up right and put on his socks.

"Ready?" I ask.

He nods. I pull out his wheelchair from the bathroom and place it next to the bed. I try to lift him up and with his help, I was able to put him on the wheelchair. I put his feet on there too

and not forgetting to put his slippers on. Once he is comfortable, I go to the bathroom again and take a brush to come comb his hair. He stares at me while I brush his hair and lift up some curls. He always does this and I've never really asked why he stares at me.

"What?" I ask.

"Huh?"

"You're staring, like usual. What is it" I ask and pat his hair. His curls have definitely grown and it's only been a week. A very long, distressing and awkward week. That's why I'm such in a good mood today, today is Friday and it's the day of the trial.

"Can I not analyse my wife?" He asks.

"Am I your wife?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean have you been treating me like your wife?"

"I'm not doing this with you." He says and reverts his head back

"Do what? You mean talk? Have an actual conversation?"

"You just don't understand do you?"

"Don't understand what T? And whatever that is, is it an excuse to keep emotionally abusing me."

"Telling you the truth is emotionally abusing you?"

"The truth? You mean the part of me being a 'manipulative megalomaniac'? The part where you said I'm a 'bitch' when I greeted our neighbour. Who's in his 80s and has a wife? Which one?"

"Naledi I just found out that the woman I thought was my mother for 26 years is not my mother, and that that very same woman murdered my actual father!"

"And I nearly died Troy! I nearly died! I watched you as you kept scraping on the floor and slipping on your own blood trying to save me from a psychotic woman who had her hand on the trigger. I fainted just thinking about leaving this world without having experienced anything! I am traumatised too but you don't see me cursing at you and throwing your opinions on the sideline! You have! The entire week and I've had it! Like you said, I'm your wife! Not your fucking punching bag!" I exclaim and stomp downstairs in a blind rage. He can help himself get down, there's a stair lift. I grab my black gown and handbag. Friday mood has officially been spoiled, thanks to my so called 'loving husband'. The door bells rings while I'm looking for my car keys, I take them and go answer the door.

"Boss lady. As'bonge (a term for 'let's be grateful')!"

"Thabang? What's going on?"

"Well, I came for 2 things. One, I need to talk to boss man about Miracle. She nearly made a reserve employee sing with the angels and meet bra God. Two, I need to know what's going on with your friend, Karabo."

"One, can't you just call Troy instead of coming here? Two, what do you mean? Karabo is fine."

"One-"

"Thabang, speak properly please, and fast, I need to be at court before 9 am."

"Sure boss lady. Entlek gwetsagalang ka boss man (what's going on with boss man)? He hasn't been to work ever since we heard the news of an intruder. Is everything okay?"

"Why don't you ask him?" I say and open the door wider so that he can see Troy going down the stairs with the stars lift in his wheelchair

"Ah ah ah! Boss man ke tapole (potato)?! Boss lady what's cooking after baking? Boss man is blind but with his legs? Ah!"

"He's temporarily paralysed from the waist down." I say to him.

"Ah ah ah! Boss man! I'm sure o lwatsa ke letswai shame (I'm sure he's sick because of salt)('salt' is a slang term used for a person's state of being when they have not had any sexual intercourse for a long time)."

"Well, while you two catch up, I have a case to get to."

"Boss lady

entlek of kae Karabo (where exactly is Karabo)?"

"Witness protection."

"Witness pro- nare gwetsagalang mo lefatseng mona, batho ba keep'a di secrets o kare ke di special agent tsa diablos (what is going on on this earth, people are keeping secrets like they're the devil's special agents)!"

I chuckled at his dramatic demeanor and go out to my car. I cannot deal with him nor his moody buddy in the house.

Thabang, sill at the door, is unsure of whether to get in the house or not.

"Boss lady! May I please use the toilet?! Number 1!" He says.

I beep my horn and go out the gate.

It's 8 am and I'm at the Regional Magistrates Court where the trial will commence. I'm waiting for Karabo to get here and other witnesses too. I know as soon as she and Bandile arrive, there's going to be a media hurricane here.

A private car stops in front of me and she appears out of the car in a formal blue suit. I'm dressed in a red suit but it won't matter because I'll have a gown over myself the entire time.

"Hey." I say to her.

"Hi."

"Ready?"

"Nervous."

"Don't be. Now, what I'm about to tell you is crucial so pay attention. Let's go to room where you will be before the trial starts."

"Alright. Now I told you that the defense will try by all means to pin the blame on you. All you have to do is stay calm and tell the truth. If he belittles you or asks the same question just with a different word, cooperate. This is a tactic. Kobus is smart. Okay?"

"Kobus as in white?"

"Yes. Have you been talking to someone about this?"

"No."

"Ka-"

"I just don't feel comfortable with that. I've only been writing stuff."

"On what?"

"My diary. I brought it with me."

"Let me see."

She takes out a pink book with a lock around it.

"I think we might just use this too. Alright. Bandile is here, I can hear by the sounds outside. Hold on friend. Okay?"

"Okay."

"Hi. It's me again, my client is about to go on trial and I really need the DNA results. As in today!"

"Miss Lane. We do apologize but we deal with other cases and you brought the dress late. We will have it by tomorrow. Maybe even Monday. There's nothing we can do."

"What am I supposed to tell my client? She was raped ma'am! If she loses this case, she'll be another failed statistic."

She goes silent for a while but when I see Mr Diale enter the courtroom, I hang up and put my phone away. I guess I'm getting the DNA results tomorrow. I just hope that the case gets postponed or something. There's no other way.

"All rise!"

"You may be seated!"

My nerves are all over the place just as Karabo's are too. This is my first rape case and worse... with friends. I, the state open up the floor and place the charges on Bandile, the defendant. He obviously pleaded not guilty which is the reason why we're all here today. The media, Karabo and Bandile's supporters, the stenographer, the court orderly and Magistrate Diale. Nancy's father. The main executive.

Bandile keeps looking at me and I know if I look back, I will lose focus.

"The State may call on their primary witness." Diale says.

"Thank you your honour. The prosecutor calls upon Miss Dinake to the stand." I say.

Karabo stands up and stands by the podium opposite mine.

"Can you please state your name and surname for the court?" I ask. Everyone knows but it's standard procedure that it's said out loud.

"Miss Dinake? You are laying the charges of rape against Mr Socishe yes?"

"Yes."

"Before we can proceed. You'll need to go under oath."

A security guard hands me the Holy Bible and I go to where Karabo is standing and place it in front of her.

She puts her right hand on the Holy Bible and her left hand in the air.

"Repeat after me : I, Karabo Dinake..."

"I, Karabo Dinake..."

"Promise to speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth..."

"Promise to speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth..."

"Or so help me God."

"Or so help me God."

"Thank you."

I take the Bible and give it back. It's show time.

"Miss Dinake, before the incident, did you personally know Mr Socishe?"

"Not really. I was him a few times and all I knew was that he was your friend."

The court gasps and I continue.

"I do confirm with the court that Mr Socishe used to be my friend. Not anymore. Now Miss Dinake, what happened?"

She inhales deeply and starts talking.

"I was at the club in Kenya. My girlfriends and I were there for a bachelorette party. After hours, Pepper and I, a friend of mine, went to a strip club called 'Venus 7'."

"You may continue."

"Okay so Pepper was busy with a bartender and I felt a bit lonely so I went over to take a seat and saw a man sitting there. It was Bandile."

"Let it be known to the court that Mr Socishe was at the club that Miss Dinake was in. There was no forcing or any agreement to meet there. I'm just putting it out there for the media rumours that Miss Dinake did those things. Continue."

"Okay so he said I should join him and keep him company because he was lonely too. We ordered a few drinks and drank like half a bottle of Hennessy and a few shots in between."

"Were you... extremely intoxicated?"

"No. I was tipsy. I had been drinking water. Anyway, he said that-"

"Who's he?"

"Bandile said that we should go to the club next door because it's more lively. It doesn't have a name, it's just called 'The Club'."

"How original!" A Bandile supporter exclaims from the back.

"Your honour if Mr Socishe's support members cannot comply with the rules of the court, I will personally drag them out myself. This is a court of the law!" I say.

"You heard the lady. Shut your trap or outside you go! You may continue Miss Dinake." Diale says and continues with his straight face.

Karabo takes a sip of water then continues, I look over at Bandile's lawyer and I know he likes what he sees. A fragile, sensitive witness like Karabo is like golden ticket for him to intimate.

Karabo continues the story and makes sure to name Blandina there, the cocaine and use words like 'penis and vagina' instead of 'dick and pussy'.

"Did you let Mr Socishe know about your non-consent?"

"Yes! I did. Several times. He wouldn't listen. He was stronger than I was."

"I'm sorry to hear that. What happened afterwards Miss Dinake?"

"I grabbed my shoe that fell and got out of the club. The Uber driver that Pepper ordered for me was already there. He took me back to the hotel and that's when I threw the dress on the bed and went straight to the shower. To wash away his filth!"

She's becoming emotional and that's not good.

"What was your state of mind in, because of the drugs?"

"I was high when I took it in but when he started raping me, I instantly became sober. I was sober but weak."

"Who did you tell first about the rape and when did you do that?"

"Mutsa. The detective and a friend of mine. I told her a month later."

"Why not sooner Miss Dinake?"

"Yeah!" Bandile's supporters exclaimed.

"Silence. Order in the court!" Diale roars.

"Why not sooner? Because I was scared Advocate. Like I said, he threatened to kill my child. He knew where I lived he said my address to my face. I was thinking of my child. Any parent would do the same."

"Thank you Miss Dinake. That'll be all your honour."

I take a seat and smirk at Bandile's attorney. He stands up and asks Karabo the same old questions.

"Miss Dinake. You have the wrong man. Let it be known to the court that my client does not know Miss Dinake. He may have been friends with Miss Lane but he's never met her. Nor spoke with her. It was only the one time when Mr Socishe went to go greet Miss Lane at the local pool in Kenya when he saw her. That was all. After that, he went straight home. We have an alibi. Miss Blandina and a security guard at the hotel confirms this. Miss Lane does not have any evidence nor any real witnesses that saw this 'alleged rape' occur. The club she is talking about is clean. There is no prostitution or any drugs for that matter. There is a report from the chief of police from Kenya himself." He says and hands a document to the Diale.

What is going on here?! False witnesses?!

"Miss Dinake, did Mr Socishe really rape you?"

"Yes he did!"

"We heard that you have quite the sexual record. Do you not?"

"Objection your honour! The defence may not bring up the witness's previous sexual history unless related." I interject.

"Agreed. Mr Kobus is it relevant?"

"No your honour. I apologize to you and the court your honour. Let's say that Mr Socishe was really at the club. Miss Dinake, Miss Lane mentioned that you went to Mr Socishe and sat with him. Correct?"

"Yes!"

"Could it be that since you felt 'alone and stuck' in life you tried to hit on Mr Socishe?"

"No I-"

"And could it be that he rejected you and you being the petty woman you are, decided to spark a rumour and say that Mr Socishe allegedly raped you?"

"What? No! Why don't you believe me?"

"Unfortunately, you don't get to ask the questions but I will answer that one. I don't believe you because I know you're lying. Myself, Mr Socishe and hundreds of others believe so. There's no evidence! There's no real witnesses! My client has an alibi. Two of them. You have?"

"But-"

"No further questions your honour." He says and goes to sit down. Bandile keeps smiling and clearing his throat.

I stand up to call on the police officer that was at the station when Karabo came to report the rape. A doctor pops in from

the court with a document in her hand. We all stare at her as she comes to me and hands me the folder.

"Young lady, what is that? And who are you?" Diale asks.

"I'm Dr Kuthrapali sir and this in my hand is DNA results from Miss Karabo Dinake's dress for her rape case. She wore it on the day of the rape. We found hair, semen and skin cells belonging to a certain Mr Bandile Socishe."

"What does that mean?!" A Bandile supporter asks from the back.

I look at the document and smile. I answer the Bandile supporter in my head. This means that he lied! This also means that we won honey, this means that we won.

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"Hey. You good?"

"I'm fine. That Kobus guy is really scary. He made it look like I'm the bad guy. Like I raped myself."

"That's how he wants you to feel. Don't give in to that. There's evidence now. Actual evidence."

"What happens now? I heard he changed his statement saying it was consensual."

"Yeah, don't worry about that. He's already proven to everyone that he's a liar. Your diary was a great help too, alongside Mutsa."

"What happens now?"

"Now? We wait for the magistrate's verdict."

"Today? On the same day?"

"Yes. That's possible. What will not be heard today is how long is his sentencing, when he's proven guilty."

"If he's proven guilty." She says.

"Trust me." I say.

She looks at me with glistening eyes and smiles. She's gone through so much. Justice served is the least she deserved.

"After much thorough preparation and the evidence presented to me. I've reached a verdict. This court finds Mr Bandile Socishe... guilty of rape of Miss Karabo Dinake."

"Hilililili!" Karabo's supporters bellowed.

"Order in the court! Right. Sentencing will be in 3 working days. Take him away. Court adjourned." Diale says and gets up with his papers and pen.

A prison warden arrests Bandile who is just going crazy by screaming and cursing at everyone.

Karabo taps me on the shoulder from behind.

"Didn't I tell you to trust me?" I ask her with a smile.

Endless tears roll down her face as she hugs me so tightly.

"Thank you Naledi. Thank you." She says in between sniffles all the while still hugging me.

"No problem K-baby."

She let's go and I hand her some tissue.

Kobus looks at us then smiles and goes out the court. Karabo's supporters are chanting and dancing outside. I know that the media is probably in a frenzy and will want statements from both Karabo and I.

"We gotta go out there. Congratulations once again." I say and pick up my handbag and hold my gown with my other arm.

"Is there... media?" She asks.

"Yes. Problem?"

"Well, I haven't told Thabang and my entire family back home about this. Not even my YouTube fans know. If I go out there..."

"Uhm... we can always find another way of getting out of here but I'm not sure-"

"No it's okay. I want to. It's time I dealt with this head on."

"You sure?"

"Yeah. Can I hold your hand?" She asks.

"Sure."

We go out the court and I'm met by a tsunami of journalists and their camera's in my face. Why is it that every case I deal with has to get the media involved?

"Mrs Lane? Mrs Lane? May we ask you some questions?" One journalist asks.

"Alright. Like always. I and my client will only answer 3 questions. That's the limit. First question?"

They all talk at once that I don't know who to listen to or answer.

"Mrs Lane?! Will you be making a campaign about rape victims?" One journalist ask.

"Uhm... I'm definitely thinking about that. I've already succeeded with the anti-drugs campaign. I think with my client's permission, we can do exactly that. Help young and old women and men open up about rape. To those who even want to confess about raping an individual."

"Mrs Lane? How long will Bandile be in prison?"

"Well, we still have to hear back from Magistrate Diale about that. We'll know in 3 working days so probably Wednesday."

"Miss Dinake, what happens now?" One journalist asks Karabo. She looks at me and I nod for her to answer. This one is for her.

"Uhm... well. Therapy. That's the first one. I have to deal with the nightmares and my fear of intimacy first. Then I have to bond with my daughter because I haven't been able to with that animal still out there. Then I'm making that campaign about raped individuals a reality. With my friend's help." She says and squeezes my hand.

"Alright. No more questions." I say and drag Karabo to my car so we can get out of there. We don't have any guards to escort us out but we managed to swim through the wave of journalists coming at us still.

We get in and I head to my office. She needs to sign a document then we're done. I turn on the radio and Karabo chuckles.

"Who is this guy?" She asks.

"The loooooove doctor. He's a total nut case but I enjoy listening to his theories about love and relationships."

"Speaking of which, how are you and Troy doing ever since the intruder incident. Did they ever catch him?"

"It's a her."

"Her?"

"Yeah. The intruder was Troy's mom." I tell her.

"What? I don't think she counts as an intruder babes."

"She had a gun and wanted to kill me because she had a crush on Troy."

She goes silent and just stares at me. I chuckle at the look on her face.

"What kind of mom-"

"She isn't Troy's biological mother. Troy's father had Troy before he had Tory with Sheryl."

"The Jocasta Complex."

"What's that?"

"A sexual desire of a mother to her son."

"You sure you don't want to go back to psychology?" I ask.

"Not really. I never enjoyed it but it did pay the bills. I'm more of a content creator. Maybe I should be an animator."

"Whatever you want K-baby."

"And that's all from the loooooove doctor. Catch y'all same time, same place on the love repertoire."

I chuckle to myself and switch off the radio. I know my smile will fade once I get in this house. Maybe it's the house that's making Troy such an ass. What I should do is also go to church. My level of cursing has reached an alarming rate. I've lost myself ever since that Sheryl scandal. I think my anxiety will calm down once she's buried. Which will be tomorrow."

I grab my handbag and sigh before opening the door and closing it behind me. I don't even call out for Troy when I get in, I already know he's here and it's only a matter of time before he picks a fight with me.

"Nay." He says when I pass his study. It's so dark in there, where is the caretaker nurse?

I go inside and find him downing a bottle of whisky still in the clothes I left him in this morning.

"Congratulations." She says and takes another gulp.

"On what?"

"Your case."

"Thank you." I say and stand awkwardly behind him. His laptop still on and our picture in Barbados as his screen saver.

Why are you still here Nay?" He asks.

"What do you mean?"

"I thought you were gone forever this morning and I was going to sleep alone today."

"Uhm... no. I was going to come back."

"Why?"

"Because... because I.... because I'd rather forget all the reasons it won't work and remember one reason why it would."

He chuckles and nods several times. That was momma's words.

"Where's Thabang?" I ask.

"I made him 2nd in command while I'm away. I trust him."

"That's good."

"Nay I'm sorry." He says.

I still can't see his face because I'm facing his back.

"For what?" I ask.

"For everything. Consider it an all inclusive apology, from not being able to save you from Sheryl to emotionally abusing you."

"That's all I wanted to hear. But T... it's not your fault what happened with Sheryl."

"You know when I saw you kneeling, waiting for her to take you from me. When I saw you looking at me like it was goodbye

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I stopped fighting with myself to live. That's why I was so surprised that I was still alive and you were there next to me."

"T..."

"I've never... never cried the way I did that day. When I saw Tory shoot her, I knew that at least she'd be gone in this world. But then you laid there too, I thought you were gone too. Turns out you just fainted." He says with a chuckle and downs another glass before continuing.

"There's no me without you Nay. Me pushing you away was to make you fall out of love with me so that you can leave and live your life. With a man who can walk and save you like Tory."

"You're so selfish."

"Say what?" He turns around in his wheelchair and faces me.

"Yes. That's so selfish of you to intentionally make me feel that way so that I too can be unhappy. My vows were just words to you then huh?"

"No I-"

"I'm not going anywhere T. Nowhere. Whether you can't walk, speak or even see. I'll always be there. This post traumatic stress is too much for you to bare alone. Let me help you." I say and bend down so that I can look at his drooped face.

"I'm not all about that Bible stuff."

"I know. I'm not talking about that. We can start by accepting things the way they are and talking to someone. Couple's therapy? Let's carry each other through this."

"You're going to have to do more than just carry me. I don't want to burden you with-"

"Then I'll do the 99% and you'll do the rest. I'll compromise."

"Really?"

"Really. T, close your eyes."

"Why?"

"Just do it."

"Okay."

"What do you see?"

"Nothing-ness?"

"That's my life without you."

He opens his brown eyes and laughs. He knows what I just did. He said the same cheesy thing to me after our first fight in University. I found it adorable though.

"T, you need to stop this. Pushing me away and dealing with this alone is stupid. You're repeating what I did. Being independent on everything and doing all by myself. We're married now, there's no I or me. It's 'we' now. Okay?"

"Yeah. I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry for my outburst this morning too. That's not me."

"I don't blame ya'. I had it coming."

"Damn right you did. So... do you really think I'm fat?"

"The truth?" He asks with his signature smirk.

"Yeah."

"You're not fat babe. Not at all. You're still the breathtaking woman I met years ago."

"Really?"

"Really. Don't mind the nonsense that was pouring out of my mouth lately. I didn't mean any of that. I don't want you coming home and instantly frown. I want you to be excited when you get here to us."

"Us?"

"Yeah." He says and points at a box with holes.

I go over to the box and open it and 'poop' comes out a very energetic Pumpkin with a bandage around the leg it was shot on.

"Pumpkin! Oh, I missed you so much boy-boy. I hope you can forgive us for traumatizing you just a few days of getting you."

It licks my fingers and plays with the keys in my hands.

"I think he loves you more than he loves me." T says.

"Jealousy."

"You'll see who feeds you from now on." Troy says to him. Pumpkin barks and keeps jumping up and down and rubbing itself against my hand.

"Have you talked to Tory yet?" I ask him.

"Yeah. I told him to-"

The door bell rings and I look at Troy.

"I told him to come over."

I pick Pumpkin up and go open the door.

"Hey Tory."

"Hi. I see that he's okay." He says and looks at Pumpkin.

"Yeah. Hey, I never got to thank you for donating your blood to Troy. That was really brave and generous of you."

"He would've done the same thing for me. Well, maybe."

I open the door wider for him to come in.

Troy wheels himself to the lounge too and they both look at each other without moving. Pumpkin stops jumping and moving on my arms too. This is so awkward because we find ourselves in the very same situation when Troy first saw Tory.

"Hey big bro."

Troy just stares at him and I know what's going to happen next.

"Come here Tory. Kneel."

Tory reluctantly walks and stands in front of him then kneels.

Oh God. What's Troy going to do?

To our surprise... he hugs Tory. He. Actually. Hugs. Tory.

"Thanks lil' bro." He says and leaves the embrace.

Then he holds Tory by the neck and squeezes the life out of him.

"If you ever... ever betray me like that again, I'm chopping you and feeding you to Miracle. Got it lil' bro?"

Tory keeps squealing and nodding. Troy let's him go and he coughs and catches his breath.

"Tory. Is there anything else we need to know?" I ask him.

"Yeah."

"Say what?" Troy looks at Tory.

"What is it?" I ask him.

"Actually it's more of a question to you."

"What's that?"

"How would you feel if I told you that Kganya and I have been seeing each other?"

Two Weeks Later

It's the 6th of February and it's Troy's 27th birthday! I cannot wait to see his face for the present I have for him. We've come a long way. I did say that anything can happen in a minute. Imagine two weeks. He agreed with couple's therapy and he's been doing good. Especially after Sheryl's burial. They didn't go but they definitely got better after Uncle Murray buried her.

I don't have nightmares as before but they've definitely calmed down.

Good thing it's Sunday because I cannot be busy with the new case and still plan a birthday party for him. Yes, I'm planning a birthday party for him but he already knows about it because of Thabang's big mouth spoiling it!

My present to him is sentimental, I don't want others to see it before him.

"I hope you're thinking about me." He says next to me on the bed.

"What?"

"You're smiling so hard. I hope you're thinking about me."

"I'm just happy that it's someone's special day today."

"You sure we can't just spend the day inside. Alone." He says and keeps kissing my hand.

"No. Come on, we haven't been spending time with our friends."

"For you... okay."

"Thank you. Can I give you my gift now?" I grin.

"Now?"

"Yes now. I've been holding it for a week and I'm at my limit." I say and reach into my bag.

"Okay. What is it?"

I give him a rectangular box with a red bow on it and smile wider when he rips it open.

"A pregnancy test? What does the two bars on it mean?" He asks.

I smile at him and wait for him to figure it out, like he always does.

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"What does the two bars mean?"

"Take a wild guess."

"Am... am I going to be dad?"

I smile widely and nod my head.

"What?! Holy sh-"

"Language."

"I can't believe this! How far long? What is the..."

"Calm down, I'm only 2 months long."

"Really? Babe, this is amazing! Thank you so much! I love you, I love you so much." He says and keeps kissing my hand.

"We're pregnant."

"We are. When's your next doctors appointment? I wanna be there." He excitedly says.

"At the end of February."

"This is amazing. I can't believe it. Have you told your mom?"

"No. Just you."

"This... baby I've wanted this for so long with you and now... thank you. You've just made me the happiest man alive. It really feels like my birthday now."

"Happy Birthday. Now let's get ready for your party."

"Boss man, happy birthday Gaddafi! Boss man!" Thabang exclaims and gets in with Obitshepo sleeping in his arms. Karabo gets in too and hugs me.

"K-baby."

"Friend. How are you?" She asks with a yellow dress on and adorable wedges. She looks like she's doing better. She even started doing dreadlocks.

"I'm okay. What about you?"

"I'm getting there. Gosh, you're glowing."

"Must be this white top I'm wearing."

"No no. A different kind of glow. Mr Lane giving it to you good?" She smirks.

I let her in and she gasps when she sees Troy on a wheelchair.

"You were saying?" I ask with a chuckle.

"He's... he's-"

"Yep. Go ahead and put your bag next to the couch."

She walks in further and greets Troy with a smile like she just didn't discover his disability.

They're the first ones to get here. Pepper couldn't make it because of his wedding project in Kenya. Some Kenyan couple hired him as their wedding planner. I'm hoping we can all catch up today and have a good time. Karabo included. By the way, Bandile was sentenced to 15 years in prison with no change of parole. Blandina and the security guard at the hotel were caught in their lies and had to pay a big fortune for that. I last heard that she went back to America.

Karabo follows me to the kitchen as Troy and Thabang play with Obi and talk business.

"Girl, when did this happen?" She asks and sits on one of the bar stools while grating some carrots.

"Sheryl shot him."

"Oh my God! And you said nothing?!"

"We were dealing with it one step at a time. Involving other people would've been messy."

"Yeah. How are y'all holding up though?"

"Great actually."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Onto other matters now, you and Thabang haven't fought for 10 minutes now so I'm guessing the co-parenting is working."

"That and he found out about Bandile and what he did."

"Oh my. What happened?"

"He actually was very understanding. I cried on his shoulder for a while and he slept at my apartment."

"Really?"

"Yeah. He's the only guy I feel comfortable when touching. We've been really bonding and I don't know..."

"Do you think a relationship might be on his mind?" I ask her and pour juice in her glass.

"Maybe. It's definitely on mine, but we tried the first time and it didn't work. I ended up putting someone's daughter in hospital. Where is Nancy anyway?"

"I have no idea. We had each other's numbers and then she probably changed them. I didn't even see her when we moved from our apartment to this house."

"Oh." She nods her head and downs the drink.

"Hello ladies!" Tory exclaims getting in the kitchen with a big plastic in his hands.

"Tory is that the meat?" Karabo asks.

"It smells horrible." I hold my nose.

"All I smell is blood." Karabo says.

"I got beef, lamb and some wors." He says and puts the plastic on the kitchen counter.

I suppress the urge to vomit at the stench of the meat. This smells so bad!

"Did you see Rivonia's message on the group?" Karabo asks as Tory marinates the meat on a board.

"What group?" I ask her. I haven't even touched my phone today. I last saw it upstairs on the charger.

"She created another group chat where she was telling us that she doesn't have anything yellow and no simple white so we shouldn't be surprised if she rocks here with a wedding dress."

I laugh and tell her that I should go fetch my phone upstairs. I mostly just wanted to get out of there because I was suffocating! I was noxious and it was only a matter of time before I stained this white top of mine.

The theme for Troy's birthday party is yellow and white, but I'm wearing my jeans thank you. I've worn too many dresses to last me a lifetime.

I can hear downstairs that Oscar is here with his wife and kids. He's the family man type, which is why he's so busy nowadays.

I go downstairs with my phone and see that the gifts are already piling up for Troy.

"Hey Oscar. Where's the wife?" I ask.

"She sick. So she's back home in bed."

"Oh my-"

"Nah, it's not that serious. She just has the flu. She didn't want to spread it or something."

"Oh. I'll send her a get well message."

One of his kids tugs my jean and looks at me with big, adorable eyes. I bend down at her level and squeeze his cheeks.

"Hello sweetie."

He looks at Oscar then back at me without uttering a word.

"Are you okay? Do you need something?"

He nods his while playing with the zipper of his pants.

"You need to use the bathroom?" I ask.

He nods with a smile and I take his hand to the guest bathroom.

Once he's done, I help him wash his hands because the basin was a bit high then point to where his father is.

"Oh. Mutsa!" I exclaim at her in the kitchen and hug her.

"Hey. Wow, you look beautiful." She says with they Nigerian accent of hers.

"Right? I mean, what kind of skin care products are you using?"

"My normal ones. Y'all just haven't seen me in a while."

"Hello!!!" Kganya exclaims from behind me.

I turn around and hug her. I didn't know she was coming.

"You said you weren't going to make it."

"I wanted to say your face when I rocked up here. Surprise!" She says with her yellow crop top and white high raise jean.

"Don't forget about me!"

We all turn around and find Rivonia in a white dress with a few laces at the wrist.

"I told y'all to not be shocked when I come here like it's my wedding."

We all laugh at her and sit around the kitchen counter to catch up.

"Now girl, why didn't you tell us that Troy is... is..." Rivonia can't even finish her sentence.

"Really Rivo?" Karabo asks.

"What? I'm sure we're all wondering."

"What happened really?" Kganya asks.

"Uhm...."

"An intruder shot Troy and that's it." Mutsa comes to the rescue.

"Oh. I heard about that. Is he caught?" Rivonia asks Mutsa.

"Yes. He's in prison right now. He just wanted a quick buck is all." Mutsa explains.

I thank God for her because I don't know how I was going to explain that Troy's mother shot him because he wanted to save me from her because she wanted to kill because she wanted Troy for herself. I get dizzy just interpreting it in my head.

"Now ladies. I think Thabang and I are going to give it another try." Karabo excitedly says.

"You wanna put someone else in hospital too?" I ask.

"Things will be different now. I now think twice before doing anything because of Obi and I have the password to his phone."

"How did you get that?" Kganya asks.

"A magician never reveals her secrets." Karabo smirks.

"What's the big deal?" Mutsa asks.

They all stare at her like she just committed the biggest crime in the history of crime itself. I don't get the big deal either.

"Do you know the power you have when you are able to access your partner's phone?" Karabo asks.

"Exactly. I sometimes don't feel like knowing because I know I'm going to cry. Let the ho*s play in the background."

"I think that a healthy relationship should mean that you do have access to each other's phone." Mutsa says.

"I agree. T and I don't really use each other's phone frequently but when he needs mine

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I unlock it for him and vice versa."

"We even know each other's passwords. That's how it's supposed to be ladies." Mutsa says.

They stare at us and laugh their socks off. While they're doing that, I decrease the heat of the pot that has pap in it and go back to the counter.

"Are they still laughing?" I ask Mutsa.

"It's just that you guys are married, the dating life is the wild west!" Rivonia says.

"Even you Rivonia? I thought your old man would not be so secretive. What's his name?" Mutsa asks.

"Victor. I recently met his older brother Vukani."

"Mr V?" I ask.

"Yeah. I guess you can call him that."

"Sorry, it's just that he used to teach me back in University." I say.

"Oh. That's why you were so weird when you met Victor?" Rivonia asks.

"Yeah. Where is Mr V anyway?" I ask.

"He says he's still teaching. He loves his job. Speaking of jobs, I'm still at Jacob & Attorney's. Mr Cornish resigned with immediate effect."

"What?!" I surprisingly ask.

"Yeah. Some hot shot guy has been there recently. If my mind had a speaker, it would be playing loud moans and dirty things." Rivonia bites her lip.

"Ah!" Kganya exclaims.

"It's just that y'all haven't seen him. If you see him neh, then you'll know. You'll be moaning 'Simpfiwe' like I do."

"Wait who?" I ask.

"His name, Simphiwe. Some lawyer that has multiple businesses. It makes sense to have a lawyer CEO for a law firm anyway." Rivonia says and pulls out a photo of him on Google.

So that's why I haven't seen him around work? He quit and decided to be a CEO at Jacob & Attorney's. I just that he was avoiding me at all costs because of what happened.

Congratulations to him.

"That was delicious. Thank you Tory." I say and take some plates to the kitchen.

"Eh. What did you put in daai vleis (that meat)?" Thabang asks while licking his fingers.

I put some dishes in the dishwasher as the girls keep bringing them in. I then take out the cake from the fridge and begin putting candles on it. I light them all and the girls and I get in the lounge with it while singing the Happy Birthday song. I place the chocolate cake in front of him and tell him to make a wish.

"I already got my wish." He kisses me then blows out the candles.

"Yay! Can I have cake now dad?" Oscar's kid asks.

"Yes you can." I tell him and give him the first slice.

He claps his hands in gratitude then goes to eat it with his other baby brother on the blanket. It's so cute how he looks out for him. I give everyone a slice and lower the volume of the music as it was time for T to unwrap his presents.

I give him one wrapped in blue and has a note from Thabang.

Troy unwraps it and thanks Thabang for the gift. It some blue T-shirt of a soccer club they both love watching on the weekends.

"Sure sure boss man."

Troy unwraps every gift and thanks them. It's really sweet and adorable how each gift is different in its own way and has the same impact on him.

There's two left. One from Tory and one from momma. She mailed it to us because she was unable to come here. She's enjoying the new house ever since Karabo and I helped her move last week.

Troy unwraps the gift from Tory and smiles. It's an old portrait of them when they were about 10 or so.

"Thanks lil' bro. This means a lot."

"Sure thing." They both hug one another and I smile too. This is a big moment for them and I honestly love how they rekindled their brother relationship.

"Last one is from momma." I say and give him to unwrap.

He does so and gets a video camera with a note that reads: 'Go make memories babies. Love momma.'

"We should definitely call her and thank her. This is amazing."

"Where's your gift boss lady?" Thabang asks.

"She already gave me one man." Troy says.

"Ohhhhhhhhhh!" Thabang exclaims and motions his eyebrows up and down.

I look at the time and instantly jump up.

"What's wrong babe?" T asks.

"We gotta go to church." I say and go upstairs.

"I'm out!" Kganya says and stands up.

I grab a hoodie for Troy and I and head downstairs. I go to the kitchen and find Kganya and Tory very comfortable with one another. The girls walk in too and stand behind me.

"What's going on here?" Karabo asks with a wide smile.

"Yeah Kganya. What's going on?" I ask with a smirk.

She let's go of Tory's hands and ashamedly smiles.

"Don't ever hide your feelings girl, that's no way to live." I tap her back. She smiles and Tory scurries away.

"You're dating Troy's brother kante?" Karabo asks.

"Y-yes. It's not serious though, we're just fooling around for now."

"You'll be surprised how love can easily change your mind honey." I say and put more dishes into the dishwasher.

"Wife material!" Rivonia chants at me.

"Whatever!" I chuckle at her.

"Babe. This is really unnecessary." Troy keeps repeating himself as in driving us to church.

"Yes. It's necessary T. I've been praying and God has been signalling for us to go to church. The signals were further confirmed when momma said that we should get a little church to go to every Sunday."

"Every Sunday?! I can't believe we ditched my party for this."

"Please T. For me." I adorably pout as I wait for the traffic light to turn green.

"For you..."

I smile and drive on.

I wheel Troy in the church. Some music is playing and the choir is singing while the congregation is on their feet singing along.

"Feeling it yet?" I ask him.

"Not yet."

"Just wait. The power of God comes in unexpected ways."

He shrugs his shoulders and I place him on the 2nd row where I will be seated too. It's one of those really fancy churches like the ones from African American movies. The choir has one uniform on and the pastor is dancing to the melody too.

They're singing one of Lebo Sekgobela's songs. She's a gospel artist.

"Hallelujah!" The pastor exclaims when he gets on the podium after the choir has sung.

We get seated and I can see that Troy is a bit uncomfortable. It's okay. He'll adjust.

The pastor reads from a scripture and preaches about faith. He says that you need to have faith before you can do anything. If you pray for rain before work, make sure to carry an umbrella with you. If you're praying for a house, start looking up furniture. If you're praying for a job, begin fixing your CV. All things good come with faith. Don't get it twisted though, you don't just pray to have money and then go back to sleep. You go out there and work for it.

After his preaches, the congregation is now livened and one of them start singing. It looks like the pastor's wife. She begins singing a slow and emotional song that my breathing increases as I listen and sing along. I stand up and the rest of the congregation stand too. This song is doing something to me. You know that moment when a tear falls down and you can't talk, just sing and pray in tongues. That's the state of mind and spirit I was in. I close my eyes and just feel God's presence in this house. God is here and he's going to touch someone.

I open my eyes when everyone keeps screaming and chanting. It's Troy and he's.... standing. He's actually standing. I hold his arm as he walks forward and goes to shake the pastor's hand. I

can't believe this! He can walk! The doctor said that he MIGHT be able to walk after months or even years. This?! This is God's work! He is Holy. He is worthy to be praised. I thank you father!

"What just happened?"

"God happened. I just knew this was a good idea. I can't wait to tell momma."

"I can't walk properly though."

"It's like learning to walk again. You need to keep walking and you'll be okay. We'll ditch the wheelchair and get you a walker. With tennis balls and everything."

"I don't remember praying or anything." He says.

"I did." I say and stop by the road.

"Why are you stopping?"

"I'm hungry."

"Again?" He asks.

I shoot him a devilish look and he raises his hands like he's surrendering.

I'm craving a kota actually and this food trailer makes them fatty and sauce dripping delicious!

"I'll be back." I say and grab my purse.

"Alright. Make it quick. There's going to be a meeting in my bed tonight." He smirks.

Now that he's no longer numb from the waist down, he's guy is definitely awake too.

I wait for some cars to pass before crossing. Some toddler stands in the middle of the street and bending down to take her toy. A truck is about to hit that toddler and there's no one around. I rush over to the toddler and grab her out of the way.

She claps her hands in excitement like she and no idea what just happened.

"Hey baby. Where is your mommy?"

Her mother rushes to me with tears in her eyes.

"Thank you so much lady." She says and takes the toddler from my arms.

"Tshepang?" I ask when I recognize her.

"Hi. You're the lady that saved me and now you just saved my baby. Thank you! You've heavenly sent!" She says.

Tshepang is the lady that I saved from drowning that day Bandile was drunk and wanted to drive. She was Bandile's girlfriend and fought with the main woman for him.

"Hey babe. Where have you guys been?" a voice from behind me says.

I turn around when I recognize the familiar voice.

"T-Tebogo?" I ask.

"Nana?"

"Babe?" Tshepang asks when she sees us looking at each other.

Tebogo goes over to her and introduces us. I look back at the car and I can see that Troy is witnessing everything.

"Nana, this is my woman Tshepang. Babe, this is an old friend of mine Naledi. We dated back in high school."

Those memories of our relationship and him cheating came flooding back like a nasty tsunami.

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"Oh. So y'all used to date huh?"

"Yeah. She was my high school sweetheart."

"I should go now. I was just trying to save your child from the busy road." I say and awkwardly smile.

"Hey. How's it been? It's been years." He says with a smile.

Tebogo is my high school ex boyfriend who cheated on me when I didn't sleep with him. We were young and I figured he'd wait for me. He was my first breakup and seeing him now only makes me resent him really.

"Fine." I say and look back when I see Troy trying to get out of the car.

I jog to him and help him get back inside.

"Who's that?" He asks.

"An old friend of mine. Let's get you back inside." I say.

"Nay! Who's that?"

"Tebogo." I sigh.

"Tebogo your ex?"

"Yeah."

"Hey guys."

We turn around and find Tebogo with Tshepang next to him.

"Uhm... what's up?" I ask.

"Well, we just wanted to congratulate the both of you on your engagement." Tshepang says.

"Thank you." I say.

"We also wanted to offer you guys a couple's hike." Tebogo says.

"Who are you?" Troy asks.

"Tebogo my brother." Tebogo says and extends his hand.

"I'm not your brother." Troy says with an alarming tone.

"What's a couple's hike?" I ask trying to break the tension.

"Yeah uhm.... we hike this other mountain every year and it's so beautiful. Usually we go alone but this year, we'd really like to have another couple to come along. They have activities to strengthen relationships and reconnect with nature."

"It's the least we can do for repaying you back Naledi."
Tshepang says.

"What makes you think-"

"We'll think about it!" I interrupt Troy.

"Sure. No problem. Give me your number in case you-"

"Over my dead body son." Troy says.

"How about I exchange numbers with you Tshepang?" I smile.

"Sure."

She gives me her numbers and I save them then tell her that we'd call if we change our minds.

"The hike begins Friday afternoon so don't take too long. It was nice seeing you again Nana." Tebogo says and they walk back to their car.

I help Troy in the car and get on the road too. I suddenly don't have an appetite for a kota. This whole situation just made my taste buds die.

"Nana?"

"Huh?"

"Nothing." Troy says and looks out the window.

"He used to call me that. Back in high school."

"Well, this isn't high school and you're not his 'Nana' anymore. You're married!"

"Okay. I didn't exactly tell him to call me that. That whole situation was just too awkward."

He keeps quiet and touches his knees like he still can't believe that he can walk. Which reminds me, I should book an

appointment with his doctor so that she can reevaluate all this. She needs to know that her patient just did the impossible.

A few days later

"You... you can walk?!" The doctor asks.

"Yeah."

"How? I mean-"

"God." I say with a smile.

"What really happened Lanes?" She asks with a smile.

"We went to the house of the Lord and he was able to walk.

'He' is still holy." I say with a smile.

"Oh. Well, I did not expect this. Sorry, I'm an atheist. This kind of thing is too good to be true for me. I know I'll find a theory to prove why he was able to walk. However, his miraculous ability and his quick healing process is beyond me. It's like he never was on a wheelchair. I'm going to prescribe pain killers just in case you experience any difficulty in walking. Especially since you told me you both are going on a hike?"

"Yes. Doctor. This afternoon actually." I say.

"Okay. Take it one step at a time. If you feel like your legs need rest then by all means, stop walking and rest. Make sure you warm up before doing any leg workouts. Got it?"

"Crystal clear." T says.

She gives us the prescription letter and we go out of her office. Troy doesn't even need a walker anymore. This is unbelievable. Glory to God!

"I gotta go back to the office. I'll see you later."

"Do you have to?"

"I kind of accompanied you here on my lunch break. It's still 12H00."

"Alright. I'm going back to the reserve just to check on things then I'll be home."

"See you then. Bye!" I peck his lips and get in my car.

"I love you!" He exclaims.

"I love you too!" I yell back and press the honk.

I look at my watch and see that I have a few more minutes until my lunch break is over. Troy and I were at his appointment to tell the doctor that he can walk again. We have actually been procrastinating to book the appointment because of his fear

that this might all be a dream and the charade that he's a actually mobile will be over. I told him that it's God's working and he seems skeptical still. On other news, since my win with Karabo's case- I'm handling 2 cases now. As I should've been. It's not a problem though, I love what I do and it loves me back. Troy and I have been talking ever since Sunday and the couple's hike was actually not a bad idea. We've travelled yes but to camp in nature has never been done. He was against it for obvious reasons but I convinced him to. I used the technical way that if I don't go that would mean that I still have feelings for Tebogo and I'm trying to avoid him, which I haven't. The trip doesn't dig deep in our pockets and we'll be back by Sunday afternoon. Since he's also a nature guy, he agreed to it and made sure to alert his doctor about the pressure he's about to put on his legs. The doctor we just come from. I called Tshepang yesterday and told her that we were interested. She said that she'll be at the mall where they are going to get supplies before fetching us and hitting the road. It's a 3 hour drive to that mountain but it's worth it. I've looked up the place they're talking about and the mountain at the background is magnificent. Also, it won't be all that survival of eating worms and building a shelter out of wood. We will have canned goods, flashlights, tents, sleeping bags, bug spray, change of clothes, radio, map, GPS and more. It's going to be fun! I've never really

been camping before so this will be a whole new experience for me.

I've been thinking so hard, I didn't even notice that I'm at my work's parking lot. I grab my essentials and walk to the elevator. I walk in and check my phone as the elevator goes up.

I have an e-mail from Jacob & Attorney's. Been a while, I'm not even expecting one.

I read through it and roll my eyes at it. They're offering me a job. More like Simphiwe is offering me a job now that he's the owner of it. He even had the audacity to tell me what I'd be earning per month. It's more than generous but I'm happy here. I know that it would be a stupid move to go back to the one place that put my life in danger. If I decline over an e-mail, he won't get the message. I need to see him.

I go to Melissa and tell her that I'd be out and I'd be back in half an hour. She takes note and I take the elevator to the parking lot again. It's time I dealt with this head on.

"Hi. I'm here to speak to Simphiwe." I tell the Rivonia.

She looks at me with her eyebrow raised high and asks me whether I have an appointment or not.

"I don't, but tell him that Naledi is here. I'm sure he'll let me through. Please Rivo."

She sighs and smiles then picks up the telephone. While she's talking to him, I take a seat and wait. It looks a bit new. New carpet and new paint. Rivonia's desk has improved too.

"He'll see you now." She says.

"Thanks."

I don't need directions or such, I already know my way around.

I inhale and knock on the door.

"Enter!" He exclaims from the other side.

I get in and close the door behind me. He looks comfortable on that master chair, it suits him.

"Naledi. You're sent an e-mail and you rock up at the building a few minutes later. Impressive." He says with a smile.

"Simpfiwe. What is going on?" I ask him firmly and put my handbag down while still standing.

"What do you mean? I'm running a company and doing the company's best interest. Which is hiring you as part of our team."

"Why me?"

"Did you not hear me say that-"

"Simpfiwe! Simpfiwe

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I don't accept your offer."

"So you came all this way to say that?"

"No! I came to ask you what your problem is with me? Is it because you had a crush on me she you didn't deal with it properly?"

"Whoa! What makes you think I took a liking at you?" He asks and comes to stand in front of me that I am behind his desk.

"Really? Really Simpfiwe? You're not even trying to hide your lie." I say and fold my arms.

Doing so, it reveals a cleavage through my white top that goes with my suit.

"Hey! My eyes are up here!" I snap my fingers.

"Apologies. Look, I may have liked you a tiny bit but this... is totally business related."

"Well, I decline. I'm happy at Black Gowns thank you." I say and grab my handbag to leave.

He blocks the door with himself and looks at me. Like really stare at me.

"Move out of the way Simphiwe." I say with a sarcastic look.

"You see? Right there. You're the only one that can handle me. All these girls just fear me. They tell me what I wanna hear, you tell me what I need to hear. He says and bites his lip. He then moves closer to me and I hit him with a punch.

"Oomph!" He groans and holds his stomach in pain.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." I say and help him sit down. I was not thinking. A while attorney assaulting the owner of a freaking law firm! I need to get out of here.

"Wow woman! You sure pack a punch." He says.

"I've been taking classes. I wouldn't have done it had you stayed in your lane!"

"Sorry Mrs Lane." He says and chuckles in between groaning.

"Get some ice on that. Next time you'll know your place. I'm married! I gotta go. I wish you a happy future with your company." I say and go out his office.

"Got my bug spray?" He asks.

"Yes. Got my canteen?"

"Yep. You sure you're up for this?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, and don't get me wrong, but you don't seem like the nature type babe. It's just an observation." He says.

"But I love star and moon gazing and sunrises with sunsets and the smell of rain hitting the soil and trees-"

"Yes but are you ready for big slugs, semi-dirty water, sand pits, heavy storm and wild animals?"

"There's no wild animals there T." I say and put on my shoes.

"You never know babe. We might meet Miracle's mating partner up there."

"Really?" I terrifyingly ask.

"I'm joking. Calm down. I'm only joking... maybe." He chuckles and goes downstairs.

He takes Pumpkin to our neighbors so that they can look after him while we're gone. They're the old, white couple next door and they really do love pets. Now we're just waiting for them to come pick us up then we'll be on our way.

"Hey guys." I get in after Troy opened the door for me.

"Hey! You guys ready?" Tshepang asks.

"Yep." I say and buckle my seat belt.

Troy and Tebogo have not said a word to each other. Tebogo is the one driving. It's only Tshepang and I that are holding an actual conversation. I hope we can all get along, just for this weekend.

We get to the ranger's office where we will leave the car and phones. I brought the camera that momma gifted Troy. Just for memories. I start filming everyone packing their camping bags and the mountain we'll be hiking.

"Sir. Could you take us a picture please? All 4 of us?" I ask the ranger and give him the camera.

He agrees and we all gather together and smile.

"Thank you." I say and looks at the photo.

"Now listen carefully. The mountain can be harsh to those who don't respect it. Keep the ground clean and try not to disturb the animals you meet."

"Animals?!" Tshepang and I ask.

"Yes, like squirrels and hedgehogs."

"Oh. So we should be done by midday of Sunday right?" I ask.

"Yes. I and your car will be waiting for you on the other side of the mountain. We placed camera's on every path so that when one hiker is lost, we'll be able to pinpoint their location. I can see y'all have a map of your own. That's good. Let me give you

this hiker's trail so that you know where to go and what to be careful of. I suggest you start walking now so that you can set up camp on that ridge." He points at a spot on the mountain.

"Thanks." Troy says.

We all start walking and hiking the trail.

Tebogo is atleast talking now.

"This is beautiful you guys. You guys come here every year?" I ask.

"Not really. This is the first time we get here. We've been to other mountains though." Tshepang says.

"Oh."

"I thought you said-" I shoosh Troy and tell him that it's fine. Everything is fine.

Okay today is Friday, we'll be back by Sunday.

Let me tell you what happened and when:

Friday

-Hiked the trail

-Set up camp at the ridge

-Set up the fire and slept

Saturday

- Hiked the trail
- Crossed the river
- Saw a waterfall behind a cave
- Tebogo and Troy took a dip in the lake
- Took pictures and videos
- Tshepang had a slug incident and cried
- Got on top and set up camp nearby

Sunday

- Watched the sunrise
- Hiked the trail
- Had an encounter with a hyena

That last one is the situation we're facing right now. We're almost at the bottom of the mountain, but because I love trees, I wanted to take pictures of the tree that was bigger than all the others. I left them at the bottom ridge and got up a hill to take the photograph. That's where I found the hyena eating what looked like a deer of some sort. I slowly moved back

because it was so focused on eating it didn't see me. I went back slowly but then Troy called out for me and it lifted its head.

It stood up and started its signature laugh sound. What the heck is a hyena doing on this mountain? I thought they said there were no wild and dangerous animals.

It growls at me and I take that opportunity to run. I go down the hill and run up to Troy.

"Babe! What's wrong?"

"T, we gotta go now. It will find a way to get down that hill and it will come for us." I say in a hurry and pick up my travel bag.

"Wait what-"

"Babe. Breathe." Troy interrupts Tebogo.

"There's no time for breathing exercises T. It could be here any moment."

"What could be here?"

Just as I'm about to answer him, a spine chilling laugh comes from behind him. He turns around and sees the hyena looking at us.

"Shit!" Tebogo curses.

"Oh my God! Keng ntwé (what is this thing)?" Tshepang asks.

"Hyena." Troy answers her while still looking at the hyena.

"How many did you see up there?" Troy asks.

"One. Why?"

"Because hyenas travel in groups."

"What?! I want to go Tebogo. Now!" Tshepang starts crying.

"What do we do now? This is basically a staring contest between you two." I whisper behind Troy.

"The first thing to do when engaging with this wild animal is to show them that you're not afraid. Some animals need you to show them you're afraid of them or else they'll prove their dominance. Like bears."

"Whatever you do, do not run and maintain eye contact." He continues talking and opens his water bottle.

He pours the water on the hyena and it runs away while yelping.

"We should go. In fact, we should run." Troy says and grabs my hand.

We all follow him while asking why are we running because he just scared it away.

"That was a weak hyena. It will call out to its group to finish us off. By the way, hyenas never get full. They will leave nothing behind."

We all look at each other and walk down the mountain.

We get a bit lost but then we found our way because of the ranger's radio we heard from his jeep.

"Ah! You made it!" The ranger smiles.

Troy goes to him and punches him in the face.

"T!"

"How dare you put our lives in danger like that! My wife is carrying my child!"

"I'm sorry sir but what is this all about? Did you follow the trail?"

"Yes we followed the trail until we saw a hyena up there!"
Tebogo exclaims.

"My apologies. Animals tend to leave their habitats and come live on the mountain. Though we've never faced a hyena before. I'll get my trackers to locate it and maybe you can get another day on the trail. On the house?"

"Hell no! I want to go! I miss my baby." Tshepang says and loads her bag in Tebogo's car.

She then gets in the driver's seat and starts the ignition.

"Look, accidents happen and you have no control of nature. What's important is that we're all alive now." I say to the ranger and get in the car too. I'm ready to get out of here and go back to civilization.

"You better be glad for my wife, otherwise..." Troy points at the ranger then gets in the car too.

Tebogo talks to the ranger a bit then gets in as well. We sit in silence as Tshepang drives us out of the woods and onto the highway.

"I just saw my life flash before my eyes." Tshepang says.. We all laugh at her and the situation that we just faced. That was insanely dangerous.

"How did you know how to handle that hyena?" Tebogo asks Troy.

"I own an animal reserve. Animals are my thing."

"Thank God for you Troy. I was ready to wet my pants." Tshepang says.

We laugh at her again and I instantly get a headache.

"What's wrong babe?"

"I just have a headache all of a sudden and my breathing feels heavy."

"What can I do?"

"Don't worry. I just need some headache pills." I smile at him and look through my bag.

Tebogo switches on the radio and we all agree that the tune that is playing is heartwarming. Tshepang starts singing along to it.

I pop open the bottle but then a few pills drop out.

I try to lean and get them but this seat belt is straining me.

I take it off and pick them up one by one.

"I'm thinking of going to therapy after this. Stru!" Tshepang says.

We all laugh at her and enjoy the tunes. The moment was so precious that we didn't even notice the vehicle that was about to hit us on my side of the car.

Where am I?

Where am I?!

My head still hurts, did I ever take those pills?

The heart monitor tells me that I'm in the hospital. Why am I here again? I slowly open my eyes and look around. There's a drip next to me. Blinds that are open. I'm on a hospital bed in a hospital gown. I lift my hand and start pressing my abdomen. Thank God it's still hard, means I'm still pregnant.

A nurse comes in and goes out again. To call the doctor I guess.

I attempt to sit up but the pain on my back is too much.

"Mrs Lane?"

I look to the door and saw that it's Troy's doctor.

"Hi."

"How are you feeling?"

"I'm good. What happened?"

"You had an accident. A car accident."

"What?!" I ask and the memories come flashing back.

"A vehicle crashes into yours. It was a drunk driver."

"Oh my gosh. Is Troy okay?"

"Everyone is miraculously fine. Even the drunk driver. Just a few scratches. It's just you that's in hospital, because you felt like you didn't deserve to wear a seatbelt." She smirks.

"I was... I was-"

"It's okay. You're fine now. You and your baby. Your husband went back home to fetch some clothes for you."

"How long have I been out?"

"A few hours. It's still Sunday."

"Okay."

"Alright. Let me go do my rounds and get you some pills for that headache." She says and writes something on her clipboard.

She stops at the door and faces me.

"By the way, your friend is here to see you. Shall I let her in?"

"Sure."

She nods then goes out the room. Karabo is a real sweetheart though. She's been trying to see me all this time and she waited. I smile just thinking about her.

I try to sit up and I do so, with a few pillows on my back it's not that difficult.

I look through the blinds and instantly get emotional. The sunset is so beautiful, I wish I was outside witnessing it.

"Mapulane."

A chill goes down my spine when someone said that. I turn my head to the door and I nearly broke down. Is that really her?

"Erica?"

I... I can't believe it! She looks amazing. Lost weight. Her black hair definitely grew longer. I can't believe she's back.

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"When-when did you get back?"

"A few days ago. I was at JB but I heard you were in North West so..."

"Wait, where have you been all this time? It's been like what 1... 2-"

"3 years."

"Wow! I can't believe it. Come here! Give me a hug!"

She comes over and gives me a hug. She's so fragile, so slim now. Erica was as thick as me so this is definitely one heck of a transformation.

"Where have you been? I called your parents so I could at least go visit you at whatever rehab you were in."

"I've been in rehab. It's just that... I kept going back. Whenever I was clean, I would go back to my parents and with temptation-"

"Erica!" I gasp.

"I'm okay though. Really I am, I usually relapse two days after the rehab but I've been an entire week clean now. I don't even crave it anymore."

"I'm glad. I never knew Tshago's disappearance would hit you that hard."

"That... and I heard you were in the hospital that day. I just... I just lost it. You were always the one keeping the group together, keeping me together so when I found out you're in hospital-"

"But I was fine though, I just fainted. I was fine."

"Yeah. I know now because there's a few rumours saying that you're married and pregnant!"

"Well, I am married but the pregnancy rumour was false back then."

"To Troy?"

"Yeah."

"I know it's late but... Congratulations!"

"Thank you. Wow, you've changed. But a good kind of change you know."

"Thank you. You haven't changed a bit. Maybe a little more prettier but definitely the same. I missed you."

"I missed you too."

Troy gets in with a bag in his hand and a paper bag in his other hand.

"Hey T."

"Hey babe. Who are you?" He looks at Erica.

"I'm Erica. Naledi's old friend. Always wanted to meet you the day Naledi told us about you."

"Uhm... okay. Nice to meet you too. How are you feeling baby?"

"I'm good. My back just hurts a little."

"Here, I got you clothes and some food. I didn't know whether you wanted something light or heavy so-" He says and gives me the paper bag. It's chocolate muffins.

"Thank you." I peck his lips.

"Anyway, when I heard that you were in an accident. I just had to get here." Erica says.

"I appreciate it. Thank you. We have so much catching up to do."

"Well, we can do that tomorrow. Right now I need to settle into my room and give y'all privacy." She says and walks out.

"Wait Erica! You're coming back right? You won't disappear again?" I ask.

"I promise I'll be back." She says and goes out.

"So. Your friend?"

"Yeah. She's like my high school best friend. Can't believe she's here. I'm so happy."

"Hmm. You okay? What did the doctor say?"

"She said everything is okay. The baby is okay too."

"When I find that drunk driver who-"

"T! T. Don't... it's okay. There's no need for that. How's your legs?" I ask trying to change the topic.

"They're good you know what I'm sayin'? I can walk but not jog or run."

"One step at a time babe."

"Literally."

"Careful babe."

"T, I'm pregnant not disabled. I'm fine." I chuckle.

He has been babying me ever since we got from the hospital, I mean it doesn't mean that I don't enjoy the attention but now he's just being dramatic.

He unlocks the door then goes out again. Where is he going? Whatever. All I know is that I'm tired and I just took a nap. I don't understand people that take a nap and wake up refreshed. How do you do that? I always wake up grumpy and even more tired. I take a seat on the couch and switch on the

TV. Whoa! It's 6 pm?! This is crazy really. Now I'm hungry.
Where is Troy?

"Hey babe. You in?"

"In here!" I exclaim from the lounge.

He comes in with Pumpkin in his arms.

"Oh my sweet baby. Come here! Come to mamma!" I say and hold our for him to jump in my arms. I fiddle with the fur on his head and lay him on my lap. As usual, he puts his head on my stomach. He actually kept putting his head on my stomach way before I knew I was pregnant. I guess he always knew.

"What you wanna eat?" He asks.

"I don't know. Cheese?"

"Cheese babe?"

"Yeah. Cheese. On bread. Grilled cheese!" I exclaim.

"Should I-"

"No. I want to do it my way. I'll do it. You want one?"

"No thanks. That seems too... oily." He says.

"Alright."

He pecks my lips then goes downstairs. I put Pumpkin down and pour warm milk in his bowl. Then I melt the butter on a pan

and begin making my extra cheesy grilled cheese sandwich. Oh God

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this is going to be so good!

I add the sandwich on a plate and take a bite. This... this is terrible! I throw away the sandwich and wash down the foul taste with cranberry juice. Was the cheese bad? Great, now I lost my appetite. I check if all the doors are locked and put Pumpkin on his bed. His bowl is almost half full. He must've been thirsty. I leave the lights of the dining room on and switch off the rest.

I jog upstairs and get in the bedroom.

"T?"

He goes out the bathroom half naked and smiles.

"What you smiling for?" I ask.

"Nothing. You just look amazing in that."

"T, this is an oversized white dress. What were you doing in the bathroom?"

"I ran you a bath. All the bath oils and everything, so you can relax."

"Really?" I ask and make a pouting face.

"Really."

I go over and hug him then get in the bathroom and close the door. Indeed he poured me a bath. There's even 2 candles here and foam in the bathtub. This is exactly what I needed. I take off the dress Troy brought and get inside. I like how hot it is, not just warm.

"Babe you good?"

"Yeah I'm good."

"Okay."

I relax in the bathtub and close my eyes to think. Gosh I forgot to overlook my cases this weekend and we didn't go to church. It's okay though. I'll make him pray with me tonight. He's been such a sweetheart really, I should treat him. I know!

I go out the bathtub and throw off the towel to see his reaction.

"Baby..." He says and bites his lip.

"What?" I act dumb and look through my drawer. While I'm looking, he grabs me from behind and kisses my neck.

"Whoa! Whoa! What are you doing?" I ask.

"What you mean? You out here naked in front of me so..." He says and leans in for a kiss.

I stop him and talk.

"Look, but don't touch."

"Say what?!"

"Look but don't touch. It's simple." I say and keep looking through my drawer. I take out Troy's oversized shirt that I don't really wear anymore and put it on. He's just following me as I go in front of the mirror in and out of the bathroom.

"T are you okay?"

"No I'm not. What you playing at? Come on." He says and leans in for a kiss again.

I move quickly and grab the lotion in the bathroom. I come out and put my leg on the bed as I lotion it.

"Let me help you." He says.

"No I got it. Thank you though." I say with a smile and seductively lotion both my legs.

"So how's the reserve?" I ask.

He stares at my legs and butt without answering me.

"Troy?!" I snap my fingers. "I was asking how's the reserve doing?"

"Uhm... they doing- babe this is torture." He says and rubs his eyes.

"What is torture?"

"You doing this to me. Why can't I touch you?"

"Because..."

"Because what? Come on." He attempts to touch my butt.

"Because I don't feel like it. It irks me. Must be the hormones." I say and go out the lotion back.

"Nay stop playing. Come on please." He says and leans in for a kiss.

"No. What are you doing? I'm tired right now so... goodnight." I say and get under the covers.

It's so hard to keep a straight face with this. I wanted to burst out laughing the moment his jaw dropped when I took off the towel. I'm just teasing him really.

"Babe. Babe are you for real?"

"What T? I got work in the morning." I say and play on my phone.

He gets on the bed and takes my phone.

"What?!"

"Why you doing this?" He asks with a serious face.

"Doing what?" I ask.

He leans in for a kiss and I instantly get out of bed and go downstairs. I grab a banana and pour some of that cranberry juice in a glass.

"What's that?" He asks when I come in.

"My snack." I say and get on the bed and peel the banana. I peel it slowly and smirk at him.

I put it half of it in my mouth and bite into it with my eyes closed and make a muffled moan.

"Come on babe! Are you for real? Why are you doing this? Can I touch you please? I want you right now." He says with pleading eyes.

"I don't feel like it." I shrug my shoulders.

I continue biting into the banana and sucking in between.

"Really Nay? Really? Come on quit playing."

"I'm not playing." I say and throw the banana in the bin in the bathroom. I get on the bed again and drink the cranberry juice while smacking my lips.

He immediately gets on top of me and starts kissing my neck.

"T! I'm going to drop the glass. What are you doing?"

"What do you think?" He asks and starts tickling me.

I wiggle under him and scream for him to stop. He stops then I put the glass on the nightstand.

"What are you doing?" I ask while suppressing my laugh.

"Why you doing this? I'm not playing right now."

"I'm not playing either-"

"What's all this look but no touch thing? You my wife! Damn."

"Okay T. I was just joking. It was a joke. I was just playing with you."

"You get pregnant and you're finally a comedian huh?"

"Kind of. Don't you think I'm funny?"

"Not really."

"Really? Then I'm not in the mood anymore. Get off of me."

"Okay baby you're funny. You're like really hilarious. I enjoy listening to your corny jokes."

"Your jokes are the ones that are corny. What the heck?"

"Baby you love my jokes and you love me."

"Unfortunately." I roll my eyes at him then smile.

"You're going to make love to me or should I-" I ask.

"I don't really feel like it." He says and gets off me.

"What?!"

"Goodnight." He says and switches off his lamp.

"Are you serious right now?" I ask.

He switches on the lamp and says he's joking.

"That wasn't funny."

"Sorry babe. I had to get you back though."

"Whatever. I'm mad now."

"Since when are you this emotional?"

"Since now." I fold my arms.

"This is going to be a loooooong pregnancy."

"Okay now I'm not mad." I say.

He smirks then kisses me and we get lost in the pleasures of the night.

"Have you seen my water bottle?" I ask him.

"No!"

He always says no but when he loses something I'm the one who knows where it is. Anyway, today is Monday and I'm so

exhausted but happy too. Working always makes me joyful.
Whether it's Monday Or Friday.

He slowly gets downstairs and sits on the bar stools. He's still getting used to walking and all that so it's going to take a while for him to run or do high jump and such.

"I called Erica and she invited me over for lunch at this other restaurant." I say to him.

"When did you do that?"

"While you were upstairs. She still uses the same number. Can you believe it?"

"Unbelievable. So when are you getting home?"

"6-ish."

"Alright. Have fun then. I'll just be home with my boy!" He says and pats Pumpkin.

"Okay. I gotta go. Love you." I say and grab my car keys, water bottle I found near the sink and my handbag.

"I love you too!"

.

"I'm okay. Seriously."

"Don't scare me like that. Don't!"

"I'm okay K-baby. Really. I gotta go okay?"

"Okay. Bye!"

"Bye." I hang up and slouch on my chair.

It's been hours now and I feel like this clock is taking forever! When is closing time? I got places to be. I look at my watch and it's nearly 17H00. This is ridiculous. I pack my bag and switch off my computer. It's only a few minutes before my knock off time, they won't mind.

I get downstairs and bid Melissa goodbye. Erica and I have some catching up to do in half an hour and I'm still at the office. I go at the parking lot and take out my keys. The parking lot is always dimly lit and frightening. I hate how there's no security guards or real lights and cameras. I always feel like something is going to jump out and grab me.

I pass a car and go to mine. Before I can open my door, someone goes behind me and puts his hand over my mouth. He takes me to a dark corner and tells me not to make a sound. A woman gets out and drives out the parking lot. The man pulls his hand away and looks at me. I'm guessing he's looking at me. He has a hoodie on and I can't tell his face. He's as tall as Tory but too slim to be him. I back up against a wall and breathe in heavily at this stranger.

"Who-who are you and what do you want? Is it money? Take it! Take my handbag." I say with tears in my eyes.

"Stop making noise. I already have a headache." He says.

His voice sounds familiar.

"Who are you?" I ask.

"You can't trust Erica." He says.

"What?"

"You can't trust Erica. She's a two timer."

"What is all this about?"

"She nearly killed me Naledi. I had to fake my own death and lay low. I never had cancer."

"I still don't know who you are. I can't see your face."

"I've been watching them watching me. Tshego? Definitely dead. Erica is alive though. Always have been. I was a fool to trust her. Her father messed up big time when he cheated with my mother."

"Wait what?! Who are you?"

"I caught them in bed together and instead of being remorseful, Erica made me promise not to tell a soul or so help me God."

"Wait what? Tshego had an affair with Sbusiso's half sister. Sbusiso died due to cancer. Who the heck are you?"

"Erica is my half sister." The man says and puts down his hoodie.

"Sbusiso?!" I exclaim.

He puts his hand over my mouth and tells me to be quiet.

"Yes. It's me. Why are you raising (making a noise)?"

"You're supposed to be dead. Cancer. What do you mean Erica is your half sister? She's from Mozambique."

"Haven't you asked why she knows more of SeTswana than her own mother tongue? Her father and my mother made her. I knew about her for a long time and I thought she could be my sister. When Tshego and I started dating, I introduced them both. Next thing I know they're in the apartment sleeping behind me back! Erica is dangerous Naledi. I'm serious. That's why I had to fake my own death. She stopped hunting me when I did. Don't trust her."

"Why would I believe you? I don't know you that well. Erica is my best friend."

He looks at me and takes out a few hair strands from his head then seals them with a bread plastic bag.

"Here. Do DNA and see if we're not from the same mother. Do it."

"But-"

"I'm going to say this again, do not trust Erica. Her name may mean 'a part of a flower' but she's far from being divine." He says then disappears into the shadows he got out from.

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7 months later

This is a disaster. It's hot and I can't put on my socks. This baby bump is making things very difficult to do.

"Need help?"

I turn to him and snort.

"No T. I don't need your help. I'm fine." I say and try to put it on sideways or something.

"You've asked for help to bath, get food and rub your feet but you don't want help with putting on socks?" He asks with a chuckle and comes to sit next to me on the couch.

"I just really wanted to be able to do this by myself." I say and put my legs on his lap so he can put on the socks.

"That's why I'm here babe. You're not alone in this. Literally." He says and rubs my tummy.

"I feel so fat. Like a cow or something."

"Babe you're not fat."

I lift up his shirt and jacket to see his abs. They are so beautiful and clean. His flat stomach is so angelic.

"Hey! Stop. You're not fat. Can I talk to my daughter now?"

"Noooo!" I chuckle.

He puts his ear on my tummy and starts talking.

"Hey baby girl. This is dad speaking. Don't call me daddy because mommy calls me that when I pl-"

"Hey!"

"Sorry. I can't wait to meet you. You're almost fully baked now. It's been the longest fucking-"

"Language!"

"It's been the longest 9 months of my life. You're bound to come out soon. I know why you're a bit late though, mommy made it so homey in there that you don't want to come out. It's okay. Take your time."

I run my hand his hair when he says this. He's seriously been so sweet and thoughtful throughout this entire pregnancy. It's making me emotional just thinking about it.

"Why are you crying?" He asks.

"I don't know." I sob. Why am I sobbing?

He comes up and kisses my forehead.

"You want me to... make it all better?" He asks with a smirk.

"No thank you. I'm just trying to get used to not doing anything."

"Maternity leave is normal babe. You'll back in your office fighting crime in no time."

"I hope so."

"You and baby Celeste are going to be fine."

"Why do you like this name so much?"

"I don't know. I just like it, just imagine I'm like: Celeste! I forbid you to go out with that boy. Do you hear me young lady?!"

"Please don't abuse my girl."

"I won't but I just wanted you to get where I was coming from. It's a shoutable name."

"I'm hungry. I want takeout."

"So early in the morning babe?"

"Is there a schedule when stomachs open that I don't know of?"

"When is your mom coming again?"

"Sunday. Today is what? Friday."

"Atleast she'll see what I've been going through."

"Excuse me?" I ask him with a death stare.

"I was asking what you wanna eat?" He nervously asks.

"Cheese. Pizza with extra cheese. Cheesy pizza!" I start licking my lips.

He shakes his head and gives me a kiss before leaving. He's such a sweetheart really. I can't wait for him to hold her in his arms.

My phone rings and momma's name pops up.

"Hello momma."

"Hello ngwanake (my child). O sharpo (are you okay)?"

"Eya momma, wena (yes mom, you)?"

"Ke sharpo (I'm okay). How's everything?"

"It's okay momma. She's just giving me back problems right now and now he's busy telling me he wants 5 more. Can you imagine?!"

"Haha. If he wants 6 kids then give him that baby."

"Never! Are you coming still? On Sunday?"

"Yes Naledi. For the 7th time."

"I'm just making sure. Where's Tshedi?"

"He's back at the old house. He's been going there everyday."

"Why?! How does he even get to Kagiso?"

"Don't be too hard on him, all his friends and memories are there. That's the only home he knows."

"I'll talk to him. As long as he's not causing trouble."

"Yes baby-"

"Momma, Troy's back with my food. I'll call you later."

"Haha. Give him the phone let me talk to him."

I give him the phone and he gives me the 2 boxes of pizza. He awkwardly smiles while he's talking to momma and nodding too like she can see him. I fan myself while taking bites in between. It's September and it's Springtime, the heat is ridiculous.

"Alright mom. Okay I will. Take care bye." He sweetly says and gives me my phone.

"What did she say?"

"Can't I have one conversation with mom without you knowing about it?"

"Whatever. I'm having the time of my life. Triple decker and all it's splendor."

"Baby you're hogging it. Lemme eat too."

"No! Go get your own."

"So you're going to eat 2 whole boxes of pizza? Alone?"

"Celeste has an appetite today. I'm just joking you can have some."

"Really?"

"No." I say and laugh at the look on his face.

"Nothing's ever good on TV these days. All I see is men flexing money they don't have on women with no clothes on. Don't you agree T?" I ask and keep brushing Pumpkin.

"Yeah I-" He stops talking and horrifyingly looks at his phone.

"What?"

"Miracle."

"Miracle what?" I ask and switch off the TV.

"She's dead. Someone stabbed her on the chest. I gotta go!" He gets up and grab his car keys.

I get up too to calm him down a bit. He looks like he's about to kill someone.

"T. Calm down. What is going on?"

"Baby lock the doors and stay upstairs. I love you." He says and gives me a sloppy kiss before going out. It's only 18H00 so being home alone is not bad now.

I sigh and sit down on the couch. When I looked at those stairs, my heart just dropped. There's no way I'm climbing those after eating burger and fries. No way. I don't know why but Erica came to mind when Troy told me about Miracle. Ever since Sbu spoke to me, I've been really distancing myself from her. Obviously I had to go to our lunch date that day because I felt bad for bailing on her. After that, I just deleted her numbers and changed my numbers too. It was kind of hard because... Erica was my friend. High school best friend. She and I share memories together. I was there for her as she was there for me. No one had my back like she did. To believe a stranger over my best friend feels wrong but I have this annoying ability to tell if a person is lying or not. Sbusiso was not lying. I took his hair that he gave me and took some of Erica's hair and sent it to the lab. I told her that I liked her hair and I wanted to touch it. The lab results came back and it told me that they're siblings. Sbu was telling the truth. She once called me after I changed my number and she said she missed me. I did not dare ask her how she got my new number but I had to act like I was heavily pregnant and not in the mood. I told Troy everything that day and he's the one who said I should stay away from her. Like really stay away. I had to change my number again. I-

'Knock knock knock'

I look at the door and realize that I never locked it. Dang it! I grab Troy's baseball bat and head to the door.

"Who is it?" I ask.

"Mail delivery!" The man from the other side says.

I look at the grown up Pumpkin who's just staring at me. If the person was a threat then Pumpkin would be barking right now. I hold my breath and open the door. The man looks at me like I'm some crazy, pregnant woman with a bat.

"Are you Naledi Lane?"

"Yes."

"Sign here please." He gives me a box and his clipboard.

"What kind of mail comes at 18H00?"

He looks at me and takes his clipboard. Okay. I lock the door this time and stand in front of the stairs again. I'm going to have to force myself up there. One step at a time.

I get upstairs and sit on the bed.

"Come here boo-boo." I say to Pumpkin.

It knows that it's not allowed on the bed but I can let it slide for today. I feel safer when he's near. He puts his paws on my lap and puts his head on my tummy, like usual.

I get a box cutter and open it, there's a letter inside.

I open the envelope and begin reading:

'Dear Naledi

How are you doing? Doesn't matter anyway. I've done terrible things to people I cared about. I wrote this letter as a warning. I just recently got bail

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a few weeks ago. It felt good to be free but not for long. Society says you should be yourself and when you do, they judge you. It's been a nightmare living out here, it's better to be in prison. I am judged wherever I go. Anyway, this letter is not about me, it's about you. You were right, I was hiding something about that night the Reverend was murdered. I didn't tell you because I was afraid. Not anymore. I cannot even tell you what I wish because this letter might not even reach you. I will give you 2 clues though:

- 1) Read the 3rd sentence of the letter.
- 2) The apple does not fall far from the tree.

I know you're a bright girl and you'll figure it out, like you've always been. You once promised me that justice will be served to me, now I'm asking you to finish this case once and for all. Don't worry about me, there's a rope that's waiting for me. By the time this letter reaches you, I'll be long dead. I've served my

purpose. Now it's time to serve yours, be the Naledi in this world of darkness.

Love

Emmarntia Kethe"

What. Just. Happened. The apple... whoa whoa! What is going on here? Am I dreaming? Pumpkin looks at me and then licks my finger. Emma is gone? Clues? What?

I get frightened by a ring from downstairs. I must've left my phone at the couch. I try to hurry to pick it up and time but it hangs up. It rings again and it's momma.

"Momma?"

"Naledi? Thusa (help)!"

"Momma what do you mean? What's going on? What's all that noise for?"

"I'm at the old house with Tshedi here. Ah!"

"Momma?! Momma!"

"I'm at the old house, people of Kagiso are accusing Tshedi of theft. They've gathered at the front of the house with sticks and

rocks and sjamboks. I know my son is not perfect but he didn't do anything this time. Why can't they just-

"Momma! Momma! I'm coming right now! I'll be there."

"No my baby. It's do dangerous and you're pregnant. I've been calling Troy but he's not picking up his phone."

"Call the police momma! A mob is attacking you without evidence!"

"The police are in on it. I saw 2 of them and they're leading the protest."

"Oh my God! Momma I'm coming! Don't talk me out of it, I'm coming right now. I'll be there in an hour tops. Try to stall them."

"Okay ngwanake (my child)."

"I love you momma. Be safe."

"I love you too baby."

I grab my car keys and call out Pumpkin, he's coming with me. There's no time for this. I look at my watch and I know that I'm running out of time. A mob in Kagiso is no joke. They're protesting over a 16 year old. Are you kidding me? I start the car and race out. I'm going save my mom. I have to.

I drive and try to call Troy at the same time. He doesn't answer me. Dang it! A call comes through and I answer it immediately.

"Hello!"

"Hi Mrs Lane. Is this a bad time?"

"Who are you?"

"I'm the guy at the lab. You sent me some hairs."

"Oh. What's up? I already have the results. Get out of my way man!" I beep my horn.

"Uhm... well we usually keep such data in our data log just in case and the hair of Miss Erica Tevola made a glitch."

"What do you mean a glitch?" I ask and run a red light.

"Well, it turns out that we already have her sample of hair in our data log. It took me days and I finally figured it out."

"Figured out what? Speak already! I'm 9 months pregnant and really impatient right now."

"Sorry. Her hair matched the one found at the scene of the Reverend's case. The one you were working on."

"What does that mean?"

"She one of the killers."

"..."

"Ma'am? Mrs Lane? Are you okay?"

"I need you to take that to the owner of Jacob's and Attorney's you hear me? The name you're looking for is Simphiwe. He'll know what to do."

"Alright ma'am."

"Bye."

Why-why would Erica kill the reverend? She has no motive. If she's one of the killers then who's the 2nd?

OH MY GOD! TSHEGO!!!

'I hurt people who I loved the most?' 'The apple does not fall far from the tree?' Emma meant her daughter. That's why she never told me! Tshego is alive and a serial killer? Alongside Erica?! This is a nightmare.

Troy calls me and I pick up.

"Babe? Where are you?"

"Troy Sebastian Lane. What I'm about to tell you is very very important..."

~Pharaoh~

"Talk to me."

"She's out of the house. She's going to her mom's house."

"Perfect."

"What about her husband though?"

"I did something that'll make him... distracted."

"Okay boss. She's about 20 minutes away now. She's really speeding."

"She's not speeding enough. Do you have her location?"

"Yes. The watch she has on has GPS. That's how we know she's 20 minutes away. Boss, she knows everything. I think it's Sbusiso."

"I took care of that rat. This is exactly the opportunity we were looking for. I have some dirty cops on the scene there. Make sure you have all you need."

"Okay boss. She's 17 minutes away now."

"She's taking too long. I'll tell my guy to light the house on fire. That'll make her speed up."

"What if her mother and brother die?"

"So be it. Either way I'm getting my way. Why do you care anyway?"

"..."

"Tshego and Erica! The biggest serial killers South Africa has ever faced. Pulling out the most elaborate murder known to man. Are you forgetting that I own you? Are you forgetting that you owe me?"

"N-No boss. Sorry boss. We have the fake skeleton with us."

"And the Benzodiazepines?"

"Yes boss. This will knock her memory clean. What about her baby boss?"

"What about the baby? Stop asking me too many questions and do your job. It's not easy running a ring. I have sh*t to attend!"

"Sorry boss. We just hoped that you would pick someone else for this job? Putting our girl in this human ring. Eish."

"No. This isn't just about abducting girls for my human trafficking ring. This is about the movie. I want to see the look on her face when she sees two of her best friends betray her. You're wearing those body cameras for a reason. I love drama! That's half of the point you 2 are doing this. Now make sure the skeletons are ready for the paramedics. I got some people in the health department that'll make it look like its her skeleton and the baby's. Just grab her from the back and do the thing."

"Yes boss. She's there now. Her husband is on the way."

"Is the house on fire?"

"Yes. Yoh yoh yoh!"

"Good. I knew we had to do that. Her law skills could've made the riot calm down. Now she has no choice but to save her family. Make sure you're at the back waiting to grab her and bring her here. She better not get in your heads. She better ask somebody."

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~Troy~

"What the actual fuck are you saying to me right now?"

"Mr Lane. Please calm down."

"No, I will not calm down. Where the fuck is my wife?!"

Rivonia comes in a car alongside Karabo and Thabang.

"Troy? What's going on here?" Karabo asks.

"Eh boss man? Where's boss lady?"

"Good question Thabang. How about you ask that to this good for nothing cop." I say and fold my arms.

"Baby, what's going on?" Rivonia goes over to the cop and holds his arm. So this is the sugar daddy Nay was telling me about? Mr V's brother is Victor? Okay.

"Mr Lane. There was nothing left."

"What do you mean there was nothing left? Her mom and brother are in hospital after she saved them yes? So where the fuck is she? Don't tell me about no skeletons and DNA and all. I want my wife. Right fucking now!"

"Mr Lane?" A voice from behind Victor says.

It's some woman with glasses and a white coat on.

"Can I help you?"

"We took a look at the skeletons inside the house. It's your wife's skeleton and we found a baby one too. I'm sorry."

"No. Victor where's my fucking wife?" I ask him.

"You just heard what the doctor said Mr Lane. She's gone. I'm sorry."

"It's midnight right now. I had to wait 4 hours for your bullshit?! You? Victor! Stood on the sideline when my wife went to a house of fire to rescue her family. You! You didn't call for backup, you didn't call an ambulance or them firefighters. Our dog got hurt too! You just stood there!" I yell.

I turn to the riot of Kagiso who look ashamed. Some went home because they were many.

"You motherfuckers are stupid! Yes. You are. You let 1 rumour make you lose your fucking heads! Then you say you're the heart of Gauteng. Bullshit! Even if it was true and Tshedi stole something, is it worth your useless lives to get out of your government houses and carry pitchforks to kill him? A 16 year old? Are you nuts?!"

"Troy calm down." Rivonia says behind me.

"No don't tell me to calm down! My wife might be hurt wherever she is and your stupid sugar daddy is telling me

bullshit! Is this the law enforcement of South Africa?! Is it?! Look at that fucking cop over there. He's busy eating some chicken instead of doing his job! They haven't even told me how the fire started!"

"Mr Lane, we are investigating your wife's dea-"

"Shut up with that! Don't you fucking say that! My wife is not dead. She's alive and she'll return to me if you do your fucking job."

"Mr Lane, do not insult the officer of the law." He says and puts his hand on his pistol.

"Or what huh? Or what? What are you going to do n*gga? Certify me?" I ask and stand close to his face.

Some men grab me and put me in an ambulance.

"Don't fucking touch me right now! I want my wife! I better not see you again Victor, I better not or I'll blow your fucking head off! I want my wife! Where's my wife?!"

~Narrated~

Naledi starts making grunts and lifting her head. She opens her eyes and sees that she's tied up to a chair. In front of her is Tshego, Erica and Pharaoh. Some men in black are standing next to them holding guns, behind her and all across the

barnyard. At least that's what it looked like, a warehouse of some sort with haystacks and horse stalls.

"Hello star. Wakey wakey." Pharaoh says and smiles.

Naledi lifts her head and looks at the woman with a black suit on.

"Bobby, bring my chair." Pharaoh says.

"Yes boss." A man says and brings a royal chair for her to sit on. A jaguar appears from behind the chair and sits next to this mysterious woman.

"Where am I?" Naledi asks.

"Aren't you going to ask who I am? Fine, you're in one of my warehouses."

"Yeah but where am I?"

"Nigeria."

"What?! How did I get here?"

"Oh come on advocate. You're asking the wrong questions. Allow me to introduce myself, my name is Pharaoh and I'm the king of this ring. All I ask is that you cooperate with me. Okay star?"

"A ring? Like a human trafficking ring?!" Naledi asks with wide eyes.

"Of course star. I've been admiring you for years. Always loved how you took charge of everything. Of all the girls we took and sold

you were the one that caught my eye. You even started investigating my club that your Karabo friend got raped in. In Kenya. Some bartender told you about me right? That's okay, I took... care of him."

"What?!"

"I don't know whether you're saying 'what' because you're confused or you're shocked. It's okay. You're special. We usually bring girls and boys in cargo ships and trucks but you... you had the opportunity to take a plane. A private jet at that."

Naledi stops looking at the woman and returns her gaze to Erica.

"Erica? Please help me. Please!" Naledi pleads.

"Erica my darling, you and Tshego step to the front and explain to your friend what's going on." Pharaoh says and smiles.

Tshego and Erica ashamedly walk forward and Tshego begins talking.

"Hi Naledi. This is going to sound insane but, we're the killers. When I disappeared years ago, it wasn't my mistake. I had fallen in love with Erica and we planned on leaving because we

found out that Sbusiso is alive and hidden. We were worried about you but when you told us that you and Troy were together, I knew that there would be someone to be there when we were gone. I was pregnant with his baby and Erica and I were going to find a home and raise it like our own. Things went sideways when we were abducted and forced into Pharaoh's human trafficking ring."

"Things went sideways? I saved your life baby... but go on."
Pharaoh says.

"Yeah. We lived amongst other girls and sold ourselves. Pharaoh didn't sell us and we were grateful. Some time went by and I gave birth to Sbusiso's baby. A girl. Pharaoh said that some man in Argentina wanted to raise my baby and marry her when she turns 18. I refused and said that I'd do anything to make sure that my baby was released into the modern world. She wanted a movie."

"I am a woman of drama." Pharaoh says and pats the jaguar next to her.

"Yeah. So I found out that my mom was planning to marry the Reverend. The very same man that abused her and I! The very same man who made her leave koko (grandma) so she could live a life of luxury and leave me, her only daughter behind. I never forgot Emmarentia. Never! So I suggested that we kill the Reverend as a form of entertainment Pharaoh requested. Erica

came along with me. I had to do it for my 2 year old daughter Naledi. Anyway, I knocked on the bathroom door to let my mom know it's me. I knocked 6 times because my short name has 6 letters in it. We knew she was in there."

"Then we bailed and stayed in South Africa just in case we missed something. We didn't even bother escaping, Pharaoh has friends everywhere. She literally rubs shoulders with ministers and military officials. That's why people never get rescued and are abducted in South Africa just to pass the border easily. We saw that you were assigned to Emma's case. That was not the plan because you were going to find a way to solve it. Indeed you did because you found my hair there and sent it to the lab. I waited for the test results and killed detective Maphanga before he could tell you the hair belonged to mine. I took the results and made sure that I took the hair from the lab and erased my data. When Mutsa was assigned to the case we relaxed because we knew she wasn't going to find anything. We left nothing."

"Can I just take this moment and thank you Naledi for making sure that Mutsa's father stayed out of jail. He may be a reckless lose but he contributes to my ring. My girls can't live without his drugs. Carry on." Pharaoh says.

"We made the signature stabbing in the chest because Emmarentia broke my heart. She tore out my heart when she

let that man hurt me and leave me. I paid her a visit and made sure that she didn't say a word to anyone, not even you or else she would be next. I was the one that kept visiting her. We had to kill Rea too because she started investigating us again. She was hurt that she lost yet another case. We didn't want to wait for her to stumble on something before we had the chance to destroy it. Mr Cornish let us in so that we could kill her without alarming anyone. She was a fighter but Mr Cornish helped us a bit. He wanted her to die because of the baby she was carrying wasn't his. He doesn't even have a family. A few hookers and R100 000 made sure he kept his mouth shut. The watch that I left for you has a locator in it. I put it in when you were getting married and left it unattended. That's how we were able to locate you at your mom's house and bring you here. One rumour we spread about your brother made the people protest."

Naledi looks at them blankly and starts tearing up.

"I'm sorry about your baby. The drug we used caused your miscarriage." Erica says.

"Who are you people?!" Naledi exclaims.

"We're sorry Naledi. We had to do it for our child. Pharaoh was not happy that you were living life and all so she said we should bring you to her then our baby girl would be sent to an adoption center in South Africa."

"Now that you're all caught up, how about we take this to the bedroom. I don't sleep with these bitches but you... I've been craving for you." Pharaoh says and licks her lips.

"But-but you're a girl."

"I'm a man living in a woman's body Naledi. I have a p*enis. So shall we?" Pharaoh asks and stands up.

"We're sorry Naledi." Tshego says.

"Who are you?"

"I know you hate me right now-"

"No, who are you? I don't know you." Naledi says.

"How much of that drug did you give her?" Pharaoh asks.

"Uhm..."

"You fools! She was supposed to not remember a few hours before you kidnapped her. Not a few years! Naledi? Do you remember yourself being pregnant?"

"I was pregnant?" Naledi asks.

"Put her with the other girls, I need to think since you idiots can't do that." Pharaoh says and walks away. The jaguar follows behind her until they're out of sight.

Two muscular men forcefully take her to a room full of women and lock it up. There's a bunch of women on the floor smoking drugs and one bed that some are on. There's 3 women on the bed to be exact and they're having a threesome. In front of all the girls! They don't look bothered and they all look different, like they come from different countries.

Naledi starts hyperventilating and screaming for help.

"Shut her up! We have headaches." One of the girls say.

"Naledi?" A voice asks behind her.

She turns around and says hello.

"You don't remember me? It's me. Nancy. Nancy Diale."

"I'm sorry I don't know you. I just got here. Can you help me get out? I need to go home to momma."

"I wish I could baby girl. We're all stuck here. The drugs make us stay and there's literally no way to escape. How are you?"

"I really don't know who you are. I have a grade 12 exam to write tomorrow."

"A what? How old do you think you are?"

"17. I'm turning 18 on the 28th of September."

"Oh my goodness! You lost your memory? You're 26 not 17 Naledi."

"I'm 17 ma'am."

"Shoot! Troy must be going through hell too."

"Who's Troy?"

~Troy~

"Sir? We're going to sign you up to a mental institution. You're not well."

"I am well. My wife and baby are back home. I know they are. They're not dead."

"Sir your wife and baby have passed on. We're sorry." The nurse says and closes the door behind her before locking it.

Oh Nay baby. Where are you?

~Narrated~

"How the heck can you forget about your life Naledi?"

"I don't know. I think I remember... nah I got nothing. Last thing I remember was me practicing English for my exam tomorrow. It's an important subject if I'm ever going to do law."

"Yoh. This is bad."

"Can't be worse than you? When did you get here uhm... what did you say your name was?"

"Nancy Diale. I've been here for half a year now. My father sold me."

"What do you mean by that?"

"My father is a magistrate. He rubs shoulders with Pharaoh too."

"Oh my gosh. I'm so sorry... Nancy."

"It's okay. My father never loved me anyway, I think that's why I was so unlucky when it came to the opposite gender. I never had that fatherly love. Onto other things though, Naledi you shouldn't be here. This place is for hopeless people like me. You have a husband and a family to get to."

"I really wish I could remember that. I don't even feel like I forgot my... oh my gosh!" Naledi says and covers her eyes with her hands.

"What?"

"The girls on the bed are... doing sexual stuff to each other. Naked!"

"You wanna join pretty lips?" One of the girls on the bed asks Naledi.

"No thank you." Naledi frighteningly replies.

Just then the two muscular men that put her in come inside and pick Naledi up. She kicks and screams for them to let her go. They take her upstairs and throw her into a room.

"How the heck is there an upstairs in a barnyard?" She asks herself.

"I hope they didn't hurt you bad." A voice says.

Naledi turns around slowly and sees Pharaoh on a canopy bed in a red silk gown.

"Uhm... ma'am. Please let me go. I'll do anything like that Tshego girl did. I don't belong here."

"You know the key to a successful ring is to not remain stagnant. You have to keep it moving. I make it even more

confusing like using barnyards and retirement homes. Well, I make it look like that. People live amongst sex slaves and they don't even know it. I get mail. That's how convincing I make it. After our session, I'm taking you guys elsewhere."

"What session? And where will you be taking us?"

"There's about 8 girls in that room you were in. They are my best girls. Like any king, I have headquarters. A lair of some sort. The main office. That's where you'll meet hundreds of others girls and get to work."

"Work?" Naledi asks and starts tearing up.

"Shhhh! Baby! Don't cry. Want me to make it all better?"

Pharaoh asks and holds Naledi by the cheeks.

Naledi reluctantly nods and Pharaoh smiles and gives her a muffin. A chocolate muffin, which is her favourite.

"What do I do with it?"

"Eat it baby girl.", Pharaoh says and pours herself a glass of whiskey.

Naledi sniffs the muffin and inspects it for fowl ingredients. She takes a bite and swallows. It wasn't that bad. She takes a another bite and another until there was nothing left but the muffin wrapper.

"You done? Feel better?"

"I feel funny." Naledi says and feels her forehead. "What was in that muffin?"

"Sit down star. You need to be entertained." Pharaoh says and helps Naledi sit down on the bed. She lays her down and slowly takes off the dress she wore. She attempts to take off her underwear before Naledi flinches and crawls backward.

"Ma'am what are you doing?" Naledi asks.

"I'm hungry."

"Then go get a muffin."

"No, I'm hungry for you." Pharaoh says and grabs her legs. She rips off her underwear and spreads her legs. Naledi tries to fight her but she's too weak and disorientated. Pharaoh takes off her red silk gown and stands naked in front of Naledi. Her manhood hangs down and soon penetrates her. She wiggles and squirms under Pharaoh's forceful intercourse. Pharaoh goes in and out of her until she was satisfied. She puts on her gown and knocks on the door. All of a sudden, 3 muscular men get in.

"You know why I call my men Bobby? Because men are dogs, but they're also human. You made me tired to fuck you and gave me a struggle to make you happy. You know how many girls would kill to be in your position? Some girls that are in my ring haven't even met me yet. You're special but you don't see it that way. Bobby's?! It's lunch time."

The men start taking off their clothes and licking their lips.

"What are they going to do?" Naledi asks with tears in her eyes.

"They may be dogs but they're human. They haven't felt a woman's touch in a while now. All 3 of them will have their way with you. Tell me when you're done boys.", Pharaoh says and goes out the door.

Naledi screams and cries out to the Heavens, before she knows it, all 3 men have penetrated her and went out the door in satisfaction. Naledi lay's on the bed with fluid coming out of her female organ and mouth. She can't move nor cry anymore. She is now a hollow shell of her former self.

Pharaoh gets in and asks her a question. She does not answer.

"How dare you not answer Pharaoh! Bobby 2! Put her in the den, she needs to learn her manners."

Some man grabs her and takes her to some sort of basement under the barnyard. She's just laying in the man's arms like she feels nothing anymore. He throws her into a prison cell on the cold floor and shuts the cell closed. The only light there is an old light bulb illuminating above her. She lays still on the cold ground, naked and empty and listens to the beat of her heart slow down with each breath.

~Troy~

"Mr Lane, you have a visitor." The nurse says and opens the door.

I leave my deck of cards and wait for this 'visitor' they're talking about. I've been in here for 2 days and I'm already tired. I need to find my wife but these motherf-

"Troy."

I look up and it's Tory looking as calm as always.

"Tory. What are you doing here?" I ask him.

"Troy I'm sorry man. You know, that you have to go through this."

"Whatever. That won't help me bring back Nay."

"It might just."

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

"Troy you need to relax. I know that ain't a easy thing to do right now, but you need to appear like you're sane bro. This thing of saying Naledi is alive and shit will keep you in here forever."

"But she is a-"

"I know she's alive

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but I need you on the outside. Pretend for these people like you're dealing with her death and you've accepted things. Appear sane for Christ sake!"

"How do you know she's alive?" I ask him.

"Just do as I say and get out of here. Naledi needs you on this one." He says and gets up.

"Tory! Tory what the fuck are you talking about? What aren't you telling me?"

"It's time you knew the kind of work I helped the Reverend with." He says and goes out the door.

~Narrated~

"Have you learned your manners now star?"

Naledi gazes at Pharaoh who's standing outside of the cell she's in. She's wearing a red leather suit and a black coat on. Her pet jaguar is next to her on a leash.

"Answer me!" Pharaoh exclaims.

Naledi knows that if she plays tough and doesn't reply to her, she'll spend another night in here. She's already spent 2 days

with no food, water and clothes in the basement. She couldn't stay any longer.

"Little girl, I'm not going to ask you again."

"Yes Pharaoh, I've learnt my manners." She says with a whisper.

"Good. Let her out and take her to Nancy. They seem to have a bond."

The cell is open and Naledi is taken to a stable outside the barnyard. There's several rooms in that stable. The man barges the door open of one of the rooms and throws Naledi on the floor. She coughs and wheezes saliva because that's all she had in her stomach. She looks up and Nancy is on the bed satisfying a man old enough to be her father.

"Naledi? What the-"

"Hey! I paid good money for you. Finish!" The man bellows.

Nancy sighs and gets on her knees yet again. She goes about his erect manhood in her mouth until he climaxed. The fluid goes all over Nancy's face and bare chest. The man zips his pants and pats Nancy on the back before heading out.

"Oh Naledi, what did they do to you? Let's get you cleaned up. Come on." Nancy says and helps Naledi in the bathroom.

"Hey! Hey! Stay with me. Naledi?! Stay with me. Get inside the bathtub. Now."

She helps Naledi get in and clean up visible dirt. She then towel dries her and helps her put on her very own gown. There's not a lot of 'normal' clothes here so the gown will have to do for now. It's not silk, so it should generate heat. She helps Naledi on the bed and takes off the sheets. They had fluid on them. She takes a blanket and covers her up.

"Alright. Let me try and get you food and water. Okay? I'll be back." Nancy says and puts on a tight top before heading out.

~Troy~

How the hell do I act okay when my baby could be out there somewhere? How? Tory has some explaining to do. Serious explaining to do. I've been dodging these anti-depressants they've been giving me. I don't need all this, I need to find my wife.

"Mr Lane, you have a visitor." The nurse says.

I've had a visit from Tory and Thabang already! Who's next? I don't like to see people right now.

"Troy man. How are ya'?" A man says and sits down on the visitor seats.

"Excuse you. Who are you?"

"You don't remember your old lecturer boy?" The man takes off his hat.

"Mr V?! No way man!"

"Yes way. How you doing? Sorry, that's an inappropriate thing to ask."

"Mr V? What are you doing here? Still mad I never graduated from your class?" I smirk.

"Not really boy. I know you left because of your better half. Have you gotten any news yet?"

"No. Not yet. I'm losing hope Mr V."

"Don't say that, they'll find her."

"Mr V, no offence, but your younger brother Victor is not doing his job."

"I know. That's why I'm here. There's something you need to know about my brother."

"What's that?"

"Your younger brother said that I should pay you a visit when I was looking for you. He said that you need to get out of here if we are ever going to tell you our truths. Indeed Troy, you need

to get out of here. You'll never find your wife rotting in this hospital."

"Just tell me Mr V! What's going on with your brother?"

"Get out of here and we'll talk further son. Take care." He says and stands up to leave.

~Narrated~

Nancy returns with a peanut butter and jam sandwich with a bottle of water.

"Here Naledi. Eat."

"What's the point Nancy?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what's the point of all this? Why should I eat when I'm dead inside already. I was just gang raped 2 days ago and you want me to eat? I'd rather die here of starvation. This place is hell."

"Eat Naledi. Pharaoh says that you have your 1st client this evening."

"First client?! Ah! Never!"

"Hey listen! You don't have rights here! Remember those 3 girls on the bed?" "Yeah."

"They were wearing white and innocent dresses when I went to go get you food." "So?"

"When Pharaoh dresses up the girls like that, it means she either has a buyer or she wants to sell them. She has access to the dark web where people purchase wild animal parts, guns, cocaine and even girls in human trafficking rings. They set up a video camera in front of you and you go live. You'll just see a bunch of comments and 6 figure numbers pop up."

"What's that?"

"The price you'll be sold on. Once Pharaoh picks the highest bidder, we'll never see you again. They use a specific drug that will make you... I don't know how to say it. Let's just say you'll do whatever your new husband tells you to do."

"That's horrible!"

"It is. Now eat up, tomorrow we're moving to Pharaoh's headquarters." "So?"

"When we shift, it becomes a real mess because we're people and we're sacred. The guards are busy and all."

"You're still not telling me anything."

"I have a plan for us to escape."

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~Troy~

A few days later

"Alright Mr Lane. Sign here and you'll be good to go." The nurse says.

I write down my signature and basically jog out of that hospital. I am never ever going back here again. They'll never take me alive. Okay, it's Saturday and I need to go the house and inform Mr V that I made it out. I called Tory to come pick me up while I was inside. I stand near the entrance and wait for him.

While I wait, my mind wonders onto other things.

Naledi.

I miss her so much, I miss her laugh, her smile, her hair, her voice, her touch and even her corny jokes. These 2 better make sure that I find her, I'm not living my lifetime without her. I'd die the 1st minute.

"Hey! Stop day dreaming and let's go."

I snap out of it and walk towards his black Mercedes.

"Sup man?"

"All good. No complaints." He says.

"Hello Troy."

I look back and Mr V is sitting at the back with a smile on his face.

"Oh. Hey Mr V."

"Ready?" Tory asks.

"Yeah. I'm ready to get the fuck out of here."

I unlock the front door and head straight for the couch. I throw myself on it and groan.

"Hey man. Get up. We got some work to do."

"Tory, what are you talking about? You still haven't said a word to me."

"Alright I'm ready to talk if you can just sit up and look at me man."

I sigh and get up so I can face them. Mr V takes off his hat and takes a seat next to Tory. I sit comfortably and feel something under me.

I grab it and pull it out from the couch. It's Nay's pink sock. I remember that day I was helping her put on socks even though it was a 100 degrees outside. I look at it and put it in my pocket. I'll have a part of her to get me through this.

"Okay. By the way, Naledi's mom and brother are awake. I think they'll discharge them tomorrow or something. Your dog is..."

"Is what?" I ask.

"Pumpkin probably tried to help Naledi and it got burned real bad. It's gone man. I'm sorry."

I sigh and swallow the lump in my throat. It's fine. I lost Miracle, I lost Pumpkin but I'm not losing Nay.

"Start talking Mr V." I say.

He clears his throat and begins speaking.

"My brother is the officer of the law, obviously. However, he's a snitch. A rat. He's a dirty cop that takes bribes and scratches backs. And I don't mean bribes like traffic officer with their R20 bribe, I mean so much money it has to be transferred into his bank account."

"What's that got to do with me?" I ask.

"We think he might be working for someone. Now it's my turn, when I got out of the army, I was lost. I didn't have you or anyone else and I was conveniently in South Africa. I met the reverend that Naledi was investigating and he offered me a job. I was to put the girls in line."

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

"My tall stature made sure that the girls feared me and automatically get in line. He had prostitutes that worked for him. They all volunteered to work for him so it didn't really bother me as much. I just had to make sure that they don't cheat him or run off without telling him. They could actually walk away if they wanted to. Most of them didn't anyway, the money was too good. I think Naledi might be caught up in that. Y'all told me that the case she was investigating was deadly and all. Right? Well, maybe she's taken somewhere to do that."

"Nay would never sell herself."

"Exactly. We think she might be taken against her will and that she's trapped wherever she is."

"What like... human trafficking? You tryn'a tell me my baby is out there being fucked somewhere by some old man without her consent?!" I ask and stand up.

"Look man. You need to--"

"Don't even say it Tory. I need to breathe." I say and go upstairs. This isn't happening. This isn't happening. This isn't happening. This is... a box? I open our bedroom door wider and see a box on the bed. What the heck? It's addressed to our house. To Naledi Lane! But there's nothing inside. I look around and under the bed for clues but nothing. I lift up her pillow and see a paper. It's a letter. I read through it and curse under my

breath. I run back down and give Tory and Mr V to read the letter.

"Who's Emmarentia Kethe?" Mr V asks.

"The reverend's woman. Well, girlfriend. He already had a wife back home." Tory replies.

"Nay was working on the reverend's case and said that they found hair at the scene of the crime. She thought it was the reverend's wife until she showed up bald. This is the girlfriend that Nay was trying to defend. Tshego's mom."

"So she knew who the killers were?" Tory asks.

"I guess. It seems like Nay already figured out who one of the killers were. This was a case from Jacob's & Attorney's so I'll call them." I say.

I look for the firm's number on Google and call the office. I don't really want to call them because Nay told me of some dirt bag called Simphiwe who kept hitting on her. Then she told me that he now owns the firm and offered her a job. However, I don't have an option.

"Hello. This is Jacob's & Attorney's

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how may I help you?" Rivonia's voice is on the other line. She's Victor's girlfriend so I should be careful not to spill the beans. She might be packing too.

"Hey Rivonia. I want to speak to Simphiwe please. It's Troy."

"Troy? You're out? Wow! That's great. Why do you want to-"

"I uhm... I need to know about Nay's insurance policy at the firm. Now that she's gone, I want to erect a tombstone to remember her by."

"That's so sweet. I know it's hard for you, it's hard on all of us. Mutsa hasn't been working and Kganya her cousin is just not coping."

"Yeah so... Simphiwe?"

"Just a minute..."

I breathe out and pull a thumbs up to them.

"Hello?"

"Hello. Simphiwe right? It's Troy. Troy Lane."

"Mr Lane. Wow. Man I am glad you called because I have something for you."

"You-you have something for me?"

"Yeah... but first tell me why are you calling? You dealing with it man?"

"Uhm yeah... I'm pretty sure we're talking about the same thing. What is it that you wanted to tell me."

"Alright so I received a call last week from a lab company right?"

"Yeah?"

"And they told me that Naledi said they should leave the results with me."

"What results?"

"The hair sample. Naledi was investigating the reverend's case and the hair they found at the scene of the crime popped up on their data log. It was someone named Erica Tevola. So-"

"Erica?! You mean her high school best friend Erica?!"

"Uhm... well I'm not sure they're friends. Anyway-"

I hang up and throw my phone on the couch.

"What? What is it?" Tory asks.

"I think Erica might have a hand in Nay's disappearance. She's one of the killers."

"Son, this is bad. This is too much for my old heart to bare. I told you all you need to know. The rest is up to you guys. I hope you Find Naledi soon. Take care now." He says and stands up to walk with his stick. He retired last year so I understand that he's

too old to be dealing with this. I walk him out and call an Uber for him.

I walk back inside and find Tory still reading the letter.

"What are you thinking?" I ask him.

"This needs a detective man. The apple? The sentence? All this shit is some jigsaw game or something."

"Where's Mutsa?"

"At home probably."

"Alright. Let's go show her this. Maybe she can explain."

"I'm driving."

~Narrated~

"Please sir. I don't want to."

"I paid good money for you now open those legs!"

"I'll take care of you. She has HIV. You got a c*ndom?" A voice from behind says. Naledi and the man on top of her look back. It's Nancy.

"You have AIDS? Disgusting! Yeah you can handle me. To think I nearly slept with her raw. Sies!" The Nigerian man says and gets off Naledi.

"Alright. Let's go to my room. I don't have protection so we're doing it raw. You'll pay double. Deal?"

"Double?"

"It comes with a lap dance and a mouth job."

"Deal!" The old man excitedly says.

Nancy grabs the man by his tie and go out of her room. She grabs her legs and swings back and forth in trauma. She was just raped days ago and now that man wanted her to deal with it again. She's been living on the edge ever since. Every night, Pharaoh would tell her to come upstairs and please her. She didn't have a choice but to oblige. Atleast she was sleeping with her alone and not all these men. Today was her first day working and that man was her 1st client.

"You good?" Nancy asks.

"I'm no expert but that was fast."

"He came quickly. Pathetic! As long as he has the illness now."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm the one that's HIV positive. I sleep with these men without protection on purpose. They take life from me so I take life from them."

"Oh my-"

"Don't worry about it. What we should worry about is that escape plan of mine."

"Nancy we tried to escape last time and it turns out we weren't moving. Been stuck in this farm for God knows how long!"

"Yeah but I got word that we really are moving tomorrow. Tonight is the night."

"Tonight?! That's too early."

"All the other girls weren't complaining, why are you?"

"There's more? I thought we're the only ones that were escaping."

"No. Some 3 other girls are down too. They want to get out of here too so be ready. It's the Saturday sunset now. At 04H00, we strike."

"Why not just 00H00?"

"Too noticeable. Pharaoh doesn't sleep much and by that time the guards would be sleepy and all. It's perfect."

"Okay. So we're escaping tomorrow not tonight then."

"Shhh! These walls have ears. We'll meet up in my room at 03H00. Okay?"

"Okay. I hope this works."

"It will. It has to."

It's 3 am and the girls have gathered in Nancy's room to go over the plan. Naledi knows the 2 others but 1 looks new. She's awful quiet and has that sweater on like her life depends on it.

"Alright girls. We getting out front. Everything sinister happens at the back of the farm so the front we go. There's a mountain nearby where hikers camp out so we'll run there and ask for help. We need to do this fast. The sun is about to rise." Nancy says.

"I'm ready to get out of here. I have a boyfriend that's waiting for me." One of the girls says.

"Me too. Pharaoh can go fuck herself!"

"Shhh! Shut up. Both of you." Nancy reprimands.

"Sorry."

"May I ask, are you girls escaping in that tight dress and those high shoes?" Naledi asks.

"Of course baby. We don't have any other clothes, well we do but it doesn't fit our style."

The new girl has on a tracksuit and no shoes. Naledi feels her pain, she also doesn't have shoes and the only thing she's been

wearing is Nancy's soft gown and socks. She doesn't even have underwear on.

"Alright. Now I got a knife to stab. Just in case we run into a guard." Nancy says.

They move out and silently walk behind Nancy. Everyone is keeping a watch out for guards. A guard is standing near the corner so they're going to have to distract it.

Nancy picks up a rock and throws it over behind the barn. Alarmed, the guard leaves his post and goes at the back. They walk and even jog a little.

"You guys sure you want to do this? There's a fence at the entrance which we will cut to get out of here. You sure you want to?" Nancy whispers.

"Damn straight." One of the girls says

They all nod and continue moving. The ground is a bit uncomfortable to walk on because of the pebbles and splinters. Naledi and the new girl look at each other and continue moving. They are near the entrance, just have to go around a corner.

"No man. This was too easy." Naledi thinks to herself but doesn't say a word.

They all go around the corner and sprint to the fence. Before they reach there, Pharaoh comes out with her jaguar and 16 other men with guns. They stand at the entrance and look at the girls.

"Well well well. This is cute. Four girls trying to outsmart me. Me? The one and only Pharaoh?"

The girls stop walking and start trembling. The sun starts rising and creates some sort of light behind Pharaoh and her men that makes them seem superior.

Naledi and the new girl hold onto each other even though they don't know each other.

"There's 5 of us. Not 4 Pharaoh." One of the girls says.

"No. There's 4 of you." Nancy says and goes to stand next to Pharaoh.

"Nancy?" Naledi asks.

"Naledi you're the smartest girl here but you're also the most gullible. Nancy my dear, here's your money. You can go back to sleep." Pharaoh says and hands Nancy a stack of dollar bills. She starts counting it with a smile on her face.

"I'm really disappointed in y'all. Mostly you Naledi. You were my best girl."

"Nancy you backstabbing son of a bitch!" One of the girls yells.

"Sorry guys. Money is power. Makes me wet and weak. I was never going to help y'all escape. I approached Pharaoh with an idea that if I find disloyal girls in her ring, she'll give me some money and a week off from work. All these men got me tense. It's nothing personal you guys, I don't hate y'all, I just hate how I love money. Y'all will understand if you survive."

"What do you mean survive?" Naledi asks.

"You all have 4 seconds to start running before Raphael tears you to shreds. I didn't feed him on purpose."

"Who's Raphael?"

"My pet jaguar." Pharaoh says and pats the man eating animal next to her.

"1..." She starts counting. Naledi and the girls run back to the their rooms. It's so far away!

"4!" Pharaoh exclaims. "Eat!" She says again and the jaguar starts chasing them.

"Ahhhh!" One of the girls screams in pain. Naledi looks back and the jaguar was on top of the girl that had high heels on. It dislocates her neck with its teeth and chases them again. They keep running and get closer. The rooms are a few feet away. The jaguar growls and gets on top of the girl that had a tight dress on. It steps on her neck and breaks it then runs after Naledi and the new girl. Naledi runs for her life and reaches her

room before closing the door. Her and the new girl put their body weight on the door so that the jaguar couldn't get in. It was scratching and growling from the other side. It nearly got them.

"Raphael!" Pharaoh says from the other side of the door.

Naledi and the new girl are panting and sweating and trembling.

"Alright girls. You made it. Wash up and get ready for the move. Don't even try to betray me again, next time I won't be so graceful." Pharaoh says.

Naledi stops barricading the door when she hears footsteps walking away.

She sits down on the bed and looks under her left foot. With so much adrenaline going through her veins, she didn't even feel this splinter.

"You're Naledi Lane?" The new girl asks.

"Naledi Mapulane. Who are you?"

"Tshedi's girlfriend. Ex-girlfriend. He left me for the popular girl with big bums at school."

"Tshedi's dating? He's only 8."

"Tshedi is 16."

"I don't know what you're talking about. Does that mean you're 16 too?"

"I'm 15."

Naledi massages her temple in distress. Those girls are dead. As in, no life. Pharaoh abducts girls as young as 15! Nancy may be a mole but she was right about one thing, there's no way out of here.

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~Troy~

"Mutsa! Anyone home?" Tory yells as he bangs the front door.

"I don't think anyone is-"

The door flings open before I can finish my sentence. It's Mutsa, in a night gown! It's odd to see her like this when we're used to her serious face and all suited up.

"Troy. How are you?" She asks like her voice is straining.

"I'm a'right. What about you?" I ask.

"A mess. How can you be alright? Your wife just passed on, alongside your child."

"Mutsa there's no time to explain, we need you to read this for us." Tory says and shows her the letter.

"Oh no boys. I'm not doing anything that has to do with crime or solving cases. I'm done."

"What do you mean you're done?" I ask.

"I'm going to resign. Maybe become a housewife. I don't know."

"What? You a housewife? The adrenalin junkie?" I ask.

"Yes Troy. I really don't have time for this. Naledi is gone and at some point, she took a piece of me with her. I'm sorry."

"This letter may bring her back." I say before she close the door.

She opens it again and looks at Troy and I.

"Get in. Wipe your shoes."

We get inside and wipe our shoes on the welcome mat as instructed. We follow her to the kitchen.

"Where's the husband?" I ask.

"Work. You want coffee?"

"Yes fucking please!" Tory exclaims.

"I'm okay thank you." I say.

Her surbaban house is neat and welcoming. We sit on the bar stools and wait for her to pour the coffee.

She gives Tory a cup and sips on her own.

"What kind of trouble are you in now boys?" She asks.

"Trouble? What makes you think-"

"Mutsa this was delivered to Naledi. A few hours before she was taken." I interject Tory.

"Before she was taken? Troy, Naledi is gone. Forensics-"

"Forensics are bullshit!"

Tory tells her his story with the Reverend and what Mr V said too.

"I know that you Tory were some kind of guard to prostitutes. I interrogated you the day your mother died. What I don't understand is what makes you think she was taken? Her remains were in the house boys."

"Erica is one of the killers. For the Reverend's case." I say.

"Who's Erica? And how do you know all this?"

"The lab told us that her hair matches the one they found at the scene of the murder. Erica is Naledi's high school best friend. She went away to rehab and came when Nay had an accident."

"All those years? She just pops up at that particular hospital?"

"Exactly Mutsa. That's kind of odd, even for someone like me who's not a detective. Please, we need you to read this for us. She read it before she drove to Kagiso." I plead.

She looks at me distinctively and grabs the letter. She puts her mug down and starts reading.

"Yeah, I head about her death. Tragic really. What is all this?"

"We were hoping you'd figure it out." Tory says.

She reads the letter again and grabs a pen nearby to make notes on the paper.

"I don't know, this is just on the top of my head but did she have a sister?"

"We... don't think so."

"The apple doesn't fall too far from the tree? Did she have a child? Tshegofatso Kethe right?"

"Tshego?! You think she did this?"

"Last time we heard from this girl was when you and Naledi were still dating. Remember? She's probably dead wherever she is."

"How can you be so sure? What other mastermind do you know that deals with this kind of stuff? Prostitution and drugs and all? Like an underworld lord?" I ask.

"Why are really you asking that?"

"Word on the street is never wrong."

She thinks for a while then her face goes pale.

"What? Who are you thinking about?"

"No nevermind. It doesn't matter."

"Mutsa my wife could be somewhere in some human trafficking shit. Everything matters, no matter how small." I say.

"My father. He's an underworld lord and he worked with Naledi. She was his attorney for the drug charges."

"Where is he?" I ask.

"I don't think that's wise Troy. Listen, you need to grieve. This isn't healthy. Tory why are you giving your brother false hope?"

"Argh! You sound like Sheryl right now." Tory rolls his eyes.

"Please Mutsa. Please. We can handle ourselves, we're just going to talk to him. That's all." I say and stand up.

She sighs and writes on a sticky note.

"That's... that's his address. I'm not going with you, I'm expecting and stress is not good."

"We wouldn't want you to. Wait, you're pregnant?"

"Yeah. I never thought it would happen, the doctors said so. I went to Naledi when she was 8 months pregnant and she prayed for me. I went to the doctors last week and I'm expecting. Troy, if you're right and Naledi is out there somewhere. You better find that sumbitch who took her and bring them to their knees!"

"Roger that."

"Alright. Let me call and Thabang and-"

"Whoa! What are you bringing Thabang in for? Why?" I ask.

"He asked me to. He said you're a 'Gadaffi' and he'd like to help. We need more brains and arms Troy. This shit can go sideways."

"Exactly. Thabang has a girlfriend and a baby Tory."

"Well, I'm calling him. It's too hot to be arguing with you right now. I can't believe it's only the 27th and it's this hot."

I clear my throat and massage my throbbing head.

"What?" He asks.

"It's the 27th of September. Naledi's due date is tomorrow. The 28th, I was supposed to hold baby Celeste for the first time."

"Ah man, I'm sorry. You'll be alright man."

"Tomorrow is also her 26th birthday."

"We'll find her man. Don't worry about it." He says and pats my back.

"Even if we do find her, what if she lost the baby through all this? You know what that'll do to her man?"

He doesn't answer me.

"Get inside bro. Let's go see Mutsa's father."

We drive through a neighbourhood that looks like a hotspot for prostitutes and drugs. Guns blaze every weekend here. There are some toddlers playing with a broken fire hydrant and some criminals wannabes that are staring at Tory's Mercedes.

"Maybe we should have taken an Uber." I say.

"Why do you say that?"

"I can already see your car being hijacked here."

"Don't worry about it. They aren't touching my baby. Now according to this note, Mutsa's father should be... at this standard house."

"You'd think he has a castle with all his money."

"The simpler the house, the less attraction to cops. Let's go. Here, take this." He says and gives me a gun.

"What the fuck Tory? We're going to talk to the n*gga not ambush him. What's this for?"

"You lucky I don't have bullet proof vests and walkie talkies. This old man is not stupid, he'll see our car and our wallets and will rob us clean."

"It's fucking loaded?!"

"Of course it's loaded. Troy, you need to focus man. If he sees us as whimps, he'll definitely take advantage of that. We cannot be seen weak or scared, we might as well just give up."

"Okay okay, just give me a minute. I've held tranquilizers not these things."

"Just a beautiful day in the hood son. We used to play these kind of games man. The only difference now, is that it's real."

He takes his car keys and gets out, I follow and he locks these car. He then turns to the people and speaks out loud.

"Alright! You motherfuckers best not think of taking my baby! If you do this is what's gon' happen..." He raises up his gun and fired 3 shots in the air.

"Got it?! Alright bro, let's go."

I stare at Tory looking as casual as usual, I've got a psycho of a brother. We walk towards the house and we're met by two huge men smoking cigarettes and playing something on their radio.

"Le nyakang mo lena (what you want here)?" One of them asks.

"Uhm..."

"We're looking for your mama." Tory interrupts me.

How does he even know this language?

"Wareng (what did you say)?" The guy says and stands up. He's taller than both of us combined.

"I said, we're looking for your mama. Now get out of the way son."

"Hey wena (you)! Ware mamake wetsang (what did you say about my mom?!)"

Okay the guy looks a bit mad, I pinch Tory and shush him.

"We're sorry to bother you gentlemen, but we're looking for Mutsa's father."

"Mutsa ke mang (who's Mutsa)?"

His phone rings and he speaks a complete different language that I don't understand. I only know a bit of SeTswana, I don't know what this one is.

"Boss says you come get the house and income." He says.

"Huh? You sure you got through high school son? You dropped out in kindergarten or something?" Tory says and chuckles.

I slap the back of his head and walk through the door with I'm following. Some naked girl comes to me and asks if I 'want her' to give me a ride.

"Uhm... no thank you." I disgustingly say and get her hand off of me.

"I don't mind." Tory says and gazes at her.

"Hey! Focus! You got a girlfriend, remember? Does the name 'Kganya' ring a bell?"

"Fine. Maybe next time bitch."

We pass the lounge where some guys are passed out probably from all the drugs on the table.

There's light in the other room so we knock and get in.

"Hello boys. Let me just finish this." Mutsa's father says and takes a R100 note to sniff the powder on the table. His nose twitches and he sneezes a bit before relaxing on the bed.

"Listen up trash bag, we need word about something and we need it now. I don't have time for your old face and this pigsty you call a home right now."

"Tory!" I reprimand him.

"So you boys come in here and insult me. In my home? Wonder shall never end." He says and pushes his cup with a gun.

"Listen sir, we need to know about any human trafficking area you know about. I think my wife was taken there. We think it's by some people named Erica and Tshegofatso. Does the names ring a bell?" I ask.

"What's your wife's name?" He asks.

"Naledi. Naledi Lane."

"Advocate Lane? I can't believe it. Shame man. When did this happen?" He asks and burps in our faces.

"Days ago."

"Ayo! We don't got time for you, just tell us the dirt so we can leave!" Tory exclaims.

"Human trafficking? Hmm. Well, that's for me to know and for you to find out. I don't talk unless I see what makes the world go round."

"What's that?" Tory asks.

"Money." I answer him.

I look through my pockets, I've been in an asylum, of course I don't have my wallet with me.

"Broke are we? This is embarrassing, I'm actually glad they took her. That fat a*s needs a man with money not a piece of nothing like yourself."

I look at him and grab the collar of his shirt. I punch him in the face and punch him again. He starts bleeding as I'm punching him.

"Whoa! Troy man, this dude is like 80 years old. You'll kill him." Tory says.

I stare at him real close still with my hands on his collar.

"Where. Is. My. Wife." I ask.

"Look boy, I don't know okay. If she's kidnapping by who I think she is then there's no hope. You said she's been gone for days right? There's no way she's still out here. Please man." He begs.

"What do you mean? Kidnapped by who? fucking tell me!"

"You want me to tell you the name? I'd rather you beat me up till I die. There's no way I'm ratting out. She will drill holes in me with her bullets."

"So it's a she?" Tory asks.

"Yes, human trafficking queen based in Nigeria. There's no way you're getting your wife back son. The sooner you accept that, the better. I lost my very own wife to human trafficking ring. 20 years ago. Never seen her ever since." He says.

I let go of him and get out of the room. I pass the lounge, out the door and into Tory's car.

"Hey bro. You just leave me in there with him."

"I'm done Tory."

"What the fuck are you talking about? If we just-"

"Did you not hear what he said? 20 years ago man! Nay is gone, some part of me have always believed that but I just kept fooling myself. We just walked into a house with a few men and drugs here and there and we nearly lost our lives. Nay is out there dealing with that and more. You think she still alive? What are we gonna do? Go to Nigeria and ask the millions of people if they've seen my wife?"

"Troy man. Here, I forgot to give you this." He reaches into his glove compartment and gives me a necklace. It's Naledi's cross necklace I gave. Must've fallen off.

"Look man, when she was taken, her Lord or whatever made sure this stayed behind. You can't give up on her now man. Look how far we've gotten, not even Mutsa would've gotten this far."

I look at it and caress it with my fingers.

"Just take me home Tory. I just want to be alone right now."

~Narrated~

Some man barges into the room full of the girls and grabs Naledi from the crowd. She doesn't even fight it because she knows it's pointless. They have moved but they're still in a barnyard, some sort of isolated farm. They were transported in a truck, hours and hours on the road.

The man takes Naledi upstairs and directs her into a room. She already knows that Pharaoh is in here.

"What wrong with your shirt? Why is it wet?"

"I don't know, there's milk coming out of b*obs. I don't know why."

"Hmm. Sit down." Pharaoh orders.

Naledi sighs and sits down, she's thinking that Pharaoh is going to sleep with her, but there's like 3 bodyguards and Erica and Tshego in the room too. She may not know Tshego, but she most certainly remembers Erica.

Pharaoh takes a seat on a chair and takes a remote. She switches on the TV that's mounted on the wall in front of them.

"You know why we're here star? You know why South Africa is my favourite country?"

"Why?"

"Because it's easy. It's not even a poor country, but you throw money at these hypocrites and their tails wag in excitement. Most of my girls come from this country right here. If it's not the citizens then it's the government officials. All corrupt. All of them. Had they been serious, I would be in jail right now but no... I have some minister's wife somewhere in Russia pregnant

with her 2nd child. That's why we're in SA right now. I need boys now."

"You're not going to get away with this." Naledi says.

"I think I already have baby. Watch the TV and you'll see. See, I took everything from you but there's one thing I haven't taken, and that's hope. You're still hoping that you're going back to your mom and live your pathetic life. That's why you're resisting. Watch then."

Naledi turns her gaze to the screen and an image of a house pops up. More like live feed.

"You remember this house?"

"Uhm... I mean it looks familiar but-"

"This is the house you bought for your mother. Super job with that by the way."

"Wait... what am I watching? Why are these men getting in the house?"

"Awww, look at your mom."

"Momma." Naledi says with a whisper.

"She even sleeps with a Bible. How about we help her... meet her maker." Pharaoh says with an evil grin.

"What are you talking about? Please don't do anything to her."

Pharaoh yells 'fire' and they shoot Naledi's mom until the live feed goes blank.

"NOOOO! NO! NO! MOMMA! NO!" Naledi yells and drops to the floor just as her tears do the same.

"Well, now there's no mommy to go back to. And to offer extra protection from my side, once your brother comes back home, we'll anonymously call the cops and say that he did it. He already has a reputation, it'll be easy for the cops of SA to believe."

Naledi gets up and faces Pharaoh closely.

"You're going to regret this."

"I wish you could try."

~Troy~

There's a knock on the door.

"Go away!" I yell.

"Mr Lane?"

I get up and go open the door. It's Tshedi, Nay's brother.

"Come in." I open the door for him. He slowly gets in and flinches every time his bandaged hand touches something. He goes to sit on the couch and looks around the house.

"What can I help you with boy?" I ask and join him in the lounge.

"I didn't do it Mr Lane."

"I know you didn't."

"I have stolen in the past but... I swear I didn't do it."

"It's okay Tshedi. How's mom?"

"Not good. She's sick, she cries all day and sleeps all day. The other Mr Lane said that you're going to get my sister back. Are you?" He asks with his big eyes.

I'm unable to reply to him. I take out the cross necklace and look at it. I turn my gaze to the table near the pot plant and see our picture on our wedding day.

"Yes boy, we're going to find her. I'm not going down without a fight."

~Naledi~

The man puts me back in the room and I sit on the floor as some girls are busy on the one bed. Momma. Tshedi. Why does Pharaoh hate me this much? Well, she wanted to break me and she has finally succeeded. I get angry and sad at the same time.

I made it easy for them. I'm soft and that's my problem. All these girls are weak! I feel my rage reach the top of my throat.

"Hi Naledi. What did you do out there?" The new girl asks.

"Naledi is dead new girl. Naledi is no more in me."

"Put your faith and the Lord your God will-"

"There is no God."

"Mrs Lane, how could you say that?"

"God would never let this happen if He existed. I used to believe He was there until I saw those animals slaughter my mother with the Holy Bible in her hand. The Holy Bible!"

"But there's still a God."

"There's no God new girl, but Pharaoh and her moguls better start praying to their personal God for mercy. I'm not going down without a fight."

~Narrated~

"What's going on out here?" Naledi comes out of her barnyard room to see the commotion outside.

"Pharaoh found some snitches in her ring. Those 3 bodyguards aren't actually bodyguards but undercover cops." The new girl says.

"So why are they kneeling in front of her like that?"

Just then, Pharaoh's pet jaguar pounces on one of them and tears the poor man to shreds.

"So you thought you could fool me? Everyone, take note. This is what happens when you cross a queen." Pharaoh exclaims to all the girls who were watching. She takes out her gun and shoots the 2 remaining bodyguards dead.

"Those poor guys." The new girl says.

"Serves them right. Betrayal is nasty, in all forms and angles." Naledi says and walks back to her room.

"Wait... why are you like this? This isn't the way Tshedi described you. I thought you were sweet and a believer and-"

"I told you that the old Naledi is gone. This is the new me. There is no God. Now if you'll excuse me, I got a man to please and then kill."

~Troy~

"Tshedi you sure about this?"

"Mr Lane, I'm doing this for my sister. I don't know if we'll get shot or not but I'm willing to put my life on the line for her, just like she did for me."

"Alright. Have they agreed?"

"We're already at our starting point of the march."

"Oh wow. Okay. See ya' later boy."

"Oh and Mr Lane, please bring her back."

"That's what I plan to do."

I hang up and look at Tory who's already staring at me.

"What?" I ask.

"This plan is dumb. You're going to interrogate the president?! You think he knows about this? How will you even get to him?"

"I don't know man. I'm willing to try."

The front door swings open and Mutsa comes in with a bunch of men. She orders them to 'get ready' and comes to the kitchen.

"Uhm... Mutsa?"

She ignores me and puts her black bag on the kitchen counter and puts a bullet proof vest on. She loads her guns and sits down.

"Listen up boys." She says.

We look at each other and back at her.

"Now I know that I said y'all should handle this, but this is no way to go about it. There's a friend of mine that was obsessed with pinning down a human trafficking lord and he mentioned that he finally found his big break yesterday. We haven't been in contact with him ever since but he did tell us that they're right here in South Africa, somewhere around Gauteng. I asked my commander and he gave me permission to pursue this and go find out what happened to the undercover cop. I can't promise you that she's there because she could've been abducted by another ring leader. What do you boys think?"

"I think... we're in. If there's even a slight chance that she might be there then let's go for it." I say.

"Good. We're not waiting till night time or anything, it could be that they're moving out now so we need to go now. It's around 17H00 now."

"What about Tshedi? He's leading a protest of thousands of people and we're ditching him?" Tory asks.

"There's a protest? That's perfect! The distraction is just what we need. Let's get ready boys." She says and loads another gun.

"I thought you said you were gonna quit." I state.

"When you're born for something, it always has a way of crawling back to you." She says.

"Thabang?" Tory asks.

I look back and Thabang and Karabo are standing behind us.

"What are you guys doing here?" I ask.

"We're here to help boss man. Boss lady was Karabo's friend and Obitshepo's godmother."

"Guys, you really don't have to."

"But we want to..." Karabo says. "I have my camera ready. I'm going to go live and film everything so that we can see those corrupt officials."

"What about baby Obi?" I ask.

"My cousin is with him." Karabo says.

"Oscar says he apologizes for not being able to come." Thabang says.

"It's okay. He has a family to look out for."

"Here's your guns fella's. You're going to need them." Mutsa says and hands Tory and I our weapons.

"I'm never touching a gun after this." I say.

"You'll be alright big bro. Remember who we're doing this for."

"Yeah..."

Nay baby, just hold on we're going home.

~Narrated~

"Thousands of protestors have taken to the street to strike against the captivity of young girls and boys around the country. They're demanding that the government takes action or they will. We still don't have all the details but it seems that the leader of this protest is 16 year old Tshedimogo Mapulane. The very same young man that was nearly burnt alive with his mother due to a fire started by an unknown person. We bring you live where they're speaking, chanting and burning tires in front of the parliament where every government official is in." The lady on the TV says.

Naledi and the girls are watching all this. The girls laugh at Tshedi and the protestors.

"My family once led a protest bigger than this so that I could return home. Did they ever find me? No. That boy is just wasting his time." One of the girls says.

"Tshedi isn't in jail?" Naledi whispers to herself.

She gets up and goes out of Nancy's room. The TV was in her room either way. She walks to her room and closes the door. This is the perfect opportunity she was looking for. Today, she goes free. She changes into black leather pants and matching top. She ties her big afro up and puts on the red lipstick she uses when she has a customer. All she needs now, is a gun. She goes out her room and there are several body guards around. She looks for one that seems to be a bit bored and weak. She goes over to him and puts on her biggest charm.

"Hey there. Want a ride?" She asks the bodyguard and bites her lip.

"Ma'am. Get back to your headquarters."

"Really? I'm offering myself on a silver platter and you're declining?" She asks and grabs the man's manhood.

"Oh. Aroused are we? Let me take care of you. Let Star take care of you baby." She whispers in his ear.

He thinks for a while then takes Naledi's hand and goes behind the barnyard.

"What do you want in return?" The bodyguard asks.

"That good old powder. I haven't had any and it's driving me nuts." She lies. Pharaoh instructs the people who prepare food to add the drug that all the girls were addicted to. That's why she never takes food from them and would rather find another way to obtain food.

"Okay. Deal." The bodyguard grins and kisses Naledi. Although she's disgusted, she kisses him back and slowly reaches for his gun. She brings his face closer so that he can be lost in the kiss and before the bodyguard could count

his gun was in her hands and she was pointing it at him.

"You bitch!"

"This is what happens when you mess with the queen." She says and shoots him in the head. That went better than expected considering she's never used a gun before, but she's been paying attention on how the bodyguards used it. The shot obviously made a few bodyguards alarmed and they were approaching the back of the barnyard when all of a sudden... a van crashes through the fence of the entrance. More than a 100 men dressed in bullet proof vests step out and begin shooting at the bodyguard. It becomes a shoot off and almost

all the girls go out of their private bunkers and scream at the commotion. Mutsa is right in front, shooting anything with a gun. Naledi sees this as another opportunity to sneak out. She doesn't want to be rescued, she wants to escape and go on a rampage. A killing rampage. The new girl runs out of the room and sees Naledi, she tries to run to her but gets shot in the chest. Naledi runs to her and takes off the girl's shirt so that she can stop the bleeding. Tshego and Erica run passed them.

"Erica and you other girl, please help us. She's only 15. Please save her." Naledi pleads.

They both look at Naledi and continue running. No word from them.

She looks down at the girl and her eyes are shut, she's gone. No time to cry and get help, she gets up and starts running in the opposite direction. All the girls are running towards the squad of policemen to be saved.

Naledi goes out the back just like when Nancy wanted them to escape. Pharaoh is probably somewhere fighting for her life. She climbs over the fence and runs through the bushes and trees that followed.

"I'm free." She thinks to herself. She can still hear people screaming and shots being fired from the farm. She climbs a little hill and stops running to catch her breath.

"Thabang?" She hears a voice behind her. There's no one there but she definitely heard someone talking. She takes out her gun and motions it wherever she sees fit. She goes around a few trees and sees a man dressed in black, squatting over a laptop and talking into a walkie talkie. The man has his back faced against Naledi.

"Thabang over?" The man bellows.

"Sorry Troy, Thabang and Karabo tried to save a girl and were shot by some woman with a jaguar. I'm sorry man." A voice goes through the walkie talkie.

"shit! Tory is on his way right now, he's bringing more Calvary and more media personnel. I can't believe Thabang is gone man. I'm coming over."

"No! We need your eyes and ears up there. Do not come down here, they called for backup and there's more of them."

"Shit!"

Naledi stops in her tracks and clears her throat. The man stands up quickly and turns around. It's Troy.

"N-Naledi?"

"That's my name, mind telling me yours." Naledi says.

"What are you talking about? I can't believe I found you. Thank God!" Troy moves closer to hug Naledi but she steps back.

"Nay? It's me. T?"

"That's your name? A letter? You working for Pharaoh?"

"No. Who's Pharaoh? Baby it's me and... you're not pregnant. You lost the baby?"

"That's what I was told. Now, who are you?" Naledi asks and aims the gun at Troy's chest.

"It's me baby. It's me. Your husband."

"I don't have a husband. I have a boyfriend named Tebogo and you don't look like him."

"What?! What did they do to you baby?" Troy asks with tears in his eyes.

"You part of the ring? That's why you're also dressed in black?"

"I'm dressed like this to camouflage. We're here to rescue you baby." Troy steps closer only for Naledi to step back again.

"I don't need to be rescued. All those girls are there and I'm here. I did it by myself."

"Okay. Okay you did. I can see that, I'm so glad you're here. I have been missing you, I've been a mess without you-"

"Cut the bullshit!"

"Nay? You're really going to shoot me? Okay, shoot me."

Naledi scoffs and cocks her gun and points at Troy's forehead then places her finger on the trigger. Troy wide eyes her showing that he was not expecting that.

"I have nothing to lose sir. I will pull the trigger, no doubt. Now I'm going to ask you for the last time, who are you?"

~Narrated~

They stand in front of each other, they don't make a move and they don't move a muscle. The sound of distant gunshots and birds chirping from a nearby tree are the only sounds that are filling up the space. Naledi still has the gun pointed at Troy's forehead.

"Who are you?!" Naledi asks again.

"Troy Lane. I'm a 27 year old guy, originally from Atlanta. I have a wife named Naledi Lane who's an advocate. We had a puppy named Pumpkin and an unborn baby girl. Celeste Lane." He says with tears. He does not dare wipe them off, he let's them roll down his face.

"So you thought since my name is Naledi that I'm your wife Naledi Lane?"

"You are my wife."

"No! I'm not. Stop saying that."

"You said you're going to shoot me, so haven't you?"

"I'm thinking of a reason myself." Naledi says.

"Good thing I record my calls." Troy says and looks through his phone. He clicks on an audio and plays it loudly.

"T, what I'm about to tell you is very important."

"What are you talking about?"

"Momma just called she and some protestors have surrounded her house with stones and all sorts of weapons. They want to kill Tshedi."

"What?! Okay wait for me."

"You're too far T. You'll never make it in time."

"Naledi that's too dangerous and too much stress. You could lose the baby."

"We can always have another baby Celeste, T. What I will never have again is a family. My mother and brother are all I have besides you."

"Naledi don't you do this."

"We will find each other again. Like we always do."

"Naledi..."

"I love you."

"Naledi!"

"Wish me luck."

The audio ends and Troy looks at Naledi.

"I still don't believe you." Naledi says as her lips quiver.

They look into each other's eyes and Troy reaches into his shirt and takes out the necklace from around his neck.

"Where did you get that?" Naledi asks.

"Your mother gave you this. Your 1st birthday without your dad. You stepped on it one morning when you were going to work and it broke. I took it somewhere and they installed a diamond in the middle so that it won't break again. You wore this everyday. You'd rather forget your wedding ring, but this, this you even swam with it."

Naledi looks at him and grabs it with her other hand. She lowers her gun when she senses that Troy is not a threat.

"You killed momma and then stole my necklace you son of a bitch!" Naledi exclaims and Troy holds her hand from hitting his face

"I wanna wake up next to you every morning." A voice echoes through Naledi's head. She gets dizzy and leans on a tree.

"You okay?" Troy asks.

"What did you just do? What did you do to my hand?"

"Uhm... I held it?"

"Hold it again."

"What?"

"Hold my hand again."

Troy walks over to her and holds her hand with both of his. A wave of memories come flashing back like a monstrous tsunami.

"Yes, I'll be your girlfriend."

"Tshego disappeared?"

"Erica is in rehab? No!"

"We'll get through this. You and me."

"I graduated momma! I got my LLB!"

"T, I like this apartment."

"Let's get it! Anything you want."

"I got a job at Jacob's & Attorneys!"

"You love animal video games so much, why don't you open an animal game reserve or something."

Naledi falls down on the dirt and holds her spinning head.

"Nay seriously, are you okay?" Troy asks and leans on one knee to her level.

"Touch my hand again." Naledi says.

Troy touches her hand again but nothing happens. She closes her eyes real tight, but no memories come flashing back. She was almost there.

"You're going to have to do something more... intimate." Naledi says and looks at him.

"What are you talking about?"

"Kiss me."

"Huh?"

"Kiss me, but don't get any ideas because-"

Troy pins Naledi to the tree and kisses her before she could finish her sentence. She closes her eyes and more memories flow.

"This is one of the hardest cases in the history of mankind."

"Please marry me."

"Kenya here we come!"

"Naledi, Bandile raped me."

"Sheryl, are you nuts?"

"Pumpkin!"

"What does two bars mean? I'm going to be a dad?!"

"Thabang and Karabo?"

"Tebogo your ex?"

"Couples hike?"

"Erica? When did you get out?"

"Sbusiso?!"

"Don't trust Erica, her name may mean 'part of a flower' but she's far from being divine."

"Miracle was stabbed. I gotta go."

"What kind of mail comes this late?"

"Love

Emmarentia Kethe."

"Naledi, thusa (help)!"

"Erica is one of the killers."

"Tshego! The apple doesn't fall too far from the tree."

"T, what I'm about to tell you is very important."

Naledi passes out and breaks the kiss.

"Nay? Nay? Naledi?!" Troy exclaims and shakes Naledi back to Earth.

She instantly wakes up and looks around.

"Nay are you okay?"

She looks down and holds her head.

"Yeah I'm fine T." She says.

"Wait... did you just call me..."

Naledi looks up and Troy and her eyes fill up with tears.

"T!" She excitedly exclaims and hugs him tighter than ever.

"Nay? I thought I lost you." Troy says and hugs her back even tighter.

"I thought I lost you. Why didn't you come for me earlier?" She asks and wipes Troy's tears whilst hers are falling down her face too.

"I didn't know where you were. I was admitted into an insane asylum. I was going crazy baby. Tory and Mutsa are here with me. Thabang and Karabo are..."

"They're what?"

"They're dead babe."

Naledi swallows the lump in her throat and fights back the tears.

"What did they do to you? Did they hurt you? Why are you dressed in leather?"

She looks down on herself and pushed the gun away from her.

"It's such a long story. Just take me home please, I need to grieve. They took momma T."

"What? No. Sure, mom said that there were some guys at the house but they only took her expensive vase and some money then they left. Must've been those drug boys. She's perfectly fine, I saw her earlier this morning."

"But... but Pharaoh-"

"Who is this Pharaoh you keep on talking about?"

"The one and only king of this Earth. Thank you." A voice grows.

Troy and Naledi stand up simultaneously and look at Pharaoh standing a few feet away from them. She has Erica on one side and Tshego standing on the other.

"Tshego you backstabber!" Naledi yells.

"You remember me?" Tshego asks.

"It's over man. Cops exposed you, you're done." Troy says.

"You know what I love about your wife Mr Lane? She's soft. She's sweet. Lastly, she's gullible. This right here I didn't expect it so I'll give her that. She trusts too much. Tshego and Erica, Nancy and even you Mr Lane. She trusted that you'd be together forever. Too bad that fairytale is about to come to an

end." Pharaoh says and aims at Naledi. She shoots at her but Troy jumps in front of her and takes the bullet.

"shit!" Pharaoh says when a bunch of cops start shooting at her.

She, Tshago and Erica run away into the trees to avoid the incoming bullets. Naledi kneels down and hyperventilates.

"T? T! Troy! No no nonononono! Troy?!" She cries. Troy closes his eyes. Mutsa and Tory come running and look down at Troy. Sirens approach and Naledi picks up her gun and stands up.

"Naledi? Where are you going?" Mutsa asks.

"Please make sure he gets a dignified funeral." Naledi says and steps back still not taking her eyes off of Troy's body on the dirt.

"Bro? Big bro?!" Tory kneels in front of Troy's body.

"Naledi where are you going? Don't go again. Please. Whatever you're thinking, don't do it. You can still go on. You can walk away from all this."

"Mutsa have you ever watched the life leave your husband's eyes? No? Then don't tell me what to do."

"Naledi you don't understand-"

"He cannot go without being avenged." Naledi says and starts walking into the sunset.

She's been walking for 4 hours. She'd think that there's someone looking at her then she'd shoot at nothing. The realization that Troy is gone would hit her, then she'd cry for a bit and continue walking. She starts tearing up again when she hears foreign voices. This forest is huge, the voices could be coming from anywhere. She takes out her gun and walks slowly towards a boulder on a little hill. She looks over and there's a warehouse down the hill. With a bunch of white men talking and laughing. No Pharaoh in sight but there is something of hers. Her pet jaguar. In a cage.

She tries to go downhill unseen, hiding behind bushes and trees. She finally reaches to one tree where she could eavesdrop on these strange men.

"How much for the jaguar?"

"Three million."

"You're kidding right? For this?"

"This is Pharaoh's jaguar man. Rarest of its species. A total killing machine."

"I don't want it to kill anybody, I want it's parts. They'd sell a fortune on the black market. The fur, I'm keeping for myself." The other man says and looks at it while it's hissing in the cage. Looks like its about to break those bars and escape with the way it keeps clawing at them.

"Okay. Two million. Final offer."

"Deal. The Chinese are gonna go crazy over this one."

Naledi looks over at the Jaguar and some part of her feels sorry for it. She knows what it's like to be lost and in a tight spot with nowhere to go but your doom.

"Don't do it. Just walk away. Walk away. Don't rescue the man-eating animal. It's an animal. Don't do it!" She keeps whispering to herself.

"What was that?" One of the men says after hearing Naledi's whispering. She curses under her breath.

The men take out their guns and walk slowly to the tree that she's hiding behind.

"Hello?" One of them asks.

Naledi pounces away from the tree and shoots at one of the guys. They keep shooting at her but she's too fast for them. Well, almost. She looks at her abdomen and realizes she's been

hit. It hurts but it's not fatal. She runs and hides behind the warehouse.

"Don't let me die yet. I need to avenge T. Don't let me die yet." She whispers to herself again. She counts to 3 and shoots at the other guy. Head shot. Three bodyguards are still on high alert. She goes around the other side of the warehouse and waits for an opportunity to strike. She shoots one on the leg and two others on the chest. She runs to get their guns and shoots all 3 repetitively on their heads.

"Dieeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!" She exclaims as she keeps shooting at all of them until their faces become unrecognizable.

After her episode, she drops down and catches her breath. She flinches at the pain of her wound. She looks over at the jaguar in the cage busy growling at her. She stands up and goes over to it. Does she dare open the cage? All it takes is a single maneuver of opening the cage door and it's free.

"Listen to me." She speaks to the jaguar as if it understands her. "I'm bleeding and I need to patch up and look for your ex-owner who sold you to these motherfuckers. What I need is your cooperation. I'm going to let you out, you try to eat me and I'll kill you. You understand?" She asks and looks at it. It blankly looks at her back and starts growling.

"Okay. Here we go." She says.

She opens the cage door and steps back. It gets out and starts moving towards her while growling.

"I said to not eat me! You wanna die? Huh?!" She nervously asks as she keeps walking backwards.

It growls again and walks faster to her.

She remembers the hiking trip at the mountain with Tebogo and Tshepang when they were encountering a hyena. Some animals need you to show them you're afraid and some need you to show them authority. This one right here needs the latter. Right? No. She stops moving backwards and looks at it in the eyes.

"Stop!" She bellows.

It keeps walking towards her until it's only few feet away.

"I said stop! I'm your master and I said stop Raphael!" She exclaims and shoots 2 shots in the air.

It lies down at the sound.

Naledi takes that as a sign that it yields. She reaches over to touch it's head but it scratches her. She fires 5 shots in the air and aims at it.

"Don't make me kill you today Raphael. It's sunset and I'm not the one."

She nervously goes over to touch it's head again and it just lies there.

"Good boy. There we go. I knew you were a sweetheart."

It purrs and slowly wags it's tail left and right.

"You promise not to eat me right?"

It growls and Naledi takes that as a yes.

"Come on Raphael. Let's rest in this warehouse. I need to start thinking."

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~Naledi~

So this is what it comes to? Hehe... I think I'm losing my mind.

No.

I think I may have actually regained my senses.

After all I've done for them...

After all the blood, sweat, tears and everything in between they do this to me? ME?!

I let my guard down! I let my guard down twice in my life but this time... this time it got me burned.

Third time is a charm I guess.

I ought to thank them, because had they not betrayed me I would still be the blind, law-abiding citizen they expected me to be. This will be very much useful. A sweet girl will never be considered vindictive or even remotely close to changing her

character. This gun that is in front of me should have sent me running for my life

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from their perspective. The blood trailing down the left side of my face alongside my bullet wound should have made me call the emergency line for assistance, from their perspective. I should have never even rescued this 350 LB jaguar sitting next to me from those dirt bags that were ready to trade it and chop its body parts, from their perspective.

I finally understand. I finally understand why...

These people think they are above the law, they think they are above the citizens, they think they are above me! They will not know what hit them.

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." You know who said that? Martin Luther King Jr.

"RAPHAEL! It's time to go."

"They made me like this... and now it's time they met their creation."

~Narrated~

Naledi steps out into the distant night and walks with Raphael following her. She sees red. She doesn't even want to get anyone's sympathy or telling her that it's going to be alright. Troy is gone, he's actually gone and Pharaoh did it. Everyone involved with her made this mess happen.

"Momma." A voice whispers to her.

Before Troy was shot, he mentioned that she was still alive and that it was armoured robbers that were in the house. Just trying to make a quick buck. Perhaps, Pharaoh did all that just to make her submit and surrender to her will. She doesn't even know where she is, but if she can ask a stranger and pay for the bus with the gold watch she took from one of the guys she killed earlier on, she'll be home in no time.

The bus stops and she gets off, when the bus driver told her that she couldn't get in with her Jaguar, she just menacingly stared at him and he changed his mind. They both get off and begin walking home. She gets to the street and stands in front of the house, she can't believe she used to not know this house. The house she bought for her mother.

"Ready to go Raphael? Just don't scare mommma okay?" She says she and pats the jaguar.

She sighs and walks to the front door.

She softly knocks and waits for her mother to open the door. Surprisingly, it's Ntate Joe who opens the door. Her mother's boyfriend. That sounds wrong to say, even in one's head.

"Naledi? Hao! Re leboga Ntate Modimo (we thank God)!" He excitedly says.

Naledi doesn't reply to that, she just smiles and asks where her mother is. While she's on that, she can't help but notice how he looks busy, the apron and the dish cloth and the packet of pills in his pocket.

"Tsena (come in)." He says.

Ntate Joe opens the door wider and eyes the jaguar and looks at Naledi.

"Come on Raphael. Don't attack just yet, okay?" She says. She goes to the kitchen and gives Raphael some leftover meat so he can feast on it and not on Joe.

She leaves it and goes to the dimly lit room at the end of the hallway and knocks before opening the door.

Her mother is asleep, looks like she just ate. Ntate Joe has really been taking care of her. Naledi sits on the edge of the bed and

looks down at the heater at her feet. Despite it being a bit warmer now, 'momma' will always switch on the heater or ask for a hot water bottle accompanied with Rooibos tea. It's like the mother could feel Naledi there because she woke up instantly and looked at Naledi.

"Momma." Naledi whispers.

"Naledi ya bophelo baka (the star of my life)." The mother says. She opens her arms for a hug but her mother doesn't move.

"Momma? What's wrong?"

"Stroke."

Naledi nods and looks away to hide her tears. Her mother doesn't deserve this, she probably got the stroke from stressing too much or being hit by the fake news that Naledi is dead.

"Ngwanake (my child). I'm not disabled. I can move and walk and everything, I just do it x2 slower now. Okare ke koko Deborah (it's like I'm grandma Deborah)."

They both chuckle and share an awkward silence.

"Tshedi okae (where is Tshedi)?"

"Jail. Protest."

Naledi nods and reassures her mother that Tshedi will be home before the clock strikes 23H59 today.

"What do you mean by that? Naledi where have you been?"

Naledi tells her mother the shortened version of her experience with human trafficking and Tshego and Pharaoh. All of it.

"They shot Troy momma. They-" Naledi breaks down and hods her face.

"Enwa metsi (drink water)." The mother says and hands her a glass of water. She gulps it down in one go, never realizing until now that she was thirsty.

"Okay. Bring your black clothes and I'll lay a mattress for you so you can mourn you husband. We'll ask the ladies around to come and help peel the vegetables-"

"I'm not doing all of that momma. I'm going to avenge Troy."

"That's what I was afraid you were going to say. Naledi, no my baby. Don't do it. I felt the same way when your father passed on, it was like I could go to all the houses of those people who are protesting and kill them for doing so in the first place. I had to let go, I had to-"

"Momma, no offense but I'm not in the mood. I just came to see you because all this could be fatal. I could never come back here and tell you that I love you and that I thank you for raising me into the woman I am today. If it wasn't for you... I just want to thank you momma. You were a blessing before and you're

still a blessing right now. I need to go." Naledi says and stands up.

She hugs her mother and kisses her on the cheek.

She turns around to walk but the mother is holding her hand.

"Momma?"

"Just remember sweet child, if you're going to choose revenge, dig two graves. One for them, and one for you." The mother says and lets go of her hand to wipe her tears.

"Don't cry momma, I'm going to make the world a better place. One bullet at a time." Naledi says and walks out of the room. She thinks out loud and very hard too, if she's going to play with sharks, she's going to get bitten for sure. Is she ready for death? Like Mutsa said, it's not too late to turn things around. She can hand herself over and try to pick up the pieces of her life.

No. Not this time.

"Raphael! Let's go." She says.

"Wa tsamaya (are you leaving)?" Ntate Joe asks and wipes a plate.

"Yes. I want to thank you for taking care of momma at a time like this, I'm sorry for being so rude in the beginning. Should've tried to know you first. Take care." She says and walks out with

Raphael following. He's gone from being slow to super energetic.

"What's the matter boy? Want to start our rampage right now?" She asks.

The jaguar growls and she takes that as a yes. She has 6 people on her list: Mr Cornish, Nancy

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Mutsa's father, Erica, Tshego and Pharaoh.

First up, her former employer, Mr Cornish.

She gets to the house where he apparently stays with his 'wife and kids' and knocks on the door. Mr Cornish sighs and trots over to answer the door. He's so focused on the soccer game, he didn't even realise that it's late at night and his door is unlocked.

He opens the door and closes it again. Naledi blocks it with her boot and opens it wider.

"Hello Mr Cornish, where's the wife and kids?" She asks him.

He's busy crawling backwards on the floor while facing Naledi. He looks so terrified, it's like he's seen a ghost.

"They errr... they went to their grandma's house." He manages to say.

"So who's that naked girl on your couch? Cheating on your wife Mr Cornish?"

He keeps moving backward and just staring at her. He screams when he sees Raphael coming from behind Naledi.

"Shut up or I'll blow your brains out." Naledi says and takes out her gun.

"Get up, let's go talk in the lounge. Now!" She orders.

He gets up and brisk walks to the couch.

"Don't wake her up. That'll be rude." Naledi says. "So you thought you could outsmart my hey?" She says and takes a seat in front of Mr Cornish.

"N-n-no advocate. I did not such thing."

"So you didn't know that Tshego and Erica were the Reverend murderers and you didn't kill Realeboga when she started digging deeper? Hm?"

He gets tongue tied and she chuckles at that.

"You had me fooled, I'll give you that. I mean, you had everyone believe that you had a wife and kids. Those were actors? Hm?"

He nods and keeps staring at the jaguar.

"Oh don't worry about him. He'll be useful for later, not now. Now, I wanna play a game."

Mr Cornish begins crying and pleading on his knees.

"Scary right? Like jigsaw? That movie is brilliant. Everyone thinks that he was a killer, when all he did was try to fix the world and he got killed for it. Sit back on the couch Mr Cornish." She says.

He sits back on the couch and wipes his tears.

She takes the girl's phone and asks him to unlock it.

"I... I don't know her password."

"Come on, you don't know your bitch's password? Try harder sir."

He unlocks it with trembling hands and Naledi dials 10111 and waits.

"What are you doing?" He asks.

"Hello?" Naledi fakes her voice to a teenager and speaks while fake crying. The girl lying on the couch looks like a teenager anyway.

"Hello? Mr Cornish is trying to kill me. Please hurry. Track the location of the phone because... please hurry!" Naledi says and hangs up.

"Why-"

"You have to 2 options. Kill the girl and get arrested or I kill you and pin it on the girl. I know you're smart, but I also know you're a crook who looks out for himself." Naledi says and gives him an extra gun with 1 bullet in it.

"I can't kill her-"

"Then I'll kill you." Naledi says and aims the gun at his forehead.

"No wait! Wait! Let me think!"

"No time sir. The police will be here in a few minutes, I can already hear the sirens. Pick now or I'll pick for you."

Mr Cornish closes his eyes and shoots the girl in the head. Blood stains the white couch and the tile on the floor.

"Wow. You really are selfish. Okay, give me your hand." She says and cuffs his wrist to the TV stand. She writes "I killed Rea" on his forehead and walks away.

"See you in about... 20 years or so." She chuckles and leaves the screaming Mr Cornish to face the music and wrath of the universe.

~Troy~

Where the h*ll am I? What's that noise? I open my eyes and see Tory asleep on the chair. I'm in a hospital?

"Tory?"

He wakes up and instantly smiles.

"Oh thank fuck man! You scared me there for a second."

"Where am I? Wait a minute, where's Naledi?!"

"She left man. On a killing spree, she thought you was dead."

"But I wore a bullet proof vest."

"With the way you was lying on the ground, you had me fooled too man."

"I thought bullet proof was to protect yourself. Why does it hurt so bad?"

"You're not dead are you? So stop complaining. The girls are safe but... where are you going?"

"To look for Nay. She needs to know I'm alive or she'll start something she can't undo." I say and begin removing the sheets.

"I think she's already begun man." Tory says and hands me his phone. A trending photo of Mr Cornish being arrested. At 22H34. "shit!"

"Your girl is bada*s man!" Tory excitedly says.

"She could die man! I need to get out of here and look for her."

"Where are you going to start man?! She's not even doing anything by the book. She could be going after a security guard next or something."

"We need to try man! Come on."

~Narrated~

"So you're sleeping here comfortably while your daughter is out there, selling herself?" Naledi asks in the dark.

Magistrate Diale springs out of bed and turns the bedroom lamp on.

"Advocate Mapulane? I thought you were-"

"Dead? Yeah, that's what people thought, or at least that's what they hoped for. Right?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You are a magistrate for Christ's sake! Yet you sell your own daughter? And if you can do that, that means you already know that there are girls being abducted by Pharaoh huh? Yet you sleep here, peacefully? Shame. Anyway, I wanna play a game. Tell me where Nancy is or I rip out your arm that use to bang that thing you use in court. You don't deserve to be in the justice system. You're a crook and a scumbag. Tell me where your daughter is so I can kill her, or I rip put your arm. Your choice. I know you're smart, but I also know that you're a crook

who looks out for himself." She says and takes out her gun. Magistrate Diale shivers and tries to think.

"But-but she's my daughter."

Naledi smiles and beats him up. She goes to the bathroom and takes out the heavy top that covers the toilet water and beats his arm until it turned blue and spewed out blood. She breaks a few bones and shoots his arm right off. He screams in pain and watches in horror as blood sprays out of the place that once held his arm.

"Here, use your other hand to call the police. Admit to your wicked ways or I'll come back and break your other arm. Remember, I'm watching. Now where's Nancy?!"

"She-she's in a hospital. Almond. Nursing her wounds. Ah!"

"Much obliged. By the way, you'd better release my brother from jail. By sunrise, he'd better be asleep in his Egyptian cotton duvets. Got it?" She asks. He nods and begins dialing the telephone.

She goes out and smiles when she hears him calling the police and confessing to corruption.

South Africa had better prepare itself.

This is just the beginning...

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~Narrated~

"Nancy, how are you? How's your head?"

"Argh! It hurts a bit doctor. But I'll be alright."

"I wanna play a game."

Nancy stops massaging her head and looks up to the female doctor. She has her white coat on, a clipboard and a mask over her face.

"What?" She asks.

The doctor takes out her mask and smiles.

"N-Naledi?"

"Why do people always tremble when they see me? I don't get it. Am I ugly or something?"

"Uhm... you..."

"Shut up. I said I want to play a game. I stood up for you, forgave you when you 'accidentally' kissed Troy and even took you out and listened to your sob stories. Then when it's time for you to come through for me, you stab me in the back? Why Nancy? We could've gone free. Troy could've been alive now but-"

"Troy's dead?"

"You don't get to say his fucking name! You have 2 options, either I insert this in your drip and you die a slow and painful death. I heard it feels like your insides are melting or frying. Kganya told me. Or... I insert this one. This one will make you disabled everywhere. Even if someone fucked you over and over again, you won't feel anything. I know you're smart, but I also know you're a crook that looks out for yourself."

"Naledi. Please. I'm sorry I betrayed you, I didn't mean-"

"Will you hurry up. I left Raphael outside and he's getting anxious."

She looks at Naledi with pleading eyes.

"Alright. I'll let it easy this time, I'll pick for you." Naledi says.

She taps on the injection and closes Nancy's mouth. She inserts it and presses on. Nancy's muffled screams are like music to her ears.

"There. You will be a potato for the rest of your life, but at least you'll be alive. You're welcome."

Nancy just sits there crying and not able to move or yell. Naledi takes off the doctor's disguise clothes and steps out of the hospital. She goes out back and finds Raphael waiting for her. It's around 23H27 at night.

"Alright boy. Next, Mutsa's father."

"Hi. Is he here?" Naledi asks with the shortest and tightest skirt she's ever worn to a guard outside.

"Yeah. O mang wena (who are you)?"

"Melissa. I wanna give your boss a night he'll never forget." She says and licks her lips. This disguise is really working for her, the guard is even getting a turn on.

"Oh. Okay. You're lucky he's awake." The other guard says and opens the door for Naledi.

She blows them kisses and gets inside with style. Most of the girls in the house have passed out or are making out on the couch. She walks passed them and goes to a room she assumes Mutsa's father is in.

She opens the door and finds him pumping into some girl who seems to be enjoying herself. Naledi has to play along so she smiles and wink at him.

"Can I get a turn when you're done with her?" She asks and licks her lips.

Mutsa's father notices her curves and thighs literally ripping through the skirt. That was intentional.

He slaps the other girl on the butt and sends her out before they could finish.

"Get on here baby." He says.

Naledi smiles and takes off her glasses, he still can't recognize her. Maybe it's because most of his attention is on the lower part of her body. She smiles and prances around the bedroom for him.

"You like?" She asks with a smile.

"Yes ma'am." The old man bites his lip and strokes his manhood.

"You got powder before we can start?" Naledi asks.

"Yeah. Over here." He quickly says and takes out a tray with the drugs lined up.

She smiles and goes over to him only to push him down and take out her gun. She pushes his gun away and aims it at his chest.

"What are you doing?!"

"Shut up. Did I not tell you to leave this shit?" Naledi asks and takes out the wig.

Mutsa's father open his mouth in shock and says nothing.

"Did I not tell you to leave drugs Sir? Did I not when I saved your a*s from going to jail?"

"Advocate Lane? What a surprise. What's with the disguise dear?"

"Don't call me 'dear', I'm not a letter. I wanna play a game sir. Snort all that c*caine or I blow your head off." She says and looks at him straight in the eyes.

"You're joking abi?"

"Do it now."

"Okay."

He takes all the lines in his nose until it twitches. He takes the last one and starts breathing in heavily.

"Oh no. Are you having a heart attack?" Naledi asks.

He wheezes and grabs anything to help. He coughs and wheezes some more until he drops on the bed and stops breathing.

Naledi checks his pulse, no pulse. She smiles and opens a window for her to sneak out. She gets out and tip toes out the fence.

"Naledi?"

She turns around and takes out her gun.

"Whoa! It's me, Troy."

"But... but you-"

"Bullet proof vest. Mutsa gave me one. What are you doing here? In those clothes?"

Naledi calms Raphael down when it keeps growling at Troy.

"Is it yours?"

"Yeah."

"Naledi. Please tell me you haven't done anything bad. Please baby."

Naledi looks away and does not reply. Even though it's a bit dark, she can see the disappointment on his face.

"I'm alive now. You can stop all this and we can skip the country. Start afresh."

"No." She says with a strained voice.

"Please."

"You don't understand Troy. You just don't get it. You weren't raped and starved for days. You didn't feel your baby dying in your womb. You didn't-"

"Okay. I get all that. But I'm here, I actually came to him so I can ask where you were. If you're here

"I'm sure he's dead. Yes?"

Naledi nods and looks down.

"Troy. I'm broken. I'm messed up, life can't go back to the way it used to be for me. The old Naledi died when I was forced into that human trafficking ring."

"What about your God? Your belief?"

"I don't believe there's a God anymore. I'm no longer a Christian, T. It's a stupid waste of time. I have to do this."

"What happens after you're done killing them all? Hm? What about us?"

"There is no us. I don't even have my wedding ring anymore."

"What are you talking about? You're still wearing the necklace?"

"Yeah. I love it."

"Nay please come with me. Don't do this. It's not too late."

Sirens fill the night and she begins walking backwards.

"Yo bro! That old man is gone man. Who's this?" Tory comes jogging to Troy.

"The love of my life walking away from me." Troy says.

"T, I love you. I'm afraid you can't... we can't do this anymore. We've drifted apart. You can still go on, find you a nice girl and settle down. Forget about me." Naledi says.

"..."

"I'll always love you." She goes to him and kisses him before running away with Raphael.

"Yo! That was some deep shit! You giving up on her?"

"No way Tory. My heart won't allow me. Get the car, we're following her."

"Look at her. So adorable." Tshego says.

"Yeah. She has your eyes baby." Erica says.

They look down at their child, Mercedes, who's cooing and feeding herself porridge.

"If it wasn't for Naledi-"

"Our baby would still be with Pharaoh. We owe her, especially after betraying her like that." Tshego interjects.

"Hey. We did it for our baby. We had to." Erica says and gives Tshego a kiss on the forehead.

"Let me go get some batteries for her toy. I think it just needs new batteries." Erica says and goes downstairs. They found this

apartment the minute they split away from Pharaoh. They are just laying low until they find a way to sneak out of the country and make a life outside the border.

Erica goes through a few papers to look for the batteries.

"Where are those batteries?" She whispers to herself.

"Looking for something?"

Erica turns around and finds Naledi sitting down on the couch with Raphael next to her. A gun in her hand. She has her black leather attire on.

"shit! Naledi? What the fuck are you-"

"Shut up. Let's go upstairs and see your baby. I'm sure she's dying to see me too."

Erica raises her hands and slowly goes upstairs. She opens the door and goes to stand next to Tshego.

"Naledi? My friend?" Tshego asks.

"Am I your friend?" Naledi asks with a smile and sits on the rocking chair.

"How did you find us?" Erica asks.

"A lesbian couple with a toddler and a panicking attitude raises a few alarms. She says and rocks back and forth.

"Well, actually I asked Mr V's brother, Victor, and he ratted you guys out so quick. Pathetic really. He died because of that. Anyway, I'm not here to talk about him. I wanna play a game."

"shit!" Erica curses.

"Give me her." Naledi says.

Tshego helps Mercedes on her feet and she walks to Naledi and plays with her gun.

"What do you want Naledi?" Erica asks.

"Please don't hurt her." Tshego cries.

"Why are you guys making me look like the bad guy? You're the ones that killed my baby. You're the ones that let the 15 year old new girl die. You're the ones that betrayed me and all of South Africa. You! Not me! She's adorable really, why is her name Mercedes?"

"Tshego gave birth to her in Pharaoh's Mercedes car."

"Sbusiso's good genes paid off here. She's adorable. Anyway, you have 2 options. Fight to the death or I kill your kid here. One of you... must die." Naledi says and puts Mercedes on her lap.

They both watch as Tshego and Erica fight each other on the floor and break glasses and throw each other against the wall. Naledi is actually benevolent because she thought they would

have said no. Betrayal runs in both of their blood. Erica being the strongest one, bangs Tshego's head against the wall until she loses consciousness and dies. Her head was bashed from behind and blood was trickling out of her head. Erica breathes in and out before turning to Naledi.

"Why are you even protecting Mercedes so much? She's not yours. She's Tshego and Sbusiso's child."

"You won't understand." Erica says.

"Yeah... because you took that away from me. Now, I will take something from you."

"What's that?"

"Your life." She says and shoots Erica on the forehead. She didn't even hesitate or stay up for pep talk. She looks at the toddler on her lap and somehow understands them. They did everything for her, just like how she would if her baby was alive.

She takes her downstairs with Raphael following and puts her on the carpet. She takes out a phone and calls the emergency line. They will get here and take care of her. She walks out and finds Troy and Tory outside.

"Naledi."

"Troy please. What are you doing here? How did you find me?"

"We followed you."

"shit! Is that a fucking leopard?!" Tory exclaims.

"Jaguar." Naledi corrects him.

"What were you doing in there?" He asks.

"Taking care of old friends." She says.

Just then her burner phone rings and she reluctantly answers it.

No one has this phone's numbers because they don't exist.

That's why she uses it sometimes to call the police.

"Hello?"

"Put it on loud speaker." Troy whispers.

She does so and asks who the caller is.

"The one and only Pharaoh." The caller giggles.

"What do you want?" She sighs.

"Oh no star. It's not what I want. It's what I have, that you want."

"What are you talking about bitch?"

Troy stares at Naledi as she's swearing and blowing off her steam. This isn't the Naledi he married.

"I'll give you a hint. It has a vagina." Pharaoh says.

"The fuck?"

"One more hint." She says and puts her phone near a baby. The baby cries and Naledi's heart drops. Pharaoh has her baby. How? She doesn't know but she can feel that Pharaoh has baby Celeste.

"If you hurt her-"

"Relax. I won't do such. She'll be a great collection to my new trafficking ring."

"Pharaoh you son of a bitch!"

"Insulting me won't bring you any closer to your baby. Meet me at the place where both you and your husband began and I might be able to negotiate. You for the baby?"

"I'll be there."

"Great. See you there star."

Naledi hangs up and sits down on the ground to think.

"The place we began? Where's that? Where is baby Celeste? Where?"

"The place where we made it official, T. The park."

70

~Narrated~

"Okay. Tory get the car and Nay you'll-"

"T, no! You're not coming with me."

"I can stand on the side when you go on your revenge spree, but when my baby is involved... I'm forcing myself in. Try all you want but you cannot do this alone."

"Who is Pharaoh anyway?" Tory asks.

"Leader of the biggest human trafficking ring, ruler of the underworld, friends of politicians and military officials. She's the most powerful being in all of... I don't even know. We may never get out of this alive so if you want to bail, do it now."
Naledi says.

"I'm a ride or die type of brother, let's do this!"

"Let's go get our baby." Troy says and extends his hand to Naledi.

She reluctantly grabs it and stands up to him.

"Let's go."

They all get in Tory's car and head onto the highway. They pass a troop of police cars heading towards the opposite direction, probably going to see what happened in that house. Naledi

breathes out a sigh of relief when she realizes that the toddler she left will be taken care of. She may be a ruthless killer, but she's still a soft woman. Especially when it comes to children.

They get to the park in an hour or so. It's close to sunrise, she can't believe she did all this in one night. Something the law enforcement of South Africa couldn't do for years. Tory excuses himself to a smoke and Naledi gets out too. They leave Troy inside with Raphael.

"Hey boss lady."

"Hehe. I can't believe Thabang died man. Karabo too. She was the only friend I ever had really. Was always there for me." Naledi says.

"It's 2 am. Pharaoh isn't here."

"She'll be here. Tory, I need to talk to you."

"What's that?"

"I need you to take Troy somewhere. What's about to go down here is going to be historical. I can't let Troy get broken like me. Please."

"You know how much damage that could do to him? My brother loves you Naledi. More than he loves himself. Never

seen him like this on any girl. You heard what he said, you can't do this alone."

"Okay. I just don't want him to regret doing this with me."

"He won't he-" Tory stops talking and faces forward. Obviously alarmed by something.

Naledi follows his gaze and sees a woman with a red cloak on in the park. She has her back faced against them.

"Is that... is that-"

"I don't know. It just seems too easy to walk in there and ambush her. Let's give Troy a heads up."

Naledi knocks on the window and he comes out with a phone in his hands.

"Is gave 25% to Tory, 25% to Oscar and 50% to Celestial when she's 21."

"What's all that?" Naledi asks.

"Shares to Africa Meets America. The game reserve."

Naledi nods and shallows the lump in her throat.

They all watch the woman standing there by the lake, glazing on the sunrise. Naledi can't tell whether it's Pharaoh or not. Without warning, the woman bends down and places a box on the lake. Naledi and Troy think nothing of it until a baby cries in

it. That's probably Pharaoh trying to drown Celeste. Tory thinks fast and runs to the park with his gun in his hand.

"Tory! Tory wait!" Naledi yells to him.

"Yo! Your name may be Pharaoh but this ain't Egypt a'right. Give me the baby!" Tory points to Pharaoh.

She turns around slowly and smiles at Tory. She takes out a gun from her cloak and shoots Tory in the head.

Naledi and Troy enter the park and see Tory's body on the floor. The box is still on the lake and baby Celeste is still crying inside.

"Pharaoh you mother-"

"This isn't your game Naledi. It's mine. Both of you sit down or I will push this box further down the lake."

Naledi and Troy sit down on the bench and hold each other's hands. They hear a beeping and look under the bench.

"It's a pressure bomb. You get up from that bench and boom! We're all dead." Pharaoh smiles. She takes off her cloak and looks at them.

"You won't get away with this!" Troy exclaims with hurt as he gazes upon his brother's body.

"What's up with you Pharaoh? Why do you hate me like this? Why are you doing all this?" Naledi cries.

Pharaoh's smile disappears at the question.

"Maybe it's time I told you my history. Never really told anyone." Pharaoh says and lowers her gun. She sits on a nearby swing and begins talking, all the while the box that has baby Celeste is slowly sinking.

"I was... born with a manhood. It's always been there. But I was a girl. I had mood swings, loved everything pink and dreamt of having a family with a husband one day. I'm only 30 this year but it hurts me every time I have to talk about this. I remember being 14. Nobody knew about me, I wore skirts and acted like an ordinary girl. That made a certain guy interested in me. We dated until it came to a point whereby we had to be... intimate. We never talked about it but I figured since he always told me he loved me, seeing me with a manhood would not be an issue. Boy was I wrong. He laughed and made fun of me as I stood naked in front of him. He called me all sorts of names and even took a nude picture of me and sent it to Facebook. The picture circulated the web as more and more people made fun of me. I was humiliated! My mother has always wanted me to act like a boy, so when she heard that I was being bullied for pretending to be a girl, she abandoned me. I was even abducted into a human trafficking ring and I remember the boss telling his guys

to send me home because I wasn't what he was looking for. It felt good to be home but I... I wasn't even good enough to be kidnapped? My mother left South Africa and went back to her husband because he had won money. I'll never forgive Sheryl for leaving me. I'm technically South African but she was American. Anyway, I just told myself that I'd never let anyone disrespect me again."

Naledi and Troy look at each other and communicate using their eyes.

"Pharaoh is Troy's sister!" They thought to themselves.

The box keeps sinking and they are both running out of time.

"I want you to watch as your baby drowns right in front of you and you cannot do anything about it. Just like I couldn't years ago." Pharaoh says.

All of a sudden a glass breaks from somewhere and Raphael comes strolling in the park.

Naledi smiles and thanks herself for bringing Raphael along with her.

"You even had the audacity to kidnap my jaguar!" Pharaoh says and smiles at it only for it to growl at her.

"You know what Defamation of Character is Pharaoh? That's the spreading of lies to ruin one's reputation. You thought I was

weak, I was incompetent. You thought wrong. I'm a warrior, the daughter of the most High." Naledi says with pride.

Pharaoh steps back and looks at Raphael that's busy growling at her.

"You know the saying, you live by the sword you die by the sword. Well, you live by the gun, you die by the gun. And if you live by the jaguar?" Naledi asks with a smirk.

"Don't you dare say it Naledi!" Pharaoh says with fear.

"Eat!" Naledi exclaims.

Raphael pounces on Pharaoh and tears her to shreds. It dislocates her neck but she's still alive and still screaming in agony. It flips her over and literally removes her spine from her body. It goes for her neck one more time until it does a 360° rotation. It continues devouring her until she stops moving and breathing too. Naledi smiles but instantly frowns when the box starts sinking rapidly. Celeste is going to drown.

She looks at Troy. "Go. Grab Celeste and run." She says.

"No. You go!"

"We both can't, it's a pressure bomb for both of us. Either way." "On 3?" "1... 2... 3!"

They both get up from the bench, grab the box and run as fast as they can. The bomb beeps before exploding and causing

destruction to a nearby radius. Naledi and Troy turn their backs so that they blow affects them and not the box. They fall and pass out.

The crying of Celeste wakes them up a few seconds later. Naledi lies on her side and opens the box. Lying inside is baby Celeste, as happy as can be now. She's completely naked. She has caramel skin and curly hair just like Troy. Naledi takes her out of the box and holds her in her arms. Troy joins them and makes adorable faces to her.

"She's beautiful." Naledi says with tears in her eyes.

"She is. Am I the only one feeling cold?"

Naledi shakes her head. She's feeling cold too. Troy looks at his back and sees that he has a hole. A literal hole from the explosion. Naledi feels something behind her too, a tree branch that's sticking from her back. They're both dying.

"We're dying babe."

"We are. I can hear sirens but... it'll be too late by the time they get here." She says and coughs out blood. "Any regrets?" She asks. "None. You?"

"None. Will you do me one favour? Could you recite your vows to me one more time?" Naledi asks and lays next to Troy as they look into the sunrise sky with baby Celeste in between them. "Oh shit!" Troy curses.

"What?" "I forgot them."

They both chuckle and cough out blood once again.

"Okay. I'll do it for you. One more time." "Please do T."

"It doesn't matter what happens in this lifetime, I'll always be there. I love you for my heart. I love you for my soul. Let... let it be known that even if we both die, I'll still wait for you in another lifetime." Troy says with tears in his eyes.

"I love you T." "I love you too Nay."

"Till we meet again my love." "Till we meet again."

Troy closes his eyes first. Naledi unhooks her necklace and hangs it around baby Celeste's neck.

"I love you more Celeste. Heaven waits for mommy and daddy. Just know one thing child, I'll always be there for you. Just like I've always... been." Naledi says and takes one more breath before closing her eyes too. The sirens fill up the early morning. They all lay there in each other's embrace, thanking God with each other's energy for the life they've shared. Even if it was for a lovely, brief moment.

20 years later.

~Mercedes~

The wars of our mothers are not ours to bear. Never! It's been 20 years since my parents have died. Tshgofatso and Erica. Someone named Naledi Lane killed them. Murdered them in cold blood. All they did was try to protect me and they were persecuted for that. It's fine. It's all fine because I heard that they died, but their child lives. Celeste Lane. She will pay for her parent's mistakes. Her parents get praised and mine get thrown aside? No. Soon, they will meet my wrath!

~Celeste~

"What are you doing in here?" He asks.

"Will you give me a minute Obitshepo?! Just one!"

"Alright alright. Just don't take too long. We got work to do."
He says and closes the door behind him.

I sit here on the floor, caressing my mom's necklace. Twenty years later and I still have it with me. Today is the day my parents died, 20 years ago. Obitshepo's parents died for the same thing. Change. We're inseparable. Friends ever since we found each other in the orphanage. My mom's mother died when she heard about her death. Uncle Tshedi is in jail. The life of crime kept calling his name. My mom made such an impact, we read about her in history class. She was the epitome of greatness.

After all this... things haven't changed. Corruption is still running strong and more girls are being abducted everyday. Well, Obitshepo and I have made it our mission to fix this Earth. My mom has always said that, "they made me like this, and now it's time they met their creation." She was talking about me because... I am that creation.

.....**The End**.....

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