

# I

THEY TOOK PICTURES of him before they put the gun in the plastic thing. They asked me endless questions: when did I last see him? What did he say? How had he looked when he woke up that morning? Had I called his family? How old he was? And this and that, and this and that...

I had already called Mpande from his phone. I said, "Mqoqi killed himself." And then I tried to give him the address but my guess is he already knew it.

The police asked me what my relationship with him was. I couldn't explain it.

They left with his body, and ten minutes later his brothers walked in.

He shot himself, in his glory time, the witching hours. He shot himself with the same gun that was placed on my naked back as those men took turns raping me.

I have fought all my life, and that was the one time I couldn't fight.

I could have asked the police to leave him as he was until

his family arrived but I don't think that's how they work.

"They'll identify him at the mortuary," one of the policemen said.

I wasn't sure if that was any good but I knew seeing him like that was going to be even worse for them.

I knew which one was Nkosana and which one was Mpande but I wasn't sure about the other one, the one who uttered, "So he succeeded this time."

I didn't say anything because he wasn't talking to me, or anyone in particular. What I knew was that I was right to call the police first. Those men, tall and powerful as they were: seeing their brother sitting in that chair with a hole in the right side of his head was going to end them.

Mqoqi was their blood but he was never one of them. Yes, he blended in, he followed and participated, but there were things, or a thing, that he wanted and I feel like they took it away from him.

He said to me two days after we arrived in Concordia, "A few months ago I got to understand things clearly."

He was sitting at that very desk when I told him I had to rush to Zothile's school.

I thought we had time, that I'd be home soon, and we'd have supper and sex, and then I'd tell him that marrying him wasn't such a bad idea, seeing as we were stuck together.

But then they said there was a possibility that he'd touched my child and I lost it.

To be honest, I blamed myself. How could I have not seen it? No man can ever love a child that isn't theirs like Mqoqi loved Zothile.

They took Zothile out of my arms, those teachers and those policemen and those social workers. They said I'd kidnapped her, said I'd dragged her to another province because I chose a man over her, and that I'd wanted the money her father left her.

I thought that was appalling, but what was more appalling was that a part of me didn't believe Mqoqi would do such a thing. I hated myself for that even more. And when the investigating officer called me two days ago to tell me the charges against him were going to be dropped, I got in the car and drove back here.

I bought my own car when he was in jail, a cheap one, but it was from that same garage he bought his here in Concordia.

When I left Bloemfontein, the plan was to come straight here, but then I thought, no, let me find out who this man really is first.

I found Gabby on her kitchen floor, fluffy dogs bleeding on her chest.

The investigating officer called me again at midday to tell me Mqoqi's lawyer was dead, that his brakes had failed not far from the house.

Of many things, I'm not sure which one it was exactly that pushed him to the edge of all edges. But I do think I afforded him the success.

I know it wasn't all about me, or the girl he spoke about, or his wish to be just Mqoqi.

Nkosana asked me what the last thing he said was, and I didn't answer him. I didn't tell him what those men did to me or that they were here.

They packed his clothes and cleared his bookshelf and took his computer.

"He had a bike accident, that's what killed him. We are taking him home," Nkosana said as I handed him the keys to the house.

I knew then that I was not supposed to say anything to anyone about what had happened, and I had a feeling it wasn't about the public. No, it was about their wives and children. They didn't know that Mqoqi had tried to kill himself before.

Nkosana said I was welcome to attend the funeral but, no, here I am, entering my mother-in-law's house at KwaNdengezi with my daughter in tow. It's 10am. I've been on the road for eight hours straight.

"Gogo!" she screams and runs to her.

I'm pulling one of her three suitcases. The other two are still in the car.

"Magoti," she says. I still hate being called that. I still hate her.

"I'm going to do what Sandile always asked me to do. I'm going to get help. Can you keep her until I come back?" I say.

I know she'd never say no to that, so I offload the two suitcases and wave goodbye to the only thing I have ever been sure I love with all my heart.

I would call Ntuthuko but I heard he has a great job in Joburg now. So I get on the highway and drive.

I have only one person on my mind and I hope they haven't changed their number.

... (U) ...  
"Fok, Lals, I can't believe you're here. I thought you were dead."

She's been saying this, about her thinking I was dead, since I opened the car door and she threw her arms around me. I parked on the street, right on top of dirty running water and filth. We took as much of my stuff as we could out of the car but she kept assuring me that nobody was going to touch it, that everybody here knows her.

The stench of a dirty carpet and cigarettes is what greeted me when I walked in. I said no when she offered me a Russian Bear.

I dismissed her when she asked me what happened after I left with the weed guy.

"I can't believe he's dead. He was so rich," she says, throwing herself on the brown peeling couch. It reminds me of Sandile's couch. I wonder what that woman did with it.

I have not asked her about Jaco, but he isn't here, it's just us in this flat, us and a small fluffy dog.

"I adopted her, and I named her after you because I love her so much. She's all I have," she says, kissing the dog on the nose.

Now I remember why I thought about pressing a pillow over her face numerous times.

"So you're not going to his funeral? I think you should, I'll go with you're scared to go alone," she says.

I'm not scared, I'm done.

It's funny that she ended up being the only person I could

# *The End*

I'VE ALWAYS KNOWN Mqhele would kill me one day.

But I always thought he'd take a gun and shoot me.

I never once thought he'd do it slowly, day by day, unknowingly and unintentionally.

I pictured it being a spur of the moment thing, an impulsive reaction after I'd pushed him too far, you know, one of those moments where I don't know I've actually pushed him to the edge until it's too late.

I've pictured it in my head many times, that moment where he ends me and immediately turn the gun on himself, and we both end up on the floor of our bedroom, bleeding together, dying together.

I'm not one of all those people he's killed in his lifetime, they were nothing to him, but I am everything to him, it's either me or death and I have always known that.

Mandisa said it, and Mandisa never lied.

Our love for each other has been beautiful and ugly. We've both taken advantage of its depth. He's used the love I have for him for affirmation and I've used the love he has for me to channel the darkness inside me.

If I didn't love him so much I wouldn't have taken him back after all the times he hurt me, so now and again he had to test me to see if it was still deep enough. If he didn't love me so much he wouldn't have murdered Bheki Ngqulunga just for stalking me, he wouldn't have run out of the house to find Mvelo and murder anyone standing in his way if I hadn't ordered him to, he wouldn't have banged Mandisa's head on walls just because she made me see a dead body for the first time in my life.

I set off the animal in him whenever it suited me, and whenever that same animal turned around and came for me, I let it bite and scratch me. I then gave it space until I was sure it was tame again before I curled myself in its arms and assured it that it was still and always would be human to me.

We've both given and taken in this thing. He could have loved me right by never making me bleed. I could have loved him right by making him human.

Now here we are, me dying and him faced with the burden of what his life will be going forward, without me.

He doesn't know what's coming, wherever he is.

"Only you *wele*, only you can summon me to leave my house on a holiday just to attend to you."

She makes it sound like I demanded to see her, when in fact she was the one who told me to call anytime I need her.

And I've been telling her to stop calling me *wele*, nobody

calls me that anymore, not since boarding school. Besides, Langa and I, we are no longer inseparable, I'm sure there are people now who don't know I have a twin.

"Have they started again?" she asks.

They have.

They are more frequent lately, especially at night, I can feel them coming.

"Do they come with a headache?" she asks.

"Sometimes, but only after the bleeding stops,"

The first time I called her, after I found her on Facebook, she was shocked.

I had been looking for a doctor for a while, one I hoped could keep things between us.

And a few days later when I sat across her right here in this same room, she rolled her eyes and told me: "But this was always your thing *wele*. Do you remember how you used to randomly nose bleed at the dormitories? You looking up and ice on your forehead was all it took to make it go away,"

She was right, but I was worried this time and not because I thought there was something seriously wrong with me, but because I had always known the source of my nose-bleeding was anger. It only happened when I was really angry.

But now, I could be sitting thinking happy thoughts and the next thing my nose is wet.

I haven't told Mqhele about it, I don't talk to him anyway. I haven't told anyone really except this one and I don't even know why I trust her so much with this.

But it's probably because she reminds me of Mahlomu Dladla, before I was Hlomu Zulu.



I was the girl everybody called *wele* and lowkey didn't want to be friends with because she seemed stuck-up but had to be friends with because she was pretty.

And maybe I was stuck-up, all the boys wanted me but I didn't want them. The girls had acne and they were fat in all the wrong places, I wasn't. I read books all the time, books about blonde twin girls from America who had boyfriends their parents were okay with. I loved English and barely understood what the Maths teacher was saying.

Charity remembers all of that about me. Yes, I still call her Charity and I will not stop until she stops calling me *wele*.

We weren't exactly friends in boarding school. She was that girl nobody looked at except four times a year when she'd be announced as the top learner in Maths and Science.

I knew her name because I once shared a dormitory with her for a year. She never had food in her locker and had only four panties the whole year. Sometimes her grandmother came on visiting days we had only once a month, but most times nobody showed up for her. Her first bra was my old bra and I only gave it to her because I noticed in class how Mr Mthembu the Biology teacher stared at her perky nipples pushing on her white shirt throughout class.

Even after that, we still weren't really friends, but I never had anything against her, not even when Zaba told me associating with her wasn't good for my social standing.

Now here we are years later, my life and health at the palm of her hand.

She thinks it's nothing, and I think, which worries me a lot, that she's just happy with me being here hanging out with

her because maybe a part of her has never left high school.

The CT scan was my idea really, I insisted on it.

Our appointment is at 1pm but I've been here since 12.15pm. None of the pills she's given me in the past month have helped.

The young man hands her a big white envelope and I know whatever is in it, will determine the future of my children going forward.

"Have you ever been in an accident?"

Accident?

"No,"

My response is delayed because...an accident? Me?

"Have you ever been injured? On the head?"

She sounds different, worried.

I've never been injured on the head though.

"No,"

"Are you sure?"

"What's going on Charity?"

She's looking at the print outs in her hand.

The only time I've ever had injuries were the two times Mqhele beat me, other than that...nothing.

My phone rings again, it's my aunt this time. I ignore it because I'm dealing with bigger things here.

**I'm outside your house. Where are you?**

She's resorted to messaging now. It's already 5pm so clearly she's going to sleep over.

"Can I call you tomorrow? I just need to clear this with someone," Charity says.

My gut says there's something she is not telling me, but

*I don't want  
I leave.  
As to why my aunt  
without telling me, I don't*

DUDU BUSANI-DUBE

I don't know her that well and she's a doctor so I trust her word.

I leave.

As to why my aunt came all the way here from KwaMashu without telling me, I don't know.